MAKING RACE AND MAKING SPACE: A GENEALOGY OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY, MARYLAND 1954-1975

By

DEIRDRE MAYER DOUGHERTY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Making Race and Making Space: A Genealogy of School Desegregation in Prince George’s County, Maryland 1954-1975

By DEIRDRE MAYER DOUGHERTY

Dissertation Director:
Dr. Benjamin Justice

Scholars have long approached school desegregation as both a legal and a political problem. More recently, they have acknowledged the limits these framings put on our understanding of the nuanced ways in which identities are formed and have begun to recognize desegregation as a spatial problem. This engagement with space lays the groundwork for shifting desegregation away from a legal and political framing to seeing it as a problem of discourse and representation. Drawing on notions of space from geography and theories of racial formation, this dissertation investigates the relationship among space, race, and educational policy discourses in Prince George’s County, Maryland, from 1954-1975. I use a genealogical approach to historical inquiry in my analysis of primary source documents to consider how space and race were produced through language, and the effects this had on the educational policies that county leadership pursued in the decades following Brown. This dissertation is organized around four policies that emerged between 1954 and 1975: school choice, school construction and closure, busing for racial integration, and school discipline. I argue that each policy
contained and reinforced assumptions about race and space that led to the exclusion of communities of color and the preservation of white supremacy within the district.
Acknowledgements

It shouldn’t come as a surprise that in a dissertation about space, place factors into the debts I owe. Nor should it be a shock that someone interested in genealogy, would think about acknowledgements as a series of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual lineages. I’ve been lucky enough to have multiple families in different places and to have benefitted from getting to know many remarkable individuals on my journey.

My intellectual lineage extends back to Smith College where Dana Leibsohn agreed to be my independent study advisor on a project on collective memory and political violence in Argentina, and I learned for the first time what following an idea felt like—how messy it was and how fulfilling it could be. Ginetta Candelario helped me to begin to understand race as a social construct in her sociology class. María Estela Harretche took the time to work one on one with me as I explored Argentine theater and political activism—her passion, patience, and enthusiasm guided me. Together, Dana, Ginetta, and María Estela inspired me to go to graduate school.

At Georgetown University, I benefitted from excellent mentorship and was able to do fieldwork abroad in El Salvador under the guidance of Joanne Rappaport, Denise Brennan, and Susan Terrio, all of whom provided mentorship as I wrote my master’s thesis. They helped me hone the raw ideas that had emboldened me as an undergraduate, and they equipped me with theory and method. They were instrumental in my decision to pursue a PhD.

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Mildred Lagrana, Cody Long, Jason Ray, Dr. Michael Robinson, Alika Walker, and the late John Dudash. In my time teaching 7th Grade, I learned a great deal from my students who, I believe, taught me more than I taught them. I also met Monét Cooper, a true kindred spirit. While we taught down the hall from one another, she showed me how to bring creativity into my Language Arts classroom, how to teach for liberation, and, mostly generously, how to think about my whiteness. Since leaving PGCPS, Monét has repeatedly let me crash on her couch and has patiently talked with me through many of the ideas in this dissertation. As I was losing motivation to finish, I took a screenshot of a text of hers and set it as the wallpaper on my computer: “here’s to dismantling the disparity and the folks who use the names of children to pad their own pockets or make excuses about student achievement. U gonna do this one paper (and lesson and book) at a time.” She helped remind me why I started this whole thing to begin with.

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Eliot Graham is someone whose calm reassurances helped preserve my sanity and whose sense of humor kept me laughing. Roberta Hunter was always open for coffee and conversation and Jerald Isseks provided a sounding board for my raw ideas. The list of GSE students, to whom I owe a great deal, is long: Na’ama Av-Shalom, Rosemary Carolan, Jessie Curtis, Andrew Leland, Luis Leyva, Brandon Mauclair-Augustin, Meredith McConnochie, Jason Murphy, Atiya Strothers, and Randi Zimmerman.

None of my ideas would have taken form without the emotional support and intellectual guidance of my advisor, Ben Justice. As my study morphed and as I struggled with how to articulate the things the documents were saying to me, he said, “It sounds like you’re talking about space.” Ben has been an attentive reader and caring mentor, and he has provided encouragement by referring to this as “your book” from the beginning.

Beth Rubin brought me to Guatemala to work as her research assistant, and from working and teaching with her, I learned how to do the hard work of qualitative research and how to make sense of it all. Thea Abu El-Haj exposed me to many of the ideas that this dissertation draws upon, and Catherine Lugg saw the earliest drafts of some of my (bad) attempts to write historically. Committee members Ariana Mangual Figueroa and Louis Prisock provided valuable feedback on my proposal, helped me find sources to address gaps in my knowledge, and made me feel like the work I was doing was worth it. Drew Gitomer, Brent Horbatt, and Colleen McDermott provided numerous forms of support during my time at Rutgers.

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To my family in New Jersey:
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There are the two people whose spirits run through these pages, my grandfather, Jerome Mayer, Sr. (Babbo), and my aunt, Annette Mayer (Nette). Although I didn’t realize it at the time, Babbo and Nette gifted me with a sense of place. And, though I can’t believe that they aren’t here to read this, they have influenced my research in ways too numerous to mention.

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**Introduction: Race, Space, and Education**

In January of 2015, the *Washington Post* ran a series of three articles that focused on the precariousness of the Black middle class in Prince George’s County, Maryland, a nearly 500 square mile county that shares a border with Washington, D.C.. With the highest rate of foreclosure in the state following the subprime mortgage crisis, Prince George’s County became a proxy for meditating on the local meanings of race and suburban space as well as placing those meanings within larger historical processes of African American migration and aspiration.

Labeling the county as a unique phenomenon, “rare in American history: a community that grew more upscale as it became more black,” the series used the motif of dreams to proclaim that dreams of Black wealth had been dashed by the housing crisis which had derailed the American dream, and that people had built lives in the county on a “shattered foundation.”

*Post* readers took to the internet. “PG County is a post apocalyptic wasteland,” said one Reddit commenter. Another criticized the worn narrative that clung to the county:

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Is there anything we don't know that this article sheds light upon? Or is this the requisite annual Washington Post "Poor Ole Prince George's County, the Black Bastion of Hope Turned Nightmare" article. This story is so ingrained in the DC area culture that it is well known. But I guess we need to keep hammering it into the psyche of everyone.

Around the same time that the articles came out, a commenter posted a separate thread asking about his possible relocation from Little Rock, Arkansas, to Prince George’s County to work at Andrews Air Force Base:³

My questions are: What high schools are in the area, say, within 30 minutes from the base? What are the reputations of those schools? Are they inner city schools with violence and behavioral problems or good schools? My wife would be looking to teach at a good school where she isn't confiscating drugs and breaking up fights.

A commenter responded:

I'd like to be of help but I can't think of any positive things to say about the area…I know it sounds crazy to generalize an entire county, but it isn't a place you want to raise a family/let your wife hang out home alone.

Another responded less harshly:

PG is kind of just a mix of suburban sprawl and rural areas. The schools aren't as up to date as a lot of other counties in MD, but they are certainly more up to date then a lot of the DC schools.

Embedded in the Post articles, and in the conversation they provoked directly (and indirectly) online, was a strong sense of what suburban living, particularly being Black and suburban, has come to signify in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area and how schools themselves factor into the language of dreams, hopes, loss, and fear that the space of the county conjures. In their conversation about whether the county was an appropriate suburban space in which to raise a family or leave your wife home alone, the commenters invoked the language of good and up to date schools in contrast to the racially marked Blackness of D.C. and the accompanying imaginaries of inner city schools and violence. The commenters were talking about space and talking about race.

Their conversation was by no means a new one. Prince George’s transformation from a majority-white and rural expanse outside of the capital in the 1950s into a middle class, majority-Black suburban space by the 1990s included not simply a material reconfiguration of residential and public spaces, but also a change in the way the area, and its schools, came to be represented and talked about. Over the course of these decades, space and race came to be fused, particularly in the realm of school desegregation policy. Following Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the county’s formerly dual system strove and stalled toward “unitary status” although despite successive policies, and an eventual 1973 court order which mandated busing for desegregation, schooling remained highly segregated. These contemporary internet debates about the county’s livability and the quality of its schools were recognizable,
echoing commentaries from concerned citizens of the 50s 60s and 70s. But what was markedly absent from the story was the way in which the language and intent of these earlier policies had come to shape contemporary people’s understandings of and experiences with the county and the racial assumptions they made about its residents.

Educational and residential spaces themselves are imbued with and productive of social meaning. Controlling the meaning and experience of space is essential to how power works, due to the fact that hegemony—political and ideological—is reliant on controlling representations and their materializations (e.g. built environment). Given the relationship between social control and space, understanding how spaces have come to be, and the attendant social processes that maintain them and naturalize them, requires that we engage in the genealogical work of considering how discourses are materialized in spaces within larger flows of power and knowledge that themselves come to develop at different historical moments.

Scholars have long approached school desegregation as a legal and political problem. Some have emphasized the limits of litigation in ensuring social change and the geopolitical context that empowered the court to decide Brown. Others have focused on

5. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* /; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.
district-level analyses and have considered the local policy ecologies that either helped or discouraged schools from desegregating. Work in these strands still views Brown as a civil rights victory and places the blame for its continued inadequacy largely with its incomplete local implementation and/or with the inherent limits of the court.

Some scholars have taken a critical stance on the impact of desegregation on Black schooling and have begun to question the assumptions desegregation processes made about Black educational spaces and Black communities themselves. This work follows from earlier research on the legal context and local implementation but calls into question whether the problem of desegregation was with its poor implementation or with the general premise of Brown itself. Despite its critique of Brown, desegregation is still largely viewed as a political and legal phenomenon.

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More recently, scholars have begun to understand desegregation as a spatial problem and have engaged space in a number of ways. They have brought urban history into the conversation, thinking about the way in which cities were built and maintained, and how this related to the role that schools—their purposeful location in segregated neighborhoods and their corresponding unequal resources—were required to play in desegregation policies. Many of these spatially oriented histories still emphasize the spatial effects of law and the political context of space.

I argue, that this engagement with space lays the groundwork for shifting the problem of desegregation away from a legal and political framing toward understanding it as a problem of representation and discourse. Following the work of educational historians who have drawn on space, my dissertation contends that, in the case of school desegregation in the United States, we must understand power in ways that are less about how laws force or empower the action of already mobilized identities, and more about how power is internalized and diffuse, how it constructs and uses truth to make itself work, and how spaces and identities are co-constitutive and constantly changing.


This dissertation scrutinizes the relationship among space, race, and educational policy discourses in Prince George’s County, Maryland, between 1954 and 1975. Approaching this history genealogically, I am interested, broadly, in what became “true” about schooling and residential spaces in the county from its founding through 1975. Second, I am interested in what mechanisms empowered and disseminated these truths and to what ends these truths served. My interpretive framework is composed of social scientific notions of space coming from the field of human geography that conceive of space as something that is socially produced, and theories of racial formation. My research addresses the following questions:

1) How did understandings of race and educational spaces get taken up in policy discourses at the local and federal level?

2) What were the accompanying rationales for county policy at different historical moments?

3) How did community activists, teachers, students, and other local leaders come to understand and articulate the evolving relationship between space and race?

I argue that between 1954 and 1975, certain truths (read: discourses) about racialized educational and residential spaces were mobilized at different moments to justify and rationalize education policies that consolidated white control. This did not always happen consciously however. With each successive policy meant to bring the county into compliance with federal law, new technologies of exclusion emerged in ways that further disenfranchised students, teachers, and families of color. Moreover, my dissertation contributes to the existing literature on desegregation by bringing theories of racial formation, social scientific theories of space, and an analysis of representation and
discourse into the conversation on school desegregation. My work thinks about how, when, and why spaces and discourses about space have been produced through social action and how these representations, in turn, have had implications for the educational experiences of the county’s children. By understanding Prince George’s County’s fraught history of desegregation, we can gain insight into the contemporary educational problems that inner-ring, predominantly African American suburbs face across the country.

A Review of the Literature: School Desegregation

Writing in 1984, Jennifer Hochschild remarked that asking “does school desegregation work?” was of little use. Instead, she stated, the useful questions were ones that asked when does it work? What does “work” mean? And why does it work better in some places than in others? Historians of education grappling with the effects of more than 60 years of desegregation policy, civil rights case law, and legislation are now compelled to ask different questions from those that even Hochschild posed.

Since Brown, historians have approached the topic of school desegregation from a variety of perspectives. They have charted the causes and effects of the success of the Brown decision in relation to the civil rights movement and Cold War and have meditated on the limits of litigation. Historians have also puzzled through the local implementation and failures of Brown especially as they allow us insight into broader shifts and continuities in American political ideologies and thought. They have taken a critical stance, reframing its local failure as part of the inherent design of white supremacy. Historians have thought critically about issues of power and local control and have

emphasized the devastating effects desegregation has had on Black schooling and on Black professionals. Most recently, historians have drawn on urban history to think about the relationship between desegregation and suburbanization and urbanization in the post-war period. Instead of inquiring about the optimal conditions for desegregation to succeed or documenting its failure in local contexts, these historians have begun to turn toward the spatial as an interpretative framework, engaging space in different ways. This new way of thinking about desegregation has led scholars to ask about the simultaneous durability and instability of racial identities within the United States. Instead of conceiving of desegregation as the desired outcome or focusing on the politics behind its success, this spatial work calls us to shift our way of seeing and to parse the meaning of segregation and desegregation as a set of social practices, beliefs, identities, and policies within the contours of American ideologies. While these historians have emphasized different aspects of desegregation and have differed in terms of their scope, school desegregation in the United States has been typically framed as a political and legal problem. Building on the work of historians of education who have begun to engage space, I argue that we must make the move in the history of education to recognize desegregation as a “regime of practices” whose central problem is one of representation.  

I will review the literature on school desegregation by identifying works that fall into four primary themes. The first theme emphasizes the connection between desegregation and the civil rights movement. This work focuses on the relationship

13. Foucault, 1994: 225
between federal legislation and local activism in securing a legal framework for rights claims. Work done in this vein tends to concentrate on the limits of the court and the effects of the Brown decision on political thought, but it doesn’t put forward any sustained critique of the logic of assumptions Brown made about race, achievement, and identity. A second body of literature positions the local implementation of school desegregation—its success and failure—within broader shifts and continuities in American political thought and ideologies at the local level. This body of literature tends to view desegregation as a desired outcome and focuses on why it failed to “take” in the local political ecology of some places as opposed to others. A third body of literature makes a critical shift, exploring “normative white power” in desegregation struggles and focusing on the effects desegregation had on Black schooling and on Black professionals.14 This work is an acknowledgement of sustained white control over the aims of Black schooling even through desegregation and civil rights and is critical of the assumptions that underpinned desegregation attempts. Scholars writing in this vein attempt to rethink the history of Black schooling during the period of desegregation and before. The fourth body of work positions desegregation at the intersection of suburbanization and urbanization by drawing on urban history. Scholars writing about desegregation in this interpretive frame consider how city spaces were made and constructed in and through policy. Building on the last theme that I argue marks a transition in the literature, I will suggest an alternative way of seeing the history of school desegregation which takes up the work done by scholars on urbanization and suburbanization but adds to it an understanding of space and race as socially produced I

offer a rethinking of segregation as a set of practices, with particular interest given to the
way space and race came, over time, to be represented in policy discourses.

The Civil Rights Movement and the Brown Decision

Scholars emphasizing the relationship between the civil rights movement and
Brown have been interested in the causes and effects of shifts in American
understandings of race and rights as well as in thinking about the role of the Supreme
Court as a mechanism for social change. Dudziak, Patterson, and Klarman, writing in this
vein, focus on the Brown decision itself and on the dynamics at the federal and
international level that came to influence the court’s reasoning.15 Dudziak is interested in
how the Cold War framed the civil rights struggle while Patterson focuses on the judges,
lawyers, and the politicians who peopled Brown, as well as its continued legacy.
Klarman’s interests lie in understanding Brown as part of changing interpretations of the
Constitution. Together, their research is critically aware of the limits of Brown to
desegregate successfully American schools.

Thinking about how geopolitics intersected with court decisions and activism,
Dudziak examines the connection between the civil rights movement in the United States
and the Cold War. In considering Brown, she argues that the Cold War framed the
nation’s commitment to civil rights.16 For Dudziak, improvements in American race

15. Mary Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American
Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2001); Michael Klarman, Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil

relations and the proliferation of civil rights legislation from the 1940s to the 1960s were a result of white geopolitical interests fortuitously matching up with those of African Americans; how could Americans win the developing world over in the name of democracy when they treated racial minorities so dismally? This “interest convergence,” as Derrick Bell has called it, resulted in civil rights victories for people of color but maintained the integrity of white power structures.\footnote{Bell, Silent Covenants; Jr. Derrick A. Bell, “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma,” Harvard Law Review, no. 3 (1980): 518, https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546.}

Dudziak’s book compellingly traces Bell’s initial thesis, and, critical of more sanguine narratives of the triumph of Brown, shows how desegregation functioned as a diplomatic currency whose aim was to prove an American story of racial progress and democracy and solidify power both at home and abroad.

Patterson’s history of the legal, political, and social context that influenced the Brown decision forces us to look beyond its symbolism and to think about the continued legacy of the remedy stage of Brown II. Patterson demonstrates that Brown, far from being a simple or inevitable stamping out of injustice, was the result of strategy, world context, political climate, and historical currents that force us to consider alternative possibilities: could Brown have done more if its implementation had been different? Was Brown the right strategy for ensuring rights claims or for desegregating schools? This work, centered on the politics of personality in the Supreme Court and presidency and on the NAACP’s litigation efforts, spends time thinking about the unique conjuncture that resulted in the decision and in outlining the legal rationale behind the various arguments.
for and against segregation. Desegregation, for Patterson, is primarily a legal and political problem.

Klarman’s purpose is to think critically about the role of the court in guaranteeing social change. His work is an attempt to gauge Brown’s place, or its consequences, in the civil rights movement. While Brown represented a moment of possibility, it also is evidence of the limits of litigation and, in fact, produced severe backlash that came to define white resistance to the civil rights movement. Klarman argues that Brown did not change racial attitudes; instead, it was the result of changes in the American psyche that had already occurred in the post-war period. Furthermore, Klarman argues the Brown decision was an example of “racial jurisprudence” whose constitutional interpretation was more the result of the political commitment of the justices than of their conventional use of legal sources. This tendency to be informed by the prevailing politics of the day, Klarman muses, proves the limitations of the court. For Klarman, the decision provides insight into the role of the court in prompting social change in American society. Even though his work ostensibly engages broader understandings of race in the post-war period, desegregation is still largely defined in terms of its relationship to the law.

Dudziak, Patterson, and Klarman think about the Brown decision itself and sketch out the political and, to a lesser extent, social landscapes that precipitated it. Dudziak proves the power of taking an international perspective, and her work doubts the motive of the

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18. Michael J. Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality / (Oxford University Press, 2004), 217. “the social and political context of race had changed so dramatically, as had the personal racial attitudes of the justices, that even a relatively weak legal case could not deter them from invalidating desegregation.”

decision and brings into question whether it did much at all to restructure American understandings of race and opportunity. Patterson charges us with thinking beyond Brown, positing alternatives to the decision as a way of writing against the tendency to anoint the decision as a triumph. Klarman also, in framing Brown as almost an inevitability rather than a watershed moment, critiques the decision for provoking backlash that would disempower further activism. By focusing on Brown, these texts provide us with a thorough understanding of national level politics and help subsequent work think about the localization of different modes of political thought.

**District Level Analyses of Desegregation**

Writing in concert with scholars who have considered the Brown decision and the limits and possibilities of social change through the court, scholars have also thought about the impact Brown had on individual districts across different regions and the political thinking that came to inform, frame, and limit its local implementation. Douglas and Baum present examples of such research. In his work on Charlotte, North Carolina, Douglas considers the relative importance of direct activism and litigation in achieving desegregation policy within a self-described “moderate” city space. Baum, too, takes local perspective, and looks at how ideologies of liberalism with their reliance on colorblind conceptions of race, played out in the decisions that school leaders in

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Baltimore made after *Brown* compelled them to desegregate. Both Douglas and Baum are interested in the political thinking that shaped local responses to the legal problems posed by *Brown*.

Douglas’ case study on desegregation in Charlotte explores the various influences of legislation, litigation, social movements, and institutions at the local level, with particular attention paid to how white business interests and a desire to be perceived as racially “moderate” came to set the terms for a gradual desegregation that was ineffective, at best. Aiming to think about the way litigation and direct action came together in complex ways and with differing results over nearly a twenty year period between 1954 and the landmark *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971)* decision, he considers the role of political economy in shaping responses to calls for integration. His work is interested in showing the local political-economic rationales that conditioned white responses to federal legal mandates.

Baum argues that the failures of school desegregation in Baltimore were connected to Baltimoreans’ tendency to ignore race when crafting desegregation policy. Situating his work in conversation with Myrdal’s “American Dilemma,” Baum argues that American inability to talk about race, in large part central to the liberal project, made it nearly impossible for policymakers to understand appropriately the complex relationship between race, discrimination, and educational opportunity. Baltimore, in Maryland, a border state with a history of avoiding racial conflict by embracing a liberal colorblindness, Baum argues shaped the failure to desegregate city schools through an avoidance of conversations about race and the decision to embrace a policy of voluntary desegregation which relied on individual community members to desegregate themselves.
While the book locates itself in Baltimore at the time of school desegregation, Baum’s theoretical contribution is an examination of liberalism and “the American dilemma” as a mode of understanding a school policy of “freedom of choice.” For Baum, it is political thought that limits Brown.

These texts demonstrate the regional differentiation that marked the implementation of desegregation. They move us beyond a consideration of the massive resistance of the Deep South toward a thoughtful analysis of how desegregation in the moderate South became related to an interest in maintaining an image of harmony and how a border city became limited by liberalism’s inability to conceive of racial difference. Together, they reflect on the role of local histories of racial conflict and accommodation and try to approach the question of why desegregation—still framed primarily as a political and legal problem—failed to work.

Critical Views of Desegregation

The fascination with why desegregation failed is also taken up by scholars who put forward a critique of the racial politics of desegregation itself. These scholars emphasize its effect on Black educational spaces and are interested in power, understood as an issue of political control. Scholars who look at the racial politics of desegregation from this vantage point are critical of “normative white control” over the terms of desegregation and have re-envisioned desegregation, as an issue of political power, not simply as an educational strategy meant to result in cognitive benefits for children of color. This has led scholars to think about how desegregation has historically formed

part of another white effort to restructure hegemonic control over schooling. The historical work of Monti and Baker present evidence of desegregation as another iterative performance of white supremacy.\textsuperscript{23} Also critical of the unequal political power of Black and white community members in the implementation of desegregation, Cecelski and Siddle Walker show the very real and devastating effects desegregation had on Black schooling and on Black professionals.\textsuperscript{24}

In his historical research on desegregation in St. Louis, Monti looks at how what he calls the “desegregation crisis” is a complex ritual in American society, and one that changes surprisingly little, even as it is perceived as a threat to the social order.\textsuperscript{25} This crisis is important in that it becomes a space in which anxieties about racial mixing can be talked about in “ritualistically prescribed” ways while institutional configurations remain relatively unchanged and school systems continue to maintain control over the educational experience. Desegregation is still a political and economic phenomenon, and Monti’s focus on the stability of institutions continues to reaffirm desegregation as a political problem.


\textsuperscript{24} Cecelski, Along Freedom Road; Walker, Their Highest Potential.

\textsuperscript{25} Monti, A Semblance of Justice, 10. Monti reminds us that desegregation is “an important medium through which these negotiations could proceed, while keeping the disruption to more critical economic and political institutions to a minimum.”
Baker looks at desegregation in South Carolina as a way of understanding the lasting impact of desegregation, or the “educational evasions that endure.”26 Organized around an analysis of four educational institutions, Baker explores how two movements—the southern and local movement of Black educators and families, and the northern and national, of the NAACP—came together, as litigation and local activism put pressure on South Carolina policymakers. But, he contends, these gains were met with the creation of new barriers to access, namely in the form of standardized testing that helped limit Black access, which in turn aided white bureaucrats in the construction of “a more rational, legally defensible, and durable system of white supremacy in education.”27 Choosing South Carolina because of its peaceful experience with desegregation, Baker attempts to think about how this façade of peace belied an entrenchment of white supremacist policies that institutionalized a caste system. As such, his work is important because it aims to understand the persistent problems of educational opportunity and attainment as a series of shifts in the principles of white supremacy. Baker, attentive to power, looks at the role of policy in structuring local experiences. His work envisions power as the successful establishment of a political and legal framework, rational in nature. Desegregation, by extension, constitutes one technique within a larger political and legal problematic.

While Monti and Baker argue that *Brown* did little to change the amount of political control Black communities had over the schooling decisions that affected them, the work of Cecelski and Siddle Walker illustrates this critique in their respective


emphases on how Black schools bore both the direct burden of desegregation policies as well as the historiographic weight of negative portrayals that focused on the lack of resources and qualification in the Black community.

Showing one community’s efforts to oppose closure of a historically Black school, in Hyde County, North Carolina, Cecelski provides a history of social and resource mobilization and of politicization and autonomy and focuses on the political and social processes that marked the battle over desegregation. In conceptualizing the conflicts over school desegregation, Cecelski explores the meaning of “ancestry” and “heritage” to talk about white control in the south—the preservation of hierarchy through coercion, violence, threat, economic control, and segregation—on the one hand, and the importance of Black schools to Black communities on the other. In putting forward a critical reading of desegregation plans that often devastated the center of Black community life, he engages themes central to the history of Black schooling: self-determination and reliance, struggles over how to lay claim to “equality” without capitulating to white control, and negotiating the terms of policies and realities. While Cecelski’s work differs slightly in the sense that he is interested in how Black schooling in the county came to be understood by white residents, he focuses on the political struggle not over the terms of representation, but over the terms of control. In this regard, desegregation is still a problem of political control.

Writing against the historical tendency to focus on the inferiority of the schooling African Americans received in segregated schools and on the conflation of lack of resources with low quality education, Siddle Walker’s work on the Caswell County Training School in rural North Carolina urges us to honor the perspective of the Black
community as it remembers its own schools. She organizes her research around themes identified by the community, and considers the relationship between the community and the school, the commitment of teacher and principal to students creating an ethic of caring, and the local external pressures influenced themes of community involvement and school ethic especially through the court order that desegregated the county. Siddle Walker does the important work of presenting a counter narrative, and of placing “the successes of the school within the framework of its challenges.” While she is interested in how Black educational spaces thought about themselves in relation to how they were thought about by a broader society that claimed their inferiority, desegregation for her is a discrete and local political and legal event with corresponding effects.

Desegregation, Urbanization and Suburbanization

Increasingly, historians interested in understanding school desegregation have turned to space, engaging the spatial in a variety of ways and to a variety of degrees. These texts differ in terms of the depth of their engagement with space; some demonstrate “interactional expertise,” or an awareness of spatial vocabulary, while some are more profound in their “contributory expertise,” utilizing theory and method in deeper ways. They also work on different scales, considering space on the micro, meso, and macro levels, working in and across classroom spaces, neighborhoods and

28. Walker, 7–8. —“ethic that used institutional and interpersonal caring to facilitate student development”


metropolitan spaces, and national and international spaces. Taken together, they make new relationships among concepts and ideas visible, help us re-think place and the relationship between different scales of action, and give us new ways of understanding human subjectivity, agency, and structure. I will highlight the work of Dougherty and Ryan who use space primarily as a physical category and still view desegregation as a political and legal problem, before talking about the work of Rury and Erickson who begin to engage not only a language of spatiality, but also more complicated geographical notions of social space that move us toward a re-conceptualization of desegregation as a problem of discursive representation and practice.31

Ryan, writing across the disciplines of legal history and policy analysis considers two schools in Richmond, Virginia as examples of the way urban and suburban geographies have been delineated and maintained as separate and the corresponding impact this strict drawing of legal borders has had on the educational aspirations of children living within the metropolitan area. Through legal analysis in local context, he looks at how post-\textit{Brown} court decisions in the 1970’s created spatial configurations through district boundaries that left little recourse for struggling, mostly Black, urban schools in Richmond, Virginia. Though he begins to think about the disparity between suburban and urban schools as a constructed reality, Ryan’s understanding of space is limited, and he engages space as primarily physical, looking at how it is constructed through law and policy.

Dougherty focuses on Black school reform in Milwaukee and employs, among other approaches, a loosely defined spatial analysis in order to interpret the stories of local activists and to understand the racial geographies over which the local politics of school reform were played out. Through oral history interviews and archival research, his spatial engagement concerns how Milwaukee’s neighborhoods and public spaces changed over the course of 60 years. Engaging the multiple perspectives of Black activists, he situates each within a strong sense of urban place, as Milwaukee was transformed through migration, urbanization, and urban renewal. For Dougherty, desegregation and school reform are still conceived of in terms of political power, although he acknowledges their overlapping and contested nature and their relatedness to the built and social urban environment.

Presenting a deeper engagement with social scientific understandings of space than Ryan and Dougherty, the work of Rury and Erickson show how segregation was enacted and reinforced through public policy and racism, and how city and suburban spaces came to be racialized. Both Rury and Dougherty look at the way race and space are co-constitutive through focusing on the relationship between housing and schooling, processes of segregation and mandates to desegregate, and policy reform. While both try to understand the built environment and the beliefs and desires that inhere in places, they differ in their engagement with social theory on space. Rury consciously recognizes that space is a dialectically related process experienced through living, perceiving, and conceiving of and in it while Erickson only implicitly comes to this conclusion.

Bringing social theory on space into the discipline of educational history, through explicitly drawing on geographers Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, Rury sets out to
explore why city schools in Chicago, which were not always perceived as disadvantaged, came to be represented as imperiled in the late 1980s. He tells a reader at the fore: “This is a story of the transformation of urban "space," a process necessarily wrapped up in perception and the lived reality of shifting social and political relationships.” He comes to address this through examining the way perception reflected or was “a consequence of a shifting political and cultural geography of urban social relations.” Showing how mass migration to the suburbs gave way to “a new spatial logic of urban development” that unequally distributed resources along racial lines and helped create and solidify a political ordering, he looks closely at the implications this movement and production of space had for urban schools and their majority-Black populations. This demographic and political change across city space was accompanied by the tenure of a superintendent whose colorblind policies during the era of desegregation led him to cling to the notion of neighborhood schools, a policy which ensured the maintenance of segregation which twinned the declining perception of Chicago’s school system. Rury’s conscious engagement with space allows him to think about the built environment and the beliefs associated with it and how both the material-and the immaterial-came to create a reputation of inner city decline. His is the first attempt to begin to consider desegregation as a problem of representation and to interrogate how this space came to be produced.

Erickson, too, extends Rury’s work as she focuses on how school and residential construction that led to an “uneven educational landscape” in Nashville created and was

32. Rury, “Race, Space, and the Politics of Chicago’s Public Schools,” 120.

33. Rury, 125.
created by a pro-suburban and pro-white spatial ideology.\textsuperscript{34} Her work outlines how Nashville city-county consolidation, federal urban renewal and housing guidelines, and federal education policy worked, in conjunction with private interests, to strengthen segregation in housing and schooling. She argues that school construction helped, in part, to reinforce residential segregation and illustrates how segregation in Nashville was spatialized and how the established characteristics of space in this period helped nurture inequality during the remedy phase of busing. Inequalities of schooling construction and busing were reinforced and justified with an accompanying spatial ideology put forward by public and private forces that envisioned suburban spaces as worthy of investment and urban spaces as blighted. While Erickson does not make use of a language of social space or engage theory, her work demonstrates the processes through which space was racialized and the effect this had on the provision of public education in Nashville. Desegregation for her, is still a political problem, though not entirely. Her attentiveness to spatial ideology makes way for alternatives that can begin to consider the constructed nature of suburban and urban spaces and the accompanying rationales.\textsuperscript{35}

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\textsuperscript{34} Erickson, “Building Inequality,” 258.
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\textsuperscript{35} For all of the possibilities that attentiveness to space allows historians, there are some things about which we must be cautious. Geographers have criticized “spatial-turn historians” for an often vague commitment to space, one that is limited to older theoretical understandings of space that have since been contested in human geography (von Lünen, 2013). Additionally, many historians draw on notions of space that are “metaphorical and not geographical” (von Lünen, 2013; Bodenhamer, 2013). Technological innovations such as geographic information systems (GIS), the technology that Erickson draws on, can no doubt help historians establish new connections among disparate variables and visualize new relationships, but the use of GIS might, in its valuing of “authority, definition, and certainty over complexity, ambiguity, multiplicity and contingency” present epistemological dilemmas to historians interested in the textures of human experiences (Bodenhamer, 2013, p. 7). We must ask, what GIS, mapping, and turning toward space help us gain in terms of new perspectives on
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Toward a New Possibility: Race-Space and Discursive Representations

As the work of Rury and Erickson intimates, the new questions that we are compelled to ask, in looking at school desegregation, are not how to make desegregation work, or when it works best—the questions Hochschild posed to a second wave of desegregation scholars—but rather how have practices and policies made segregation an intractable and common sense reality in American cityscapes, and what are the accompanying racial and spatial discursive representations that help maintain it.

The history of public school reform between 1950-1975 in Prince George’s County, Maryland, presents a possibility for understanding these new questions about race, space, and discourse and for deepening an engagement with social theory on space. Reframing our understanding of the question of desegregation, we can reinterpret the way in which local officials fashioned educational policy after the Brown decision required them to desegregate area schools. Prince George’s County came to be produced as a physical and symbolic space in relation to Washington, D.C. through discriminatory federal and county housing policy, unequal flows of capital, and racial terrorism. In turn, the desegregation policies the county took up from the 1950s through the 1980s related not only to the physical production of space—the way neighborhoods had been segregated, for example—but also to the symbolic dimension of space that took the form of a general perception of a lack of qualified educators in the Black community which, historical narratives (von Lünen, 2013). And we must make sure that space matters not “‘for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because where things happen is critical to knowing how and why they happen’” (Warf and Arias, 2009 in Wachowicz and Owens, 2013, p. 127). In short, historians need to embrace geographical concepts of space, not just geospatial technologies or a vague language of spatiality (Bodenhamer, 2013).
among other factors, made integration of schools a one-way endeavor. As successive policies were being crafted, space and race were also being produced.

By drawing our attention to the production of space and race and to their discursive representations and positioning the local in relation to the national, we can envision how residential development and suburbanization can be brought to bear on understanding educational reform projects in context. By starting to puzzle together the meanings attached to urban and suburban residential and educational spaces and the ways these meanings come to be codified and talked about in policy and law, I believe this attempt to reframe desegregation must attend to both the material effects and symbolic dimensions of policy and must explore the creative and adaptive power of white supremacy.

**Methodological Orientation: Genealogical Approach to History**

In order to parse the material and symbolic dimensions of policy and the diffuse nature of (white) power, I employ a genealogical approach to historical questions that is attentive to emerging discourses and knowledges.\(^{36}\) Genealogy, in this sense, is an attempt to denaturalize the conclusions of the present through a focus on how ideas, within larger flows of power and knowledge, come to develop over time.\(^{37}\) As it relates to schooling spaces, a genealogical approach helps provide analysis which “links together


power and discourse (or knowledge) and aims to analyze the inhibiting or constraining effects of discursive practice and the resulting impacts on social and spatial arrangements."\(^{38}\) Garland reminds us that thinking about these layers of struggle, successive and fraught, “enables the genealogist to suggest – not by means of normative argument but instead by presenting a series of troublesome associations and lineages – that institutions and practices we value and take for granted today are actually more problematic or more “dangerous” than they otherwise appear.”\(^{39}\) While secondary sources can give us a clearer sense of how to make practical use of a genealogical approach, Foucault’s own writings also allow us to cobble together a sense of what genealogical inquiry means. In addition to *Discipline and Punish*, considered a prime example of his genealogical approach, three of his shorter meditations on method inform my use of genealogy in this dissertation: “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” “On Genealogy,” and “The Genealogy of Ethics.”\(^{40}\)

Foucault defines genealogy in the negative which contrasts it with both history and philosophy and provides a sense of how genealogical aims can deepen our historical insight. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” Foucault’s understanding of genealogy is first defined by him in terms of what it is not: it is not a search for origins or essence, it does not suppose continuity, it is not philosophy that exists outside of or in a position


\(^{39}\) Garland, “What Is a ‘history of the Present’?”

superior to history. Instead, genealogy is “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.”

Instead of searching for essence or origin, genealogy is the discovery that all origins or essences are themselves “fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.” Genealogy is about accidents and about passing events, mistakes, even, that have come to have significance in our society. Instead of seeking long-lost answers or pining after a meta-narrative, genealogy seeks to disrupt and to expose what strikes us as being solid or unified. This affects how a genealogically informed historical work approaches inquiry. Foucault draws a distinction between what he calls effective history and traditional history. Traditional history is based on “apocalyptic objectivity,” unable to do genealogical work because it is enamored with distance and universals. Effective history, however, “studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance.” Effective history is the aim of the genealogist.

Foucault also emphasizes the importance to genealogy of thinking historically about discourse. In “On Genealogy,” Foucault mentions an ongoing fascination with a

41. Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, 76.
42. Ibid. 78.
43. Foucault, 81.
44. Foucault, 82.
45. Foucault, 87.
46. Foucault, 90.
“typology of discourse” and suggests that discourse should be thought of historically.\textsuperscript{47} We should, in short, ask different questions. We should think about how discourses are modified and varied, how they circulate, are valued, attributed, and appropriated.\textsuperscript{48} He urges us to ask the following:

…under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.\textsuperscript{49}

Foucault, however, differentiates among types of genealogical inquiry. In “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” Foucault outlines three domains of genealogy, all of which are focused on historical ontologies, or the emergence of ideas, concepts, or objects.\textsuperscript{50} The first genealogical domain considers our relationship to truth and knowledge as it relates to our creation as subjects, the second parses the relationship between a field of power and how we come into subject-hood through our relations with others, and the third contemplates how we come to understand ourselves as moral agents in relation to larger ethical flows.\textsuperscript{51} These are not mutually exclusive and can overlap. As examples of his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Foucault, 137.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Foucault, 137.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid. 138.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Foucault, \textit{Ethics}.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Foucault, 262.
\end{itemize}
own work, he relates that *Birth of the Clinic* and the *Order of Things* concern themselves with the emergence of truth, *Discipline and Punish*, with power, and the *History of Sexuality* with ethics.

This discursive approach differs from what Fairclough has termed “textually oriented discourse analysis” in that its primary concern is not to analyze linguistic structures but rather to understand the relationship between power and discourse.\(^{52}\) Although Foucault himself avoided both positivism and creating a unified methodology, scholars such as Kendall and Wickham have offered a more practical framework for working with Foucault’s notion of discourse.\(^{53}\) Kendall and Wickham posit that this approach to discourse analysis relies on five interrelated points. The first is that discourse must be understood as a body of statements that are “regular and systematic.” Analysis, then, concerns the discovery of rules—the rules that govern the production, the rules that “delimit the sayable” the rules that create spaces in which statements can be made, and the rules that create the material and discursive elements of practice.\(^{54}\) As such, in my analysis of primary documents, I attend to the emergence and adaptation of practices of segregation and desegregation and their accompanying policy rationales at different historical moments which I consider to constitute a “regime of practices” that are productive of space and race.

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54. Kendall, 41–42.
Interpretive Framework: Space and Race

Since the 1990s, scholars in the social sciences have “turned” toward space, drawing on human geographic theories of space and a language of spatiality, and making use of qualitative and quantitative methods within spatial frameworks. Space presents an opportunity for understanding the relationship between race and education, and it equips people interested in schooling with new ways of conceiving of race and its relation to contemporary and historical issues in education. This includes the expansion of the suburbs and decline of cities, the unequal political economy of schooling, and student identity. But what is space, and what does it do for our understanding of race and education? Why and how does it matter? What exactly does it add? I will begin with an overview of how social theorists in human geography have understood space and will consider how other theorists working in response to them take their understandings of space as important to how we think about processes of racial formation and racialization.

What is Space?

Edwards points to four trends in the consideration of space in social theory. The first draws upon post-Gramscian and Marxist analysis. Work done in this vein focuses


on “orderings and representations of space as manifestations of changing economic conditions and its effects on everyday life.” Lefebvre, writing in this tradition, expanded the way space, in a capitalist system, could be understood, drawing our attention to the production of social space in an attempt to unify the physical, social, and mental fields of spatial experience. Space, Lefebvre argued, does not exist in the abstract as a thing, but rather is produced in and through interactions and relations. Humans move through and live in physical spaces, but they also perceive and conceive of the spaces in which they find themselves. He articulated the need for an approach to space “which would analyze not things in space but space itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it.” As such, we need to uncover the layers of space: “beneath the sediments left behind by history” in order to understand how spaces are produced and, through their production, how they relate to power.

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58. Edwards, 208

59. Lefebvre

60. Lefebvre, 89

61. Lefebvre, 230. Drawing on Lefebvre, for Harvey (2006) space under capitalism is absolute, relative, and relational. As absolute, it can be fixed, pre-existing, and calculable. As relative, we cannot understand space independently from time. As relational, space is caught up in all the things that surround it. Thus, for Harvey, space can “become one or all simultaneously depending on the circumstances” (2006, p. 125). A better question to ask than what is space would be “how is that different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space?” (Harvey, 1973, p.13). In short, this strand of literature is interested in how humans produce—and are produced by—space amidst political economic configurations.
A second thread of literature is a feminist framing of space which has, as its focus, “the analysis of the gender inequalities in changing orderings of space-time, and more broadly, power-geometries of their particular orderings.” Massey, writing in this framing, tells us that space is a product of interrelations, what she calls a “relational constructedness of things.” For her, space is also a sphere of multiplicity and one that is constantly under construction, a more open sense of space than either Harvey or Lefebvre allow. This conception of space as potentiality is also how Marxist feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham understand modern space, by drawing on Deleuze’s and Guatarri’s rhizomatic thought. For them space is involved in processes where “identity is splintered into disorder, chaos, multiplicity, heterogeneity, rupture and flight. It is mapped and not traced.” These understandings of space are attempts to think about spaces of difference, and to put forward alternatives to capitalocentric notions of spatial subjectivities, such as the ones Harvey and Lefebvre posit.

A third tendency in social theory is what Edwards calls materialist, or a renewed sense in the non-human, and in seeing things in terms of networks of mediators and intermediaries. In this vein, “Spatial orderings are not about human subjects per se but

62. Edwards, 208


66. Edwards
are material assemblages of subjects-objects that interrupt and affect, question and promise.”

In this tradition, non-representational theory (NRT) urges us to think spatially in ways that are “more than representational,” and to use “weak” or humble theorizations and ontologies. In spatial terms, “The world is seen not as a collection of transcendent ‘truths’ waiting to be mapped in ways edging ever closer and closer to perfection, but rather as an elusive and ephemeral flurry of activity marked by constantly changing topological relationships.”

Scholars writing about space non-representationally are charged with thinking about how things come together and form connections.

The final thread of post-structuralist understandings of space which Edwards traces, takes as central concerns “subjectivity, discourse, representation, and power.” Work on space done in this vein thinks about “the spaces and positionings of marginalized others,” looking at the margins, borders, thirdspaces, and diasporic spaces.

This framing of space is interested in difference in spatial terms and often looks to Foucault and heterotopic notions of the spatial. For Foucault and those who make use of

67. Edwards, 209

68. This is in opposition to critical theory. Leslie Knopp “Ontologies of Place, Placelessness, and Movement: Queer Quests for Identity and their Impacts on Contemporary Geographic Thought.” Gender, Place & Culture, 11, no. 1 (2004): 121-134.

69. Knopp, 126

70. Nigel Thrift Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect. (New York: Routledge, 2006). This processual emphasis is accompanied by an inclusion of non-human material bodies, attentiveness to relation and “being-in-relation” (Thrift, 2006 p. 15), and an emphasis on affect, or the “almost-not-quite” (Thrift, 2006, p. 16).

71. Edwards, 209.

72. Edwards, 209.
his concept of space, heterotopias, or spaces of difference, are open and closed, free and constraining, taking on different functions depending on the society in which they exist and the particular purpose of the space.\textsuperscript{73} As spaces of difference, they are instrumental; they envision relations between normality and deviance and create relational subjects in space.

This dissertation draws across different theorizations of space, but mostly owes its theoretical framing to Marxist and post-structuralist notions of the spatial. Because I believe that capitalism does structure the everyday, I am interested in the political economic dimension of space; how money moved, how public amenities came to be constructed in particular places, and how the labor market and businesses shaped localities. I am also interested in representation and subjectivity. I think that much can be learned through attending to the ways in which discourses are concretized, how words make space. And, I think that we must leave space for living and breathing subjects, themselves acting and being acted upon, producing and being produced by space. Most important to the human element of the story is the way in which race and space are made together.

Space and Race

Space is central to how what Omi and Winant have called “racial projects” are produced and reproduced.\textsuperscript{74} Linking the daily realities of humans to larger structures,

\textsuperscript{73} Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec. “Of Other Spaces.” \textit{Diacritics} 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-27 As an example, Foucault points to two types of heterotopias: crisis heterotopias (privileged, sacred spaces, such as cemeteries) and heterotopias of deviation (rest homes, hospitals, prisons) (Foucault, 1986, p. 4).

\textsuperscript{74} Outlining a theory of what they call “racial formation,” Omi and Winant theorize that race is formed through “projects” related to hegemony and created through
racial projects are “…simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized based upon that meaning.”

Racial formation and spatial formation are co-constitutive, creating what Neely and Samura call racial spaces: “racial interactions and processes (e.g. identities, inequalities, conflicts and so on) are also about how we collectively remake, over time, and through ongoing contestation, the spaces we inhabit. In turn, the making and remaking of space is also about the making and remaking of race.” These processes of race and space making occur in a number of ways and scholars seeking to understand the relationship between race and space use geographic understandings of space but are not limited by them, recognizing the imaginaries of space that contribute to its racialization, discourses and narratives of space and identity, and tracings of the colonial past in a colonial present as ways of conceiving of the interrelatedness between race and space.

ideology. Race is embedded in formal politics and institutions and is negotiated at a micro and macro level. These “racial projects,” take the form of “…large-scale public action, state activities, and interpretations of racial conditions in artistic, journalistic or academic fora. Omi and Winant, 60.

75. Omi and Winant, 56.


Making Race: Imaginaries, Stories, and Memory

Lipsitz argues that the racialization of spaces arises through historically constituted and racially distinct spatial imaginaries. These imaginaries, or ways of thinking about space, ascribe different values to space and are accompanied by a differential and racially determined ability to occupy public spaces. Writing about pre-Katrina New Orleans and conflicts over public spaces between police officers and Black community members, Lipsitz outlines two different spatial imaginaries. One, the white spatial imaginary, is that of white police officers who protect public spaces in the name of commerce. This imaginary, preserves racial hierarchies:

… [based on] exclusivity and augmented exchange value, functions as a central mechanism for skewing opportunities and life chances in the United States along racial lines. Whiteness, as used here, is an analytic category that refers to the structured advantages that accrue to whites because of past and present discrimination”

Exclusivity is sustained, whiteness is protected, and capital accumulation is the central raison d'être of these spaces and imaginaries. The other spatial imaginary Lipsitz outlines is that of people of color in New Orleans, who imagine the streets and corners and neighborhoods in terms of their use value, asserting the right to be in public, the right to occupy spaces and to use them, turn “segregation into congregation.” These spaces and


78. Lipsitz

79. Lipsitz, 13.
imaginaries are relational, one contingent upon the other, but both are different sides of the same coin, parts of the same exploitative capitalist and white supremacist system. These imaginaries are local with consequences and causes that are unique to place, but they are also historical, situated in a culture and history of racism, slavery, and continued racial terror and violence. This socio-historical conjuncture results in “the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. The lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension.”

Race also gets spatialized through stories. Hayward turns to narrative theory to show how the process of race/space making happens through the way individual and collective stories about race get taken up by institutions and sedimented in policy through which “they acquire a kind of geographic facticity that renders them lived reality.”

Looking at how the identity story of white Americans as suburban homeowners came to be naturalized over time, she traces the narratives in which white racial interests were embedded, narratives of racial identity and difference that linked the decline of the city to the race of the people who lived there and, by extension, the vitality of the suburbs to the absence of people of color. These stories were told and retold, circulated in the language of professional real estate associations’ codes of ethics, pamphlets of elected officials, city planners, mortgage lenders, and were overwhelmingly present in popular discourse as well. “White places” were linked to the possession of private property and

80. Lipsitz, 11.
81. Lipsitz, 12.
82. Hayward, 74.
83. Hayward, 72.
“Black places” were read as slums. Hayward shows us the extent to which space and race are intertwined, bound together in lived experience and codified in policy.

Race and space are also connected to remnants of times past, layers of experience that become normalized and create common sense notions of racial identities. McKittrick explores how place or, placelessness, becomes linked in racial imaginaries to a sense of “with,” a European and white identity and “without,” a Black and colonized identity. Recognizing that Black and other diasporic geographies and identities are inherently linked to the coloniality of the plantation and its sense of Black placelessness, she takes up this with/withoutness in her consideration of urbicide, which she defines as “the deliberate death of the city and willful place annihilation.” Urbicide is dependent on a racialization of space and is a systematic approach to reading urban spaces as disposable, as empty, as “without.” In this regard, race becomes synonymous with (urban) space and urbicide helps us look at the co-constitutive nature of race and space/place. For McKittrick, traces of the past in the present are part of how space polices and creates race. For her “the geographic management of Blackness, race, and racial difference (and thus non-Blackness) hinges on a longstanding but unacknowledged plantation past.” These tracings pervade policy and form part of common sense understandings of racialized places, which could be extended to the analysis of schools and education.

Thinking about space as produced helps us to understand race and education in several ways. The first is that it turns our attention to the multidimensionality of how

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84. McKittrick

85. McKittrick, 951.

86. McKittrick, 952.
educational and residential spaces are created, both socially and physically. This allows us to balance the local and national experiences of policy with the social relations and political economic configurations that shaped the implementation of reforms and that influenced people’s everyday lives. This sort of view of race also takes us to the moments and sites in which common sense understandings of places were cultivated. In fact, understanding how residential and educational spaces were produced over time, both physically, and in and through people’s relations with each other, is a framework that also helps us tackle how the inequality of those spaces is maintained and justified at different historical moments.

**Chapter Outline**

This dissertation is organized around four policies that emerged between 1954 and 1975: school choice, school construction and closure, busing for racial integration, and school discipline. Each policy contained and reinforced assumptions about race and space; each chapter pries into a different dimension of race/space-making. I first look at how purposefully-invoked stories about Maryland’s past produced Maryland as a distinct racial space and exempted it from perceptions of Southern brutality in ways that very much framed the possibilities for desegregation in Prince George’s County. In parallel, I also explore how Prince George’s was produced as a segregated space through zoning and school policy, flows of capital, and language. I next focus on two segregated neighborhoods, the affluent and white, Belair, and the working class and Black suburban enclave of Fairmount Heights to illustrate the different relationships these two racialized spaces had to local schools and the different ways in which they were impacted by formal and informal desegregation policies at the beginning of the 1960s. Deepening my
neighborhood level analysis, I next look at Fairmount Heights with a focus on how distinct spatial imaginaries came into conflict as the county proposed the closure of historically Black schools that had long been essential to community life in the late 1960s. My final two chapters move on to the effects of busing and school discipline between 1972 and 1975. I first think about how busing can be understood through the lens of prescriptive moral geographies that dictated where Black and white students belonged and didn’t and, finally, I look at how school discipline, also deeply moral, operated as another technology of exclusion in the years following the court order for busing.

Chapter 1: Remembering Maryland, Producing Prince George’s

This chapter explores Maryland as a “racial space” by looking at the ways in which space and race were co-constructed from its founding as a settlement in 1633 through its experience with the civil rights movement in the mid-twentieth century.87 Situating Maryland in the literature on regional identity, I look to memory in order to map how policymakers and common folk imagined their state as a racial space. I consider Maryland’s slaveholding past and the struggle for the equal provision of public education to better situate the local struggle for school desegregation and Black self-determination in Prince George’s County. I also look at how Prince George’s County was physically produced through policy, capital, and migration. I draw on the papers of former Maryland Governor Spiro Agnew and State Superintendent Thomas Pullen, located at the University of Maryland College Park and the Maryland Historical Society, respectively.

Chapter 2: Two Neighborhoods: Race and Schooling in Belair at Bowie and Fairmount Heights, 1950-1965

This chapter focuses on two neighborhoods: Belair and Fairmount Heights. I juxtapose Belair at Bowie, a William Levitt development marketed and sold exclusively to whites, and the development and growth of Fairmount Heights, a Black suburban enclave. I look at the role of nostalgia in the creation of white suburban spaces and the way in which the construction of schools formed part of an unofficial desegregation policy. This chapter is situated in literature on suburbanization and draws on Annual Reports from the school district, Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning reports, publications, and minutes from the 1950s and 1960s, oral histories, and the research on Black schooling conducted by county historian, Susan Pearl.

Chapter 3: “A Planned Effort for Racism”: School Closure and Urban Renewal, 1965-1972

School closure, a policy that came into view in 1965 and exploded in 1968, concerned how Black schools were discursively constructed as abstract and empty spaces. This widely held truth justified the closure of several historically African American schools which had been central to neighborhood life. Using faculty statements opposing school closure, the Model Cities grant application and other urban planning publications from the time, annual reports, superintendent addresses, school board minutes, and personal interviews, I identify two competing ways in which people at the time drew on space and understood the spaces central to their neighborhood schools and the consequences these understandings had on the fate of Black schooling in the county.
Chapter 4: The Moral Geography of Busing, 1972

This chapter will draw on concepts of moral geography to understand the way in which members of the community understood the court order for busing which went into effect in January of 1973. I look at editorials, letters to the editor, and articles published in the Washington Post and the Baltimore Afro-American between 1969 and 1973 to unearth the way reactions to busing drew upon racialized moral assumptions that were then codified in policy. These moral assumptions revolved around ideas of freedom and liberty regarding public education, moral judgements about the suitability of Black schools for white families, and an anxiety about how busing would lead to morally inappropriate racial intimacies through the way in which it would dissolve neighborhood boundaries.

Chapter 5: Danger, Discipline and Desegregation, 1973

The final policy, court-ordered busing, which occurred in 1973 through the early 1990s, discursively constructed desegregated schools as dangerous. This justified white conservative control and resulted in the genesis of zero tolerance disciplinary measures that targeted Black students, the effects of which are still felt in the district today. In order to consider how discourses of school as a dangerous space emerged nationally and locally, I draw on a number of written genres. I use transcripts of congressional hearings, publications by the United States Commission on Civil Rights and the publications of various professional organizations to explore the public obsession with school violence in the early 1970s. To make sense of what was happening at the local level with school board elections, disciplinary code revisions, and conflicts over busing, I use a variety of news articles from The Washington Post and the Baltimore Afro-American, located at the
Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore. To explore the grassroots activism of conservative organizations at the local level, my sources include the papers of school board member Ruth S. Wolf and Maryland House of Delegates Representative Ann Hull, as well as the papers and publications of the League of Women Voters.

**Conclusion**

Over the course of twenty years four policies—school choice, school construction and closure, busing for racial integration, and school discipline—structured the experiences of students, parents, teachers, politicians and community members in the county in direct ways. These policies dictated which schools parents sent their children to, which buses they would take or which routes they would walk, what their children would learn, and what sort of behavior would count as a disciplinary infraction. But the cumulative impact, the compounded interest of the principal of desegregation, runs deeper and extends further than two decades. These policies reach back to racial ideas present at Maryland’s founding, including notions of race that thrived during its participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. They collide with the whiteness of suburban development, the incomplete promise of the civil rights movement, the despair of urban rebellion, and the plague of mass incarceration. And they continue to impact the everyday lives of the students who attend public schools in Prince George’s County.
Chapter 1
Remembering Maryland, Producing Prince George’s

I welcome you to Maryland where the crosscurrents of thought from north and south meet and merge, where the union of states was preserved and its anthem inspired; where a nation’s boundless beauty is cast in miniature, where pleasant living is the everyday fact of life

—Spiro Agnew

In his remarks to the Junior Chamber of Commerce national convention held in Baltimore, former Maryland Governor Spiro T. Agnew envisioned his state as a harmonious confluence of disparate geographical, political, social, and economic forces. As a state wedged between Virginia and Delaware along the eastern seaboard, the tension between Maryland’s slaveholding legacy and its supposed racially moderate future factored into the policymaking context and framed the struggle for civil rights and public school desegregation in the state.  

Marylanders, both politicians and regular folks, drew on purposefully remembered and on intentionally forgotten collective memories of race relations in Maryland as they described their state. As this chapter’s opening words demonstrate, memory was a political tool—a Republican Gubernatorial hopeful in 1967, Spiro Agnew


spoke of pleasant living to a mostly white audience as he agitated his suburban base. He performed memory by noting how Maryland had remained in the Union and how the state had been the site where Francis Scott Key penned the national anthem. These innocuous events, depoliticized with the passage of time, were meant to inspire fidelity, patriotism, pride. But Agnew’s selectivity was as much a political tool as it was a partial truth. As he spoke, as he remembered, he produced Maryland as a racial space.

This chapter will situate Prince George’s County within the state of Maryland and will look at the ways in which space, memory, and policy at the state level came together after the Brown decision. Considering Maryland in relation to the literature on regional identity, I use memory as a site that can help us apprehend how policymakers and common folk imagined their state and their county as racial spaces.

This chapter explores two interrelated questions: How were spatial imaginaries of Maryland and Prince George’s produced through memory practices? How were those imaginaries bent to serve new racial and political projects in the mid-twentieth century regarding desegregation and large scale suburban changes? I turn first to Maryland’s slaveholding past and to its history of public education before exploring the way in which Prince George’s County transitioned from a rural to suburban space in the post-war period. I trace how state politicians drew on a past that imagined Maryland as a racially tolerant and progressive space as a way of accommodating the moral dissonance that the Brown decision caused them to confront. I also show how rurality emerged as a way in which suburban Prince Georgians, themselves steeped in Maryland imaginaries, sought to

contest potential changes, both educational and residential, in their community around the
time of the *Brown* decision. In both the state and the county, the past came to be re-
imagined by public officials and private citizens as they debated questions of racial
desegregation in public schools at the state and local levels. The past, in turn, produced
race and space at a variety of scales.

**Memory and Space**

Memory is central to many fields including philosophy, history, literature, and
education, and it is a philosophical, psychological, and scientific object of inquiry. In
the last decade, Memory Studies, a multidisciplinary area of research, emerged out of the
work of scholars inspired in part by theorizations on collective memory by sociologist
Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs shifted the understanding of memory from the
province of an individual, as we might say in everyday talk—*I remember*—to the domain
of a group. Collective memory can be understood as the curated product of individual
memories, and, as a result, collective memory both excludes certain individual memories
on the one hand, and legitimates certain individual memories on the other.

Drawing on memory studies, and on geographic thinking about memory, my use
of memory here involves three overlapping concepts: The first, I conceive of memory, at

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91. HI Roediger and JV Wertsch, “Creating a New Discipline of Memory

92. Roediger and Wertsch.

93. Nicolas Russell, “Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs,” *The

94. S Legg, “Reviewing Geographies of Memory/Forgetting,” *Environment and
its heart, as a geographical act. Places encode memories and are themselves (re)constructed through memory. The second, I believe remembering is a social act that involves individuals in a larger group; social space and social memory provide the setting for the formation of our identities, especially at moments where our identities feel threatened or uncertain. The third, I understand memory as being intimately related to power; what gets remembered, how it gets remembered, and how those memories are etched into public spaces and records, are sources of social control as well as an arena of resistance.

Of particular use here is the idea of nostalgia. Nostalgia can be understood as a memory process that selectively recalls positive elements, while allowing negative associations to fall through a sieve of forgetfulness. It is not bound by chronology or fact, but is “diffuse longing” that creates a sense of “pastness.” It is a key way in which spaces, through the imaginaries that are projected on them, are made and remade.


96. Steven Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman, “Memory and Place: Geographies of a Critical Relationship,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 5, no. 3 (September 2004): 348.


98. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu, 163.


Nostalgia, too, is often an enabling technology of race, in particular, of whiteness in the face of challenges to its hegemony; it is intimately linked to the production of racialized space. Nostalgia is a myth-making endeavor that elides elements of a space’s past and actively reconstructs greatness through memory practices that are constitutive of race.

**Memory in the Border States**

Remembering Maryland is a process that exists in dynamic relation to its geographical location and its fractured identity as a border state, a classification that itself is a time-space construct. Historians have taken southern exceptionalism to task by recognizing how understanding the American South as a unique and distinct region limits the ability to see how the entire nation has been implicated in a centuries-long project of maintaining an unequal racial order. The South has long stood in as a metaphor against which racial strife in other regions—namely the North—falls short. Through constant comparison, the South becomes a repository in which we can place our worst and most


102. James.


brutal moments as a nation. This dulls the legacy of racism and segregation in other regions of the United States.  

Region, too, is a slippery concept because while “region” is often a primary way in which citizens self-identify, it is imprecise, at best. Classifying Maryland regionally, as a border state is limiting; there is no clear way of placing Maryland, for example, in a regional framework—is it Southern? Northern? Somewhere in between? This confusion exists because regions, as cultural constructs, do not necessarily correspond to boundaries drawn on a map. While Maryland must be situated in its unique and conflicted history, as a former slave state that was loyal to the Union during the American Civil War, I believe it is more important to attend to how Marylanders themselves have understood and remembered their state in political, racial, and geographic terms. I turn first to Maryland’s participation in slavery and the way in which enslaved and freed people within the state struggled for access to education and civil rights during slavery and emancipation.


107. Lassiter and Crespino, 11.
Slavery and Freedom in Maryland

Settled in 1633 by George Calvert, Lord Baltimore, Maryland was the first state to recognize slavery as a “fact of law” and it remained a slave state until 1864. Slavery in Maryland changed from its early institution in the colonial era as the nature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the political economy of the Atlantic world changed. Revolution and Independence also altered the system as political leaders awkwardly grappled with issues of freedom while maintaining a highly unequal social order.

Slavery was of marginal importance through the 17th century as indentured servants outnumbered enslaved Africans. Blacks composed only 10% of the total of the colony in the 1690s. In the 1690s, Maryland planters revolted against Calvert’s control, which led to an increase in their landholdings and the centralization of power in the hands of planters; this ushered in the beginnings of a plantation-based society in the state. Land holdings increased, labor was in demand, and African slavery had been legalized. By 1755, about one third of the population of Maryland was from Africa. Though


111. Maryland State Archives and University of Maryland, 4.
Maryland’s participation in the international slave trade ended in 1774, by that point, 90% of the enslaved population had been born in the Americas.\textsuperscript{112}

By 1730, Prince George’s County, founded in 1695, out of lands pertaining to Calvert and Charles Counties, had been transformed from a “society with slaves” to a “slave society”\textsuperscript{113}. The County was bounded by two rivers, the Patuxent and the Potomac, and shared a border with the District of Columbia. Portions of the county with sandy soil provided a perfect environment for the cultivation of tobacco while in other parts of the county, people cultivated livestock or engaged in subsistence farming.\textsuperscript{114} Planting and slaveholding conferred and consolidated both status and power.

Slavery in the Chesapeake largely consisted of the cultivation of tobacco but the practices and form varied county to county.\textsuperscript{115} Maryland’s Southern Counties—Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George’s, and Montgomery—persisted with tobacco cultivation through the 19th century, a practice which was both brutal and dependent on large tracts of land and large gangs of slaves.\textsuperscript{116}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[112.] Maryland State Archives and University of Maryland, 6.
  \item[114.] Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 34.
  \item[115.] J. Elliott Russo, “‘Fifty-Four Days Work of Two Negroes’: Enslaved Labor in Colonial Somerset County, Maryland,” Agricultural History 78, no. 4 (2004): 468.
\end{itemize}
cultivated mainly wheat and other subsistence crops, slavery took a different form; smaller lots of land and fewer slaves led to the isolation of slave communities, but also granted greater independence to slaves.\textsuperscript{117} Crop diversification in the mid-eighteenth century brought about a change in the form of slavery and caused conflict among the landed elite of different Maryland regions which came to a head in debates about slavery’s continued relevance and its place in the new nation.\textsuperscript{118}

The City of Baltimore, in particular, demonstrated both the tenuousness of race relations in Maryland, and the possibilities for freed Black people.\textsuperscript{119} As a center of slave trade due to its location on the Chesapeake Bay, the city was also a locus of abolition—Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison lived and worked to advance their cause there.\textsuperscript{120} But the freed Blacks who made a home for themselves in Baltimore were a threat to many white Marylanders who were menaced by their prosperity. Freed Blacks threatened competition for jobs, evoked the specter of a different racial order, and were a reminder of the ever-present threat of rebellion.\textsuperscript{121} While a select group of Black Baltimoreans were afforded access to literacy and numeracy instruction in the antebellum period, this access was provided only inasmuch as those skills would add to their value as

\textsuperscript{117} Maryland State Archives and University of Maryland, 13.

\textsuperscript{118} Maryland State Archives and University of Maryland, “A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland.”


\textsuperscript{120} C. Fraser Smith, \textit{Here Lies Jim Crow : Civil Rights in Maryland} / (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 24.

\textsuperscript{121} Smith, 24.
enslaved people and only to the extent that education would uphold the stability of the Southern racial caste system. The large number of freed back people in the state and their relative successes, evidenced by Baltimore, along with the near constant contrasting of tobacco cultivation to the cruelty of cotton plantations in the Deep South, allowed Marylanders to “think of themselves as enlightened, kinder practitioners of slavery.”

122. Moss, *Schooling Citizens*.

Figure 1 - J. H. Colton 1855 Map of Delaware and Maryland [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons
Schooling in Maryland

In colonial Maryland, formal education was unevenly available and limited to the male children of landed gentry. The first free schools were established in Annapolis in 1696, and proposals were underway to create a county system through levying a tax on tobacco, but funding these proposals proved difficult and the plan was abandoned. Schooling remained confined to cities and remained the privilege of the rich. In the early national period, around 1816, the General Assembly attempted to formalize free public schooling by creating Boards of School Commissioners in each of the counties.

In 1826, the Maryland General Assembly created public schools for white children under ten years of age. As was common in the South, Black Marylanders paid taxes for schools that they could not send their children to. In Baltimore, Black taxpayers sought to gain access to public funding for schools for their children but multiple petitions were rejected between 1839 and 1850. In 1867, a constitutional convention resulted in fourth version of the Maryland constitution and Article 43


125. *Maryland, a Guide to the Old Line State*, 100.


129. Baum, 25.
included a provision for public education: “The legislature ought to encourage the diffusion of knowledge and virtue, the extension of a judicious system of general education, the promotion of literature, the arts, sciences, agriculture, commerce and manufacture, and the general melioration of the condition of the People”\textsuperscript{130} The constitution offered the possibility that the state was responsible for the education of all of its citizens, Black and white. A year later, in 1867, the General Assembly allowed for the use of taxes to support this endeavor.\textsuperscript{131}

In 1872, legislation transformed the Board of State Commissioners into a state Board of Education and again tackled the issue of school funding requiring the General Assembly to set up a system of Free Public Schools and to support them through taxation\textsuperscript{132} The informal racial caste system of segregation was codified in law as Governor Oden Bowie drew up legislation to keep public schools segregated.\textsuperscript{133} The 1872 Law set aside fifty thousand dollars to support Black schools, but most counties continued to use the entirety of their local funds on white schools while Black schools were supported with money from the state fund.\textsuperscript{134} This reflected the hostility on the part


\textsuperscript{131} Gregory, “The Education of Blacks in Maryland,” 121.

\textsuperscript{132} Gregory, 122.

\textsuperscript{133} Smith, \textit{Here Lies Jim Crow}. Maryland didn’t ratify the amendment until 1973.

\textsuperscript{134} Gregory, “The Education of Blacks in Maryland,” 256.
of many counties; if the state wanted Black schools, then the state could pay for them.\textsuperscript{135} During the 1870s, laws ostensibly moved toward greater inclusion of African Americans in the educational endeavor as Maryland law allowed for a “special Board of Trustees” to be in charge of Black schools.\textsuperscript{136} These trustees were appointed by county school boards. In practice, this oversight offered little fiscal autonomy for the trustee boards and, although it gave Blacks an ability to participate in the political process, it offered little power.\textsuperscript{137}

Well before the 1872 schooling law, Black Marylanders had struggled to gain access to education. In the antebellum period, Maryland had one of the largest populations of freed Black people, mostly concentrated in Baltimore, and Blacks created Sunday schools and other literary societies with the aid of the American Methodist Episcopal Church.\textsuperscript{138} The community based efforts on the part of African Americans to educate themselves, eventually led to the establishment of the first public schools for Blacks in the state which were founded in Baltimore after emancipation. These schools were a joint effort on the part of the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of Colored People and the Bureau of Refugees, Freedman, and Abandoned Lands (known as the Freedman’s Bureau).\textsuperscript{139} The city took over the supervision of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{135} Gregory, 258.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} Gregory, 260.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} Gregory, 260.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} Gregory, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} Gregory, 2.
\end{itemize}
schools, staffing them entirely with white teachers.\textsuperscript{140} In 1874, the first Black school, explicitly planned and built for the purpose of schooling, was built in Baltimore: Colored Grammar School No. 1.\textsuperscript{141} By 1875, there were 15 Black new schools in the city.\textsuperscript{142} And while many were dilapidated, or housed in old buildings not intended for the purpose of schooling, Baltimore City set the standard for free public education for Blacks in the state.\textsuperscript{143} These schools were not seen as forming part of Baltimore’s school system and critics pointed to their crumbling physical state, the “reading deficiencies” of Black students, and the low attendance rates (averaging around 40\%\textsuperscript{144}). Attendance in particular became a justification for the undeserving nature of Black students and their families. Said one critic: “[white teachers] may do all that is possible, but parents have not a proper appreciation of the necessity for regular attendance.”\textsuperscript{145}

Black education in Baltimore however, stood in stark contrast to public education in the state’s other twenty-three counties.\textsuperscript{146} Education for Blacks in the counties, mostly rural and tobacco producing, came after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{147} Counties found themselves in a tense relationship with the state regarding the provision of education for Black

\textsuperscript{140} Gregory, 2.
\textsuperscript{141} Gregory, 213.
\textsuperscript{142} Gregory, 214.
\textsuperscript{143} Gregory, 216.
\textsuperscript{144} Gregory, 217.
\textsuperscript{145} Gregory, 218.
\textsuperscript{146} Gregory, “The Education of Blacks in Maryland.”
\textsuperscript{147} Gregory, 253.
Marylanders. The state allowed the counties latitude, essentially giving them the ability to decide whether a given district’s Black population was substantial enough to warrant a separate school.\textsuperscript{148} Funding for the schools also created conflict. State funding regulations alternated between simply dividing school revenue by race on the one hand and by devoting all public school revenue to white schools with an appropriation fund for Black schools on the other.\textsuperscript{149}

In addition to funding difficulties, county boards clung to racist beliefs that further prohibited working towards ensuring equitable education for African Americans in Maryland. The president of the Prince George’s County school board remarked that he would not "visit and superintend the colored schools in the same way and to the same extent as the white schools and probably never will. . . because of the difference in caste." Black Prince Georgians were seen as uneducable: "efforts. . . particularly directed to this ignorant and helpless class, and with the poorest result."\textsuperscript{150}

In 1916 the state legislature appointed a committee to report on how to make improvements in public schools—known as the Flexner Report. The report found that the state lacked the teaching staff and had no educational policy. The divide between educational innovation in Baltimore and the squalor of the rural counties was stark. A full 40\% of all Maryland teachers taught in one-room school houses, and Black teachers were

\textsuperscript{148} Mary S. Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools of the American South /, New Perspectives on the History of the South}. (University Press of Florida, 2006).

\textsuperscript{149} Hoffschwelle, 16–17.

\textsuperscript{150} Gregory, “The Education of Blacks in Maryland,” 261.
overrepresented in rural areas.\textsuperscript{151} This led to the passage of a compulsory attendance law and led to the appointment of teacher supervisors. There were changes to the administrative structure as well: teacher certification would be centralized in the state superintendent. This also led to a reassessment of state policy regarding Black schools. After the Flexner report, state statute provided for a white supervisor of Black schools, the responsibility of which would be to encourage improvements to Black schooling in the counties and to supervise teachers. This saddled the state with the responsibility for doing for Black schools what the counties did for their white schools.\textsuperscript{152}

Black secondary education was almost non-existent outside of Baltimore; the counties had no Black high schools until 1920.\textsuperscript{153} In 1937, the required length of the school year was equalized for Blacks and whites.\textsuperscript{154} By 1938, all of the Maryland counties offered high school instruction to Black students.\textsuperscript{155} But, not surprisingly, average per-pupil expenditures were highly unequal; in 1944–45 the average amount spent on white students per year was $78 while only $69 were spent on Black students\textsuperscript{156} In 1938, Black teachers brought suit in the hopes of equalizing teacher salaries in Maryland. The court decided against the Black teachers, shifting the blame from the

\begin{itemize}
\item 151. Gregory, 280.
\item 152. Gregory, 285.
\item 153. Gregory, 4.
\item 154. Gregory, 294.
\item 155. Gregory, 294.
\end{itemize}
state Board of Education to the local school officials. The court also stated that the inequitable distribution of state funds to Black teachers did not constitute discrimination.¹⁵⁷ In 1942, the state passed an equal salary law.¹⁵⁸ By 1954, Maryland was essentially running four different school systems: a white public school system administered by county boards and overseen by the State Board of Education, a Black public school system administered by (white) county Boards of Education and overseen by the State Board of Education, a white public school system in Baltimore City which remained independent of the state Board of Education and a Black public school system in Baltimore City overseen by the Board of School Commissioners.¹⁵⁹


Figure 2- "There's Music in the Air"-from a series of photographs included in the 1946-1947 Prince George's County Board of Education Annual Report, University of Maryland Special Collections
Suburban Growth and Planning Policy in Maryland

At the time of the Brown decision, in 1954, Maryland was in transition. People had begun to move out of Baltimore and Washington, D.C. in large numbers. While similar migration had occurred earlier due to the advent of public transportation, such as streetcars, what occurred in the period after World War II, referred to as “mass-suburbanization” by historians, altered the physical and human landscape of the state.  

Suburbanization superimposed itself on the tobacco fields and slave quarters, a palimpsest of race and power, enacted in and producing Maryland as a racial space.

The way in which racialized bodies moved through urban and suburban terrain was controlled by a series of legal mechanisms that predated mass suburbanization: planning and zoning. Planning had tangible public health dividends, and it helped cities create public spaces for civic engagement. Planning also had moral and ideological dimensions, and was intensely political, even as it hid behind a veil of technocracy and rationality.  

City planning understood the city space of the present in relation to an imagined future. And, instead of reactive planning, city planners, trained professionals, aimed to create comprehensive master plans targeting the physical environment. Often,  


162. Peterson, 3.
this meant that planners were external to the community, hired for their expertise and education, but not for their intimate experiences as residents in the spaces which they sought to shape.\textsuperscript{163} This planning often provoked conflict as it felt removed from the people who would populate the spaces the planners imagined. Planning was not merely the physical act of constructing, or the abstract outline of population projections on a map. At its heart, it represented an acceptance of a new form of state intervention in the property market.\textsuperscript{164} Additionally, decisions regarding land use were themselves inherently political, differently affecting groups of citizens.\textsuperscript{165}

In Prince George’s County, the first zoning ordinances were written in 1928 but they were only put into place after the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of zoning three years later.\textsuperscript{166} The Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPP) whose jurisdiction combined the two Maryland counties that shared a border with D.C., Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties, was established in 1927 and by 1931, it had begun to engage in long term planning for Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties.\textsuperscript{167} Originally the jurisdiction of MNCPP extended to over 135

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165. Taylor, 7.


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square miles in Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties, but by 1957, this area had expanded to include 691 square miles.\footnote{168}

In the post-war period, middle class white families from Washington D.C. moved in large numbers to Maryland and Virginia due to falling property values, the migration of Blacks from Southern rural areas to the city, and what was perceived as a disintegration of urban schools and social services.\footnote{169} In-migration counted for the bulk of this population increase: 70.4 percent of the increase in Montgomery County and 61.0 percent in Prince George’s, were a result of people moving from D.C. or the surrounding area. This move to the suburbs was subsidized by federal policies that disproportionately benefitted white Americans; they were propelled by unprecedented access to credit and, in the case of veterans, by the provisions of the GI Bill.\footnote{170}

Between 1910 and 1960 the population of Montgomery and Prince George’s increased over 1000 percent with most of the growth occurring after 1940, where the population doubled every ten years between 1940 and 1960.\footnote{171} This influx of people brought about a disruption to what had previously been a relatively rural way of living. This was adroitly captured in 1959 Prince George’s Chamber of Commerce Pamphlet


\footnote{170. Andrea Carosso, \textit{Cold War Narratives : American Culture in the 1950s /} (Peter Lang, 2012).}

where a reader can see the glossy pages plastered with photos from that year’s County Fair. In one picture, two young, white, and jean-clad women proudly welcomed community members by showcasing a sign with a Southern twist: “Y’all Come!” One woman, wearing a cowboy hat and armed with a hammer donned a “Miss Agriculture” sash, while the other, wearing a cap, had a “Miss Industry” sash draped across her. This humorous embodiment of two forces central to the County’s prosperity disguises the conflict that engaged these possible futures.
Figure 3-Prince George's County Chamber of Commerce Pamphlet, 1959
By 1959, Prince George’s was in the midst of an astonishing period of growth. As a county with an agricultural tradition mired in the legacy of slavery, it had begun to change into an industrial space, replete with steady government, in-demand retail jobs, newly constructed single family homes, and suburban schools. The legacy of its agricultural past, drawn upon as a constitutive element of whiteness, and the complicated demands of its industrial present, envisioned as an uncertain and chaotic, possibly non-white eventuality, made the county a geography upon which conflicting visions of the past and of the future were played out.  

In choosing the Maryland counties in particular, families came in search of new housing and quality schools—most of the available land had been developed in the District such that it wasn’t suited for the detached single family homes that were desired at the time. Automobiles helped make longer distances more accessible, and infrastructure in the form of highways made it so that people no longer had to live where they worked.  

By 1960, 35 percent of the D.C. metropolitan population lived in either Prince George’s or in Montgomery County. Not surprisingly, housing construction trends reflected this movement of people. Between 1935 and 1951, the demand for apartments increased substantially. In the two counties combined, apartment construction

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increased from 2,034 units in 1935 to 48,407 units by 1961.\textsuperscript{175} The demand for larger houses on larger lots increased as well.\textsuperscript{176}

Access to employment also contributed to the attractiveness of Maryland suburban living. Across the two counties, the majority of those who worked in non-agricultural industry, worked in either government or civilian employment, manufacturing, or retail.\textsuperscript{177} 40\% of all jobs in the Washington Area were in downtown Washington, by the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{178} Nearly a third of all federal employment was in the suburbs, dispersed across the Maryland and Virginia counties.\textsuperscript{179} The government had employed only a few thousand in 1900 but by 1960, close to 315,000 were employed.\textsuperscript{180} The area, as a whole, in the early 1960s enjoyed low rates of unemployment compared to the national average, and a relatively high family income.\textsuperscript{181}

But while Prince George’s and Montgomery comprised a planning region, they had some striking differences in terms of growth, construction, and socioeconomic indicators, which reflected who chose to move to which county. Prince George’s saw a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{175}Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{176}Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{179}Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{180}Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{181}Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 126.
\end{itemize}
larger population increase than Montgomery—between 1955 and 1965, it increased from 277,848 to 544,592, as opposed to Montgomery County, which increased from 257,633 to 445,094.\textsuperscript{182} And, in general, people who moved to Prince George’s were younger, had more children, and less wealth than those who moved to Montgomery.\textsuperscript{183} Said one description of its inhabitants: “Prince George’s…is generally a ‘working man’s county’ with dollar-conscious young families attracted by relatively low cost single family homes and moderate rent garden apartments”\textsuperscript{184} Socioeconomically speaking, in 1960, Montgomery County was ranked number one out of ten counties in a socioeconomic comparison of counties in the Northeastern United States and Prince George’s County ranked 7, the lowest of all of the counties in the D.C. metro area with the exception of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{185} One contributing factor to this difference might have been the cost of housing construction and cost of living: the cost of housing built between 1961 and 1965 ranged between four and six thousand dollars more per single family unit in Montgomery County than in Prince George’s County.\textsuperscript{186}

Zoning changes between 1961 and 1966 are illustrative of the way in which the counties came to be shaped. In Prince George’s, the largest changes in zoning categories, or the shifting of one purpose or categorization to another, were for R-80, R-55, and R-18 properties, categorizes that concerned the construction of one-family detached residential houses and multifamily medium density residential construction.\(^{187}\) There was a 3,300 acre increase in land zoned for 9,500 square feet lots intended for one-family detached residential houses (R-80) and a 265 acre increase in land zoned for 6,500 square foot lots intended for one-family detached residential occupancy (R-55). Of most interest is the nearly 2,007 acres that became dedicated to multifamily medium density residential (R-18) construction between 1961 and 1966. In general, lots were smaller and there were more opportunities for apartment dwellers in Prince George’s than in Montgomery. But even with the growth and the new construction, a full 10% of the units in Prince George’s were considered substandard.\(^{188}\) By 1965, 22% of housing in Montgomery County was apartments, whereas 34% of housing in Prince George’s County was apartments.\(^{189}\) Only 6% of the units in Montgomery were considered substandard.\(^{190}\)

\(^{187}\) Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 36.

\(^{188}\) Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 38.


Figure 4-Image from “Zoning Guide” published in 1965 by the Project Marlboro Home Rule Charter Committee, H. Furlong Library, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore
Zoning and the Rural-Urban Fringe

Another component of Prince George’s experience with incorporation into the Maryland-Washington regional area had to do with its agricultural past. In the 1950s and 1960s as the population increased in D.C. and families began to look outside of the city and the County became less important for its agricultural offerings, and more important, as an area in transition, waiting to be developed. On this “rural-urban fringe,” its land stood in a “state of limbo,” and agricultural value was replaced by the potential for new development. The needs of farmers and non-farmers often overlapped, but oftentimes, were at cross purposes. Non-farmers wanted access to large lots and country living, while farmers wanted to have the freedom to farm as they chose and embraced policies that preserved open space. As single family homes became the predominant form of spatial organization for communities undergoing suburban growth, agricultural practices as they had stood, were threatened by encroaching populations and the rise in property value and, hence, taxes, that accompanied the new members of the community.  These changes


192. Friedberger, 503.

193. Ibid.,508.

were reflected in the number of farms: Prince George’s County had 1,087 farms in 1964, which was down from 1,251 in 1959.195

**Brown v. Board of Education in Maryland**

The 1954 *Brown* decision ruled that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” and that racial segregation deprived students of their Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection under the law.196 *Brown I* called into question the cultural logic according to which the South, segregated by law, had operated, but provided no guidance as to how exactly to remedy the situation.197 A year later, after re-hearing the case and accepting briefs from states outlining their interests and the possible conflicts they foresaw, the 1955 *Brown II* decision delegated the specific responsibilities of desegregation to local communities and to district courts. Putting decision making in the hands of local officials, *Brown II* also placed an ambiguous timeframe on the endeavor, entreatling districts to move with “with all deliberate speed.”198 To many, this meant “never.”199

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197. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.


199. Bell, *Silent Covenants*.
In May of 1954, Prince George’s County Superintendent William Schmidt huddled with administrators feverishly piecing together how to respond to the decision. The state of Maryland and the county announced their decisions two weeks later: “The role of the state board is not to set the detailed pattern of operation but to take an official position that the decision will be implemented with fairness and justice to all.” The matter delegated to the counties, Prince George’s County decided that until the Supreme Court provided a final decision, the district would operate according to its 1953-1954 status, as a dual system “…and would eliminate racial designation in statistics and records kept by the board, provide for the integration of Negro and white administrative staff and order that profession meetings of principals and teachers be held on a non-segregated basis.” In August of 1954, several members of the local chapter of the NAACP came before the Board to ask what “steps or position the Board has taken relative to the Supreme Court decision on desegregation.” The delegation was given no conclusive answer as the Board decided to create a fact-finding committee which was formed by April of 1955. Schmidt told community members that it would be “highly inappropriate” to make a desegregation plan before the committee presented its findings.

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200. Retired educator Thomas S. Gwynn came across a headline that transported him back to May 18, 1954: “School Segregation Killed in Nation—No Trouble Expected in Maryland.” Gwynn remembered that day and how administrators in the county had reacted. “Educators Make Book on Memories” 11/30/87 Prince George’s Journal


203. Hope 1976, p. 81
findings. The Washington Post, in an article about the “touchy situation” commented on the committee’s goal which was to reason through “…integration problems with a minimum of public controversy and emotionalism.” Controversy and emotionalism were avoided through a gag rule: Schmidt forbade Board members or the committee from discussing desegregation publicly or privately. Said the Post, they “…have clamped a tight lid of secrecy on all discussions of the integration question by all school authorities until the board has decided upon a definite policy.”

State Superintendent Thomas G. Pullen appointed a committee of school administrators to study the possible conflicts of desegregation. The five-person committee of superintendents recommended a “gradual adjustment” policy for the state, arguing:

The Supreme Court, in abolishing segregation in the public schools of this country created a new right for a minority group. By the same action it abrogated a right of the majority group. It is specious to argue that this right of the majority did not exist legally; it has been countenanced as a right for nearly a century and the Supreme Court on one memorable occasion placed its official sanction upon it.


206. Ibid

207. A Long Day’s Journey into Light, 74.
Invoking segregation as cultural practice sanctioned by law that was central to a (white) southern heritage, the superintendents continued in defense of their “gradual adjustment” position: “Our adherence to this position is based on our desire to build at the local level in our respective counties a climate of good will between all parties concerned. This climate is necessary to undergird the program of action which must be organized to carry out the opinion of the court.”

The focus on the preservation of good will became of paramount importance. Less important was swift action or a redistribution of public resources.

School desegregation began slowly and unevenly across the state but it didn’t immediately affect the lives of Black Marylanders outside of schools, nor did schools immediately move to desegregate. The lack of overt conflict after the Brown decision upheld Maryland’s odd place within a Southern order, as civility set it apart from its more aggressive neighbors who participated in massive resistance to the court’s mandate. But Maryland’s relatively peaceful experience with the early days of school desegregation also undermined the possibility of radical change.

**Imaginaries of Maryland and Prince George’s County**

When Spiro Agnew welcomed his audience by remarking on Maryland as a place of “boundless beauty cast in miniature” he was alluding to the geographic and political

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211. Levy, xii.
diversity of the state. Spanning from the Atlantic Ocean to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Maryland’s ecological realities both shaped regional differentiation within the state and framed race relations and the struggle for civil rights. Through slavery, school desegregation, and civil rights, Maryland’s residents understood their state in several ways by drawing on the past to make sense of the present. School officials invoked memories that sought to populate the broader public’s perception of Maryland in the decade following Brown. Two powerful examples of the uses of memory include the way in which the 1955 Commission on School Desegregation spoke about the treatment of Blacks in Maryland, and the manner in which Thomas G. Pullen described Maryland in a 1959 report to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. This memory work was also happening at the local level as Prince Georgians drew upon an imagined rural past as a protection against an uncertain future.

Commission on School Desegregation, 1955

The five men convened by Superintendent Pullen to study the effects of desegregation in 1955 drew on a collective past as they assessed and predicted the risks of desegregation. Recalling the past took the form of drawing upon an understanding of Maryland as a place that had been considerate of its Black population. This consideration, they argued, set the tenor for race relations in the state and it applied to how Marylanders

212. Agnew, “Remarks to National Convention, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Baltimore.”

had dealt with both freed Blacks and slaves in the antebellum period and during the Civil War:

Maryland has always been considerate of its colored population. As a matter of fact, the State was considerate of the Negro race when most of the representatives within the confines of the state were not citizens but slaves. The most eloquent testimony of this fact is that in 1861 the number of Negroes in Maryland was about equally divided between freed men and slaves.\footnote{214}{“Superintendent’s Committee on Desegregation,” n.d., Maryland Historical Society H. Furlong Baldwin Library.}

Not only, the Superintendents claimed, was Maryland unique in its consideration toward its Black population long before the law compelled it to be so, but the Superintendents also clung onto a liberal progress narrative that relativized the past by defending segregation as “the accepted pattern of the day.”\footnote{215}{“Superintendent’s Committee on Desegregation,” 12.} This put space between the past and the present which further justified gradualism and the non-intervention of external forces.

A commitment to progress was transformed into social capital for the state:

“Elsewhere in this report is a summary of the progress that has been made in the education of the colored race in Maryland from 1867 through 1954, a period of nearly a century. Progress has been phenomenal.”\footnote{216}{“Superintendent’s Committee on Desegregation,” 12.} By weaving together assertions of Maryland’s gentler form of slavery with a forward-looking notion of progress, the Superintendents created a narrative that the state could claim as a defense. This rosier version of the past...
was also seized upon by Superintendent Pullen as he communicated with the Commission on Civil Rights four years later on the status of school desegregation in Maryland.

Thomas G. Pullen and Desegregation in Maryland, 1959

Thomas G. Pullen was born in Virginia in 1898 to a man who had owned slaves and was educated at William and Mary College and at Teacher’s College, Columbia. Making a home for himself in Maryland, his career as an administrator spanned thirty years; he worked at the state level from 1934-1964 where he was Maryland State Superintendent from 1942 to 1964. In his 1959 report on Desegregation in Maryland to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, he invoked Maryland as a racial space with a history of racial tolerance and he described the state as “liberal.” This description provided grounds for Pullen’s policy of gradualism and attempted to envision Maryland as a Southern exception, a vision that discouraged further government intervention in state matters and also left racial inequality largely unaddressed.

Pullen described the Maryland experience with desegregation between 1954 and 1959 as “cooperation…carried on in a climate of good will that had its origin in the period before the War Between the States.” Good will, Pullen asserted, came out of the

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“racial climate” that was unique to Maryland as a border state. Pullen, like the
Superintendents before him, cited the number of freed Blacks living in Maryland in 1860
compared to the number of freed Blacks living in Virginia, a statistic that he believed
demonstrated an exception to Southern racial tension:

This fact should give some indication of the attitude of Maryland people racially,
generally one of tolerance and willingness “to let live,” even though there were
times when not much was done educationally or otherwise to improve the Negro’s
lot. But the records show very clearly that during the decades after 1865 serious
attention was given from time to time to provide “equal but separate”
opportunities.\textsuperscript{219}

Pullen continued to describe Maryland as a border state, a designation that he believed
explained its “liberality” and “tolerance” and its general avoidance of direct violence:

It is commonly supposed that several of the Border States are more liberal in their
outlook racially because of their proximity to states that have not had racial laws
since the Civil War; most of them had such laws prior to that time. Undoubtedly
this is true, but I am inclined to believe that the extent of the liberality and the
tolerant attitude in the Border States is probably due more to the classification of
the people within each state and the conditions that prevail wherein.\textsuperscript{220}

\textsuperscript{218} Thomas Pullen, “Desegregation in Public Schools in Maryland,” April 15,
1959, 1, Thomas G. Pullen, Jr. Papers, 1926-1979 Maryland Historical Society, Box 5,

\textsuperscript{219} Pullen, 4.

\textsuperscript{220} Pullen, 4.
Pullen then gave the example of Maryland’s four largest counties, Montgomery, Prince George’s, Baltimore and Anne Arundel, praising their progress:

Fortunately the local people and those who have come into those counties have adopted a liberal but moderate policy and have seen to it that desegregation has worked out in a rather satisfactory fashion. It is true that the percentage of colored children in these particular counties is not especially large, but the example set has been very helpful²²¹

Pullen’s statement contained several claims about Maryland. One was its liberality, evidenced by his persistent use of “liberal” as a descriptive and tone-setting word meant to apply to the people of the state. For Pullen, liberalism and peace were coexisting forces. In this sense, he drew on notions of what Horton has called post-war liberalism.²²² For Pullen, liberal became a signifier of an overt rejection of discrimination that was now framed as a moral issue around which general consensus had been built. But this terminology elided differences within liberal thinking, namely between radical and mainstream liberals, a splintering that would lead to the formation of the New Left and would also, within a few years, result in white backlash in response to the more progressive demands of the civil rights movement.²²³ Pullen employed liberal as a way of talking about mainstream, or reasonable liberals who likely “supported an end to Jim

²²¹. Pullen, 6.


Crow but rejected the call for a more transformative democratic agenda”224 By using liberal as a way of describing Maryland, Pullen upheld a racial order while he sought to make it slightly more workable while consolidating white control. Another claim that emerged in Pullen’s report was the importance of slavery as perennial frame of reference. In order to describe what Pullen saw as Maryland’s relative success, he looked back to its slaveholding past, a past he also used to demonstrate progress so as to avoid large scale change. This also enabled him to illustrate a regional peculiarity that required that the decisions regarding desegregation be left up to Marylanders.

White Prince Georgians themselves were trying to make sense of the massive challenges that suburbanization and mid-century claims for civil rights posed to their way of life. Not unlike politicians who imagined Maryland’s past as they justified current policy, long-time residents of the county constructed whiteness and articulated loss through nostalgia about rurality.

The County’s Agricultural Way of Life: Whiteness, Nostalgia, and Loss

In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, the physical developments in the county were met with enthusiasm by its boosters—the Chamber of Commerce released glossy pamphlets advertising its attributes, the School Board’s annual reports emphasized progress narratives. And while those in power capitalized on the growth and touted the development, wooing developers such as William Levitt, many white Prince Georgians turned backward, re-imagining the County’s past as a way of coping with its present.

224. Horton, 141.
Nostalgia equipped white Prince Georgians who felt displaced by change with a way of making sense of their experiences and laying claim to the suburban space.

One of the dominant myths of whiteness in the county was an understanding of rurality which was synonymous with farming and agricultural practices. This was combined with a rosy retelling of country schooling as it had been prior to the county’s post-war growth. These two memory practices came together to imagine the county as a space of whiteness which had tangible consequences for the lives of the ever increasing population of non-white Prince Georgians. In a sense, these memory practices were defensive, meant to resuscitate a lost past of the space and its unique lifestyle as a point of pride, especially when the county faced critiques for its backwardness. Nostalgic memory practices were also offensive—seeking to preemptively delineate who counted as a member of the community, whose voices could be heard, and what spaces—residential and educational—meant and should mean.

Not surprisingly, Black farming families were not included in nostalgic memory practices. Even though they are central to American agricultural history, Black farmers are often left out of the narrative of the independent, farming family that has coursed through the history of the country.225 Their relationship to agricultural labor, whose genesis can be found in slavery, was completely absent from the whitewashed country past that rural Prince Georgians articulated. In Prince George’s County, the retellings of the past and the defense of the rural way of life erased the pre-emancipation Black

experience in the county when it had been an area of tobacco plantations worked by enslaved African Americans. Absent from these understandings of rurality were also the lives of Black farmers who had eked out an existence through Reconstruction, through the racial terrorism that followed, and through periods of government intervention, such as the New Deal where policies that kept their white counterparts secure did not benefit tenant farmers or sharecroppers, the majority of whom were Black. Just as they were closed out of suburbanization, Black farmers were also denied loans and subsidies provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that helped white family farmers maintain stability; the USDA has been derisively referred to as “the last plantation.” Structural racism and having been locked out of landownership made Black agricultural workers incredibly vulnerable to economic crises such as the Depression and innovations such as the mechanization of labor that made farming less labor intensive. In Prince George’s County, suburban construction marked the beginning of the physical and symbolic displacement of (white) agricultural families. The platting of farmland and the resulting suburban infill evinced a national phenomenon of land loss, and a turn away from family farming to big business agriculture and industry. But while white farmers may have been existentially threatened by what geographers have called “rural gentrification,” Black farmers were erased from the collective and public memories of a rural past altogether. This is reflected in the precipitous decline of Black farming


families over the course of the twentieth century—the number of black farmers in the state peaked around 1910 at 6382 but by 1987, only 371 farms remained.228

Suburban Stagnation

The nostalgic rurality that emerged from within the community, was met with derision by those outside the community. Despite the relative abundance of jobs and the newfound prosperity, Prince George’s became infamous in the local press for its “suburban stagnation,” understood as backward by many well-to-do Washingtonians across the Anacostia River. A 1960 Washington Post article took the county to task: “It is shameful that Prince Georges lags so badly in its public services; the County’s libraries and health and welfare services are all woefully below the standards in comparable suburban areas. For too long, a complacent clique of courthouse politicians has reigned with relative little challenge.”229 An angry White Prince Georgian, president of the Prince George’s County League of Women Voters and future School Board member, Ruth S. Wolf, responded to the Post’s characterization: “The League appreciates your interest and feels certain that if the Washington Post would treat Prince George’s County as the home of more than 350,000 Marylanders, and a regular source of news, instead of a backward stepchild fit only for finger-pointing and tongue-lashings, we could work together to

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make this the kind of county we would both like to have.”

Another resident wrote in, defending the rural way of life: “we in the agricultural section have all we need for the present at least. That’s what we came to the county to secure—freedom from pressure group which are trying to “socialize” us. If people do not like what we have to offer, let them stay out and go elsewhere.”

The Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission also tapped into this nostalgia in its 1958 Annual Report as it articulated the need for open, recreational spaces. It captured the past as a way of repackaging the present. The report focused on “People and Parks,” as it outlined a plan for open space preservation. To argue for the importance of planning, the commission invoked farm lands and country living: “vacant fields which once provided impromptu ball diamonds and rambling barns that served as community dance halls and meeting centers have been replaced by housing developments.”

**Conclusion**

Memory and nostalgia, the accretion of racialized schooling practices, and a sudden and aggressive encounter with suburbanization came together to produce Prince George’s County and Maryland as racial spaces around the time of the *Brown* decision. Maryland’s past became an armament of white politicians who were eager to distance the state from its more Southern peers. By controlling the way in which their state was

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represented and talked about as a racial space, they aimed to control the form, pace, and extent of school desegregation. Seeing their state as an exception to the brutality of slavery and as liberal—shorthand for peaceful and moderate—education policymakers justified their gradualism and avoided disruption to the prevailing racial order. But it was not only politicians who carefully drew upon an imagined past. Rural, white, Prince Georgians also told powerful stories about the county’s agricultural heritage. These stories revealed the anxiety of a people who felt they had much to lose and they communicated who belonged and who didn’t belong, both in historical terms, and in projections of the future.
Chapter 2
Two Neighborhoods: Race and Schooling in Belair at Bowie and Fairmount Heights
1950-1965

In the mid-1950s Prince George’s County was in a moment of unprecedented residential expansion. In 1960, the county planning board approved a building permit that would allow William Levitt and Sons to develop a residential community on 2226 acres of land in Bowie on the site of the Belair estate, a former slave plantation built in the 1740s by Samuel Ogle. The Board of Commissioners president glowingly reported back on a meeting with Levitt: “[he] builds a good product. Levitt won’t depreciate anything and he probably will make local builders sit up and take notice. But good competition is always good”233. Around the same time, Black Prince Georgians a few miles away in Fairmount Heights continued to live in the suburban enclave constructed at the turn of the century. These two suburban spaces, all white Belair, and all Black Fairmount, in turn, had different relationships to schooling in the county, differences that were amplified by the county’s official desegregation policy of “freedom of choice” and its unofficial practice of school segregated school construction in the decade after Brown.

Looking at the construction of Belair at Bowie, a William Levitt development marketed and sold exclusively to whites, and at the development and growth of Fairmount Heights, a Black suburban enclave, this chapter explores the co-constitutive nature of race and space, in particular how racialized spaces were incorporated into and formed in reference to education policy in the years immediately following Brown. I

argue that, in the case of Belair, planning policies acted in concert with white stories of nostalgia, loss, and change to solidify white control over neighborhood level educational resources. This is evidenced in how white suburban-dwelling families articulated rights claims to quality schooling as they believed themselves to be marginalized. Fairmount Heights, on the other hand, was produced as a Black neighborhood space with a history of localized control over schools from its founding, having been denied access to public resources. Schooling there was central to neighborhood identity and community. These two contrasting spaces and school-community relationships, in turn, were differently implicated in the County’s early approach to desegregation, which included a freedom of choice policy and, less explicitly, a school construction and school closure plan.

*Brown in Prince George’s County*

The nine-member governor-appointed School Board and veteran administrator, Superintendent William Schmidt were required by law to desegregate their schools. But they also realized that to do so was unpopular with the white majority. In a decision typical of many reluctant Southern districts, but not quite as aggressive as the “massive resistance” of others, school leaders decided on an official policy of freedom of choice in 1955. This policy would remain in effect with small modifications until 1965. Students were permitted to apply to attend the school closest to their homes, a move that would ostensibly allow African American children who walked past the closest neighborhood school to arrive at their segregated school, the opportunity to choose a transfer. William S. Schmidt declared that his policy “…puts full responsibility for desegregation on the parents with the school board reserving the right to determine whether or not each
individual case is administratively feasible.”234 By retaining this right, Schmidt allowed himself executive privilege and delegated responsibility to parents.

Schmidt’s “freedom of choice” policy permitted “desegregation to the extent that it was demanded by individual parents.”235 The policy assured county citizens: “No child will be denied the privilege of attending his nearest school or any school he wants to attend unless it is administratively not practical to admit the child because of overcrowded conditions, or other valid reasons.”236 At the secondary level, the policy was more complicated: “…it will not be possible to give unlimited choice of schools because of already badly overcrowded conditions. However, cases of admission will be decided on their individual merit.”237 The Board assured citizens: “While the Board has no intentions of compelling a pupil to attend a specific school or deny him the privilege of transferring to another school, the Board reserves the right during the period of transition to delay or deny the admission of a pupil to any school if it deems such action wise and necessary. All reasons for delay or denial of the request will be made known to the applicant.”238


235. A Long Day’s Journey into Light, 95.

236. A Long Day’s Journey into Light, 93.

237. A Long Day’s Journey into Light, 93.

238. A Long Day’s Journey into Light, 93.
It followed that transfer itself was framed as a “privilege.” Because of this, not only was the burden of desegregation borne by individual parents and children, the Board often rejected applications and retained the right to do so without question. Or, the process of making applications was arduous, and individual Black parents were harassed by the district. The Board, we can assume, speaking to white citizens, took care to remind them that it would not “compel” attendance. It follows that the plan did not provide transportation to children who applied to transfer, and allowed the Board to deny requests or, at the secondary level, decide on the basis of “individual merit.” Also, the Board did not make any attempt to redraw school boundaries; instead, students continued to be assigned to a racially “appropriate” school before they were able to apply to be transferred. If judged not by rhetorical commitment but by outcome, the plan fell short: in September of 1955, the first year of the transfer program, only one percent of the county’s Black students were enrolled in schools that had previously been for whites only.\textsuperscript{239}

Over the years, numbers increased, but progress remained painfully slow. By 1961, 4.3\% of Black students attended “desegregated” schools.\textsuperscript{240} Though a handful of Black students had found their way into the white schools closest to their homes, 107 of the county’s 137 schools remained one-race.\textsuperscript{241} Further undermining the attempt to desegregate, the Board undertook construction of new all-Black schools and invested in the improvement of several all-Black schools by building additional rooms—despite the

\textsuperscript{239} A Long Day’s Journey into Light, 97.

\textsuperscript{240} A Long Day’s Journey into Light.

\textsuperscript{241} A Long Day’s Journey into Light, 107.
fact that a dual system had been ruled unconstitutional in 1954. This political move is important when understanding how segregation became naturalized and understood as an inevitability in and through space. The success of policymakers at this moment lay in their ability to disconnect willfully decades of prior planning and educational policies from their contemporary effects. They merely insisted that people lived in particular neighborhood areas solely by choice. And then, they acted and implemented policy as if this were true.

While County-wide policy framed the actions of parents and students in the decade immediately following Brown, attending to the official policy only tells a half story. Bringing our focus to the neighborhood level, I turn next to two distinct suburban neighborhoods to examine the relationship their residents had to their neighborhood schools. I explore how Belair at Bowie and Fairmount Heights were constructed physically, and how both spaces materialized divergent attitudes regarding Black and white suburban living and schooling. For Belair, I look to the popular press, in particular to the Washington Post and Baltimore Afro-American as fora in which the Levitt development was anticipated, detailed, and critiqued. Fairmount Heights, too, was represented in the press, but I amplify the limited space that it was given in the Post, with the recollections of those who went to school and worked there. I then consider County policy regarding school construction and school closure which, along with freedom of choice, were key ways in which desegregation efforts were both advanced and delayed. A comparison of these two neighborhoods and their relationship to public education yields valuable insight into how the unequal distribution of resources was rationalized.
Belair at Bowie

Abraham Levitt and his sons, William and Alfred had a tremendous impact on postwar housing in the United States. Starting with their first government contract in 1941 for war worker’s homes in Norfolk, Virginia. They innovated the construction process by standardizing lot size, choosing economical materials, and availing themselves of technology to help worker productivity. Housing became an assembly line endeavor and the firm’s vertical integration kept the Levitts in charge of everything—they grew their own timber and milled their own lumber. William Levitt took charge of operations after the war and greatly simplified the home buying process, reducing the financing and titling to two 30 minute steps.242

After the Planning Board welcomed the Levitts with open arms, embracing their plan to transform Belair at Bowie, Mr. Levitt was smug about his acceptance in the Bowie community: in an interview with the Post he declared “I’m here to stay.”243 The subdivision, which would be built 12 miles from Washington, was denied small lot zoning, but instead given phased zoning; several small lots would be surrounded by medium and then larger sized lots, and the planners approved Levitt’s request for commercial zoning so that the area would have its own shopping center.244


The Post coverage emphasized the excitement of Levitt’s vision as well as the way in which this new suburban development was positioned to irrevocably change the way of life for those who had lived in rural Bowie for generations. One article began: “Out in the Maryland countryside, surrounded by the mellow beauty of reddening leaves and harvested fields, there’s a brand-new nucleus of houses that soon will grow into a 2300-acre community of attractive homes.” Juxtaposing the bucolic scenery with the scientific configuration of a nucleus of houses, the article went on to describe, in detail, the various features that the homes would include—state of the art washing machines and dish washers, stylish tiling and floor plans, and a prohibition on eyesores such as window boxes and antennae. Belair-Bowie represented a transition from Levitt’s earlier work in Levittown in that instead of constructing houses for those on the margins of the middle-class, Belair-Bowie was expressly designed for wealthier inhabitants. Levitt simultaneously drew upon his reputation as a builder of solid homes, while he distanced himself from Levittown itself; a Good Housekeeping article that appeared before Levitt broke ground in Bowie entitled “What, Live in a Levittown?” saw Levitt separating himself from the tract living that had made him a household name.


Whiteness at Belair

Levitt was aware of the oblique sense of loss that accompanied the tension between the preservation of rolling hills and fields and the construction of a modern suburban future. The Post took notice, explaining that his sales pitch included an attempt to relate to (white) country folk as such and that he viewed his challenge as one of “Sell[ing] local residents on one of the biggest changes in the county’s history: transformation of the huge Belair estate—from open fields to a residential community.”

But while Levitt appealed to white intergenerational agricultural families and emphasized how the open fields would not be disrupted by the modern lines of Belair at Bowie, he made no attempt to address that his subdivision, vetted and supported by the County, would in essence, be for whites only. Said Levitt: "custom and precedence will dictate what we do in Maryland”

Though his innovative techniques of housing suburbanites helped ensure that a generation of white Americans were able to embrace homeownership, he saw the post-war housing crisis and racial justice as issues better left separate, famously remarking, “We can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we cannot combine the two”

Many in attendance at the initial meetings were curious community members, but several were more organized, coming from the citizens associations in the affected areas. The president of the Mitchellville Citizens Association stood up, during a question and

248. “Levittown Moves to Maryland.”


answer with Levitt and launched into a powerful monologue that referenced loss, but embraced change. The association’s president “talked of the traditional country atmosphere of the Belair area. He pointed out that descendants of some of Maryland’s oldest families who still live in the section are sorry to see the tremendous impact Levitt’s construction will bring…however they realize it is progress and in that sense are reconciled to it.”

Levitt was well aware of his audience. He tried to both appeal to and demean the white country folk; he recalled his own youth in the country—he was one of them, after all—and remarked to a crowd “one of the favorite indoor sports is gossip. You would be surprised at some of the bad things people have said we are going to do here. Well I’m here to see to it that no one, and particularly not us, gets hurt by our creation of a new community.”

But people were hurt by his development of a former slave plantation into an apartheid utopia. It was not just the historic erasure of Black agricultural experiences that was at stake. There were also material losses borne by those who were unable to bask in Levitt’s bounty. Among those were the excluded community members— aspiring middle class Black families who were excluded from his vision because of racist sales policies and poorer Black families who couldn’t dream of buying due the intersectional oppression of race and poverty. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) responded to


252. “Levitt Outlines Belair Plans.”
Levitt’s white’s only policy and, after sales opened to the public, they staged a “sleep in” in 1963 at the sales office. Civil rights activism in Maryland, at this moment, was focused on advancing legislation that would prohibit discrimination in places of public accommodation. Focusing mostly on Route 40 which was the primary way in which people traveled from New York to Washington, D.C. by car, CORE had helped organize sit-ins in late 1961 and had planned a freedom ride of Route 40 to force Governor Tawes to consider a public accommodations law. The action had been provoked after a number of incidents in 1961 involving the racial discrimination of African diplomats caused the State Department, long indifferent to domestic issues, to create a special division and collaborate with CORE. Collective action had resulted in legislative change; by 1963, the Maryland General Assembly passed a law that banned discrimination but it only applied to the counties surrounding Route 40.

In the case of Belair, activism coalesced around the experience of a Black community member who had filed a complaint with the Justice Department against Levitt after attempting to buy a house, but having been given a one line response in the negative: “Our policy remains unchanged.” The Federal Housing Administration agreed to intervene in the case of discrimination even though Levitt had obtained financing before John F. Kennedy’s executive order on equal housing opportunity. But


254. Romano.

by June, the FHA said that it could do nothing about Levitt’s discriminatory practices because the executive order had been signed after Levitt had obtained financing. 257

Picketers surrounded the office and, reluctant to comment, employees, when asked about their feelings of going to work in the midst of the racial conflict remarked “it’s a little crowded in there right now.” 258

Levitt sought an injunction against picketers. The issue on the table according to Levitt’s attorneys was “where to draw the line between the firm’s right to sell to anyone it chooses and CORE’s right of assembly and free speech” 259 Picketing continued into August where picketers were described as white, young and reckless, with the police dismissively commenting that the crowd was “90 per cent college kids.” 260 Local clergy gathered, protesting against segregation at Belair: “The problem is not a legal one, as Mr. Levitt sees it, but basically a moral question” 261 At this point, only five Black families lived in Belair, all of whom had purchased their homes on resale because of Levitt’s


258. “Three ‘Sleep-In’ at Housing Tract After Rival Groups Picket Salesroom.”


white’s only policy.\(^{262}\) Levitt wouldn’t officially change his policy until 1969, where he opened up sales and rentals to African Americans “as a tribute to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”\(^{263}\)

The Symbolic Power of Suburban Space

Belair, like Levittown before it, had a folkloric aura; it evoked rural roots, a benevolent developer-contractor, a spirit of community predicated on single-family (white) homeownership, and an investment in upward mobility.\(^{264}\) Belair residents themselves had a variety of reasons for choosing to move to the development. One housewife remarked on how Belair’s appeal was its open greenery and its novelty, comparing early buyers to rugged settlers: “The peace and quiet are heavenly. We like the idea of a brand new community starting all at once. It has a pioneer spirit”\(^{265}\) Yet others were motivated less by idealistic notions of independence than by practical assessments of value. One resident remarked “It’s a lot of house for the money”\(^{266}\) What was clear was that the inhabitants of Belair represented a new class of Prince Georgian,


\(^{266}\) Velsey
unhindered by a backwards or provincial adherence to the boss politics that had long dominated Upper Marlboro. Belair residents were not Marylanders as much as they were cosmopolitan commuters, a local lawyer observed “People in Belair don’t think along the lines of the old County Democrats and why should they? They have no connection with the county government. Most of them work in Washington or Baltimore”\textsuperscript{267}
Figure 5-Rosenthal, James W. “General View Looking South/Southwest down Winding Lane. The Colonial (Number 12407) and The Cape Cod Number (12409) Are Also Shown in the Uphill View in HABS No. MD-1253-4. - Belair at Bowie, Maryland, Bowie, Prince George’s County,
Contesting the external critiques of homogeneity, the inhabitants of Belair were described by the *Post* as strikingly normal, and yet exceptional: “typically, he’s a financially successful young family man employed in a management position in the Nation’s Capital. But he is in person a most untypical fellow.” As a group, the average was 34, with 1.8 children who had relocated from elsewhere in the Washington Metro area. Many owners at Belair—close to 40 percent—were federal employees. All the initial homeowners at Belair were white.

In 1964, Levitt turned his attention to apartment buildings and filed a rezoning application for garden apartments within Bowie. This would mean 1500 new apartment units in addition to the 2500 single family homes that had sprung up; three years earlier, only 1000 people had lived there. Levitt further ingratiated himself to the community when he gifted the 223 year old Belair Mansion to the town of Bowie to be used as a town hall. By 1966, 5,500 families lived in Belair.

Despite Levitt’s attempts to convince the Washington metro area that Belair at Bowie would not be another Levittown, the development was met with resistance on multiple fronts. In a rush to sell lots, Levitt initially let code deficiencies slip by, and


when residents first moved in, no grass had been planted, plywood boards were placed over lots to form make-shift sidewalks, and critics dubbed the housing development “the instant slum.” Levitt, however demonstrated a determination to correct these deficiencies and allocated $500 per home for repairs, leaving no code violation left unaddressed. This commitment endeared Levitt to the community and added to his persona, solidifying his brand. Outsiders regarded the development as contrived, a community manufactured out of nothing. A staff writer at the Post mocked Levitt’s vision: “How is a community born? Once it started at a crossroads and took generations to build. Today a pasture is digested by bulldozers. When builder William J. Levitt is operating a new settlement appears almost overnight”

Schooling in Bowie

Levitt had achieved the construction of a segregated community despite FHA’s attempts to intervene, despite local activism, and despite Maryland’s passage of legislation prohibiting discrimination in places of public accommodation and a general growing sentiment that had begun to reject such object displays of racism. But Levitt was faced with a crisis: how would he ensure that the young, upwardly mobile, and respectable white families that had bought his houses have access to quality education for their children? In 1960, the School Board publicly denied Levitt’s requests to build an elementary school adjacent to the property. Levitt went to the papers, ambiguously


273. Diehl.

274. Velsey “Levitt Moves In and Pastureland Becomes a Town.”
Commenting on his meeting with Superintendent Schmidt: “They have been consistently alert to the growing school needs of the County and we are confident that they will provide adequate facilities for the Belair community.”

Schmidt was hamstrung by Levitt’s superior public relations skills and sheepishly commented to the Post: “We cannot be in the position of making statements on the basis of newspaper stories.” By 1961, the earlier rumors of a school opening to accommodate the over 700 young children whose families had purchased homes in Belair came to fruition. The Board reversed its earlier refusal to build a school in close proximity to Belair, a refusal which had been based on the idea that cooperation with Levitt would be illegal due to the absence of public bidding. They agreed to borrow money from Levitt for school construction.

The school, like the development, would be white. In choosing to accept Levitt’s money and in reversing its earlier policy, the Board made a powerful statement about its own priorities and, in effect, colluded to perpetuate segregation even as its official policies remained in compliance with the law. Assessing the need for schools, in 1964, the County embarked on a 90.4 million dollar building program that would affect the


276. Velsey.

277. Velsey.

whole County, but was meant to specifically address the “need for new facilities in the Belair area of Bowie where a new town has been developed”\textsuperscript{279}

In 1965, construction for the seventh elementary school in Belair began along with the purchase of building sites for two more junior high schools in addition to the already existing junior and senior high schools.\textsuperscript{280} But the growth of the neighborhood and the County at large outpaced construction as the School Board was reluctant to build schools in advance of projected population gains. They hadn’t anticipated that the need for schools would be so dire and would come so quickly. A staff writer at the \textit{Post} chided County leadership: “The Prince George’s County School Board laughed when builder William J. Levitt said he would build a huge subdivision “overnight” in Bowie. They didn’t know he meant business”\textsuperscript{281}

By 1966, 1,800 students were on double shifts because of delays in construction, including 315 from the Bowie neighborhood who were waiting for their new schools to be constructed. Several hundred more in the Belair neighborhood whose schools were undergoing renovations and additions also found themselves in double shifts.\textsuperscript{282} Belair exemplified the increasing demands that development was placing on already crowded

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schools. White parents who had moved to the area were incensed that their children would be forced to attend double shifts. One irate mother commented to the Post: “I can’t understand how the County Commissioners can keep letting them build, build, build—apartments, houses, the works—but they won’t build the schools to take care of the kids. I think it’s horrible. They’re just saturating the schools and the children are being cheated out of the education they should have”\textsuperscript{283}

The effortlessness with which white community members had been able to campaign for the education that they believed their children should have and the resources that were subsequently allocated differed strikingly from the experience of Black suburbanites who lived in Fairmount Heights, an enclave located on the border with Washington, D.C. If Bowie was the epicenter of school construction, Fairmount was the ground zero for school closure.

**Creating a Suburban Ghetto: Fairmount Heights**

The Black suburban experience in Prince George’s County did not include model houses or slick ads in *Good Housekeeping*. Chronically short on housing, the Washington metropolitan area had absorbed substantial freed Black population in the decades following the Civil War, and this migration had continued into the twentieth century. Segregation and its attendant practices of restrictive covenants and racial steering, however, made finding housing difficult for African Americans in the nation’s capital.\textsuperscript{284}


\textsuperscript{284} Bird, “Building Community: Housing for Middle-Class African Americans in Washington, D.C., and Prince George’s County, Maryland, 1900-1955.”
In response to these barriers, African Americans developed several adaptive strategies with regard to housing, which included using and re-using existing Black-owned row houses, constructing single and multi-family units using Black tradespeople, and founding and developing separate suburbs. As well-to-do white Washingtonians moved from older neighborhoods to construct new housing across town, middle class Blacks benefited indirectly. Instead of constructing new units, Black contractors would update and modify the existing housing stock to reflect current styles and needs.

By the late 19th century, the lack of available land and the high cost of land in the District drew middle class Blacks into the Southeast and Northeast quadrants of D.C. and Prince George’s County. These sections of the city and the County were poorly developed, lacking infrastructure and were dotted with rural settlements adhering to no particular development pattern. This was typical of early Black suburbs, many of which were generally unplanned and unregulated blue-collar communities, built on cheap and often “nuisance-prone land.” Deanwood, located east of the Anacostia River but


still in the District, became the largest of these communities. Mostly Washington natives who worked in both blue and white collar jobs moved to the area and the community built its own schools and churches. Because of its relatively isolated location, there was a shuttle bus that helped bring residents to the main streetcar line. But despite the matrix of self-help and solidarity, Deanwood didn’t have access to sewer lines or paved streets until the 1950s.

The proliferation of streetcars and railroad lines into Maryland from the District was one of the factors that led to the creation of several Black suburban enclaves in Prince George’s County at the turn of the twentieth century. Fairmount Heights, located slightly further from the center of D.C. than Deanwood, was among them. Fairmount was developed in 1900 by two white men who purchased farms and subdivided them into lots. At its founding, the neighborhood was advertised, by a local Mutual Aid Society as a “viable alternative to inner-city ghetto living.” It became home to the expanding Black middle class, a majority of whom worked for the federal government. Architecturally patterned off of white neighborhoods, the space materialized discourses of class respectability; in 1908, the Washington Bee wrote of the residents: “it


291. Bird, 75.


293. Ibid, p. 33.

294. Ibid, p. 34.
is easy to see from the appearance of their beautiful homes just the class of people they are.”

Residents included professionals and tradespeople—architects, school supervisors, federal workers, masons, and Pullman porters. Incorporation in 1935 was a point of pride, and it helped residents gain access to formal privileges of self-government long denied to them as well as allowed them to benefit from the amenities enjoyed by their white peers. Despite a qualitative difference in the sort of land they occupied relative to their white suburban counterparts, African Americans in places like Fairmount Heights, shared similar values surrounding homeownership: independence, the importance of family, and the desirability of open space. Furthermore, these suburban spaces were social communities.

Postwar suburbanization in places like Washington, D.C. changed the options open to Black Americans as the explosion of white suburban development, coupled with an increase in land use restrictions, made the sort of Black working class community

295. Ibid, p. 33, 35.


297. Ibid, p. 15.

298. Wiese, Places of Their Own, 69.

299. Susan G Pearl, Fairmount Heights, Maryland: A History, from Its Beginnings (1900) to Incorporation (1935) (Upper Marlboro, MD (14741 Governor Oden Bowie Dr., Upper Marlboro 20772): M-NCPPC Planning Dept., 1991). County historian Susan Pearl, hired by MNCPP in the late 1970s to undertake a survey of African American historical spaces within the County has documented multiple African American neighborhoods, historical structures, and social and cultural contributions across Prince George’s. Additionally, she has conducted research on Rosenwald Schools in Maryland. Her tireless advocacy and her commitment to understanding history as a public good, greatly informs this section of the dissertation.
building that had marked early efforts at suburbanization, impossible.\(^{300}\) As Blacks struggled to move out of the city and achieve suburban living patterns in greater numbers, their options were limited through both formal and informal mechanisms of discrimination. As “forbidden neighbors,” they threatened whites who, alarmed by the possibility of losing their property values, projected fears “about crime, disorder, health, status, and sexuality onto African Americans.”\(^{301}\) This was the case in Prince George’s County. A long-time county resident, Sylvester Vaughns reflected: “One of the things I learned early in P.G. County is its discrimination in housing.”\(^{302}\) Vaughns remembered his own search for his first house and being told “I’m sorry, we don’t sell to coloreds…that’s Prince George’s county right outside of Washington, D.C.” Eventually he settled in Palmer Park, an unincorporated community in the County and remembered how his first days in the neighborhood had been:

They [White people] wouldn’t come to the door…they were peeping out. It was just the beginning of what we call blockbusting. Whites out, Blacks in. Housing discrimination was attacked by some legislators and by the NAACP and ACLU and some blockbusting legislation was introduced…kind of broke that up, but that led to more blockbusting, out Blacks, in Whites, out. Realtors would encourage Black people to move into certain neighborhoods and… they would tell certain White neighbors that Blacks were moving in.\(^{303}\)

\(^{300}\) Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 98.

\(^{301}\) Wiese, 99.

Mildred Gray, a retired African American schoolteacher who grew up in Capitol Heights, remembered the strong Klan presence through the 1960’s. On one particular day, in 1954, Gray remembers the Klan reacting to the integration of a service station:

The Klans were out. They were I saw them beating people pulling them out their cars. They did not however disturb me and I was able to go through. But they really were at their worst. And in fact, the Klansman burned a cross on the yard of Ridgeley church. But uh…the next day I made it my business to go back into Capitol Heights to go to the store where the action was taking place and I told the clerk, I says, you don’t have your outfit on today, do you?304

For Vaughns and Gray, as Black Prince Georgians, the county was home, but it was a space in which they felt at once insecure and uncertain. Their stories resonate with the ambivalence that many Black suburbanites felt about residential integration. Many Black suburbanites, in seeking spaces outside of the city, did not necessarily desire racial integration with white neighbors. Instead, as Andrew Wiese argues, African American suburbanization was a “pragmatic appraisal” of the limits of the racial politics of the time rooted in the hope that these spaces, would signal an escape from inferiority of the material conditions that discrimination had inflicted upon Blacks as well as the second-class citizenship that inferior (urban) housing conferred.305 Moreover African American

303. Interview with Sylvester Vaughns, African American Oral History: Prince George’s County Maryland (mirusmedia.net, 2008).

304. Mildred Gray, Oral History Interview, August 2013.

305. Wiese, Places of Their Own, 165.
presence in suburban spaces where “white” had become synonymous with “suburban,” challenged mores of white supremacy. 306

306. Wiese, 144.
By the 1960s, African American neighborhoods in many central cities such as D.C., had reached the city limits, “spilling over” into adjacent municipalities. Civil rights legislation and economic prosperity of the 1960s helped nurture and grow a new Black middle class who sought residence outside of the city. But these Black suburbanites often found themselves in older, inner ring suburbs with lagging municipal services, failing schools, and a high incidence of crime. Migration from majority-Black Washington had begun to change the racial and spatial identity of the County. The new Black population was mostly concentrated in the parts of the County inside the Capital Beltway in segregated neighborhoods such as Fairmount Heights. These spaces were tasked with accommodating a new population that was distinct from the Black professionals and blue collar tradespeople who had sought refuge in suburban enclaves at the turn of the century. Furthermore, although spaces like Fairmount were tight knit and self-reliant, in general, they lacked the resources and formal political power conferred by residence in more affluent white neighborhood spaces. It must have seemed, to many white Prince Georgians, in the words of Black Studies scholar, Henry Connolly, that “the ghetto has reached the county line and moved across it.”

307. Wiese, 211.


309. Wiese, Places of Their Own, 244.
Figure 7- Black Population in Prince George's County, 1960 and 1970, Map generated using Social Explorer
It was not only white residents who took note of the cumulative effects of haphazard planning, little to no investment in infrastructure, and lack of institutions. In 1964, as the County poured millions of dollars into school construction to benefit white families in Bowie, a columnist in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a weekly newspaper established in 1892 that covered Baltimore, Washington, and Maryland news, emphasized the high stakes of lack of public interest in Fairmount Heights. Describing the neighborhood, the editorial juxtaposed the extreme wealth and imposing neoclassical architecture of the Capital with the daily public health risks that residents faced in these Black suburban communities. “Not far from the handsome buildings of Washington are the small colored communities of Cedar Heights and Fairmount Heights in Prince George’s County. They have to be seen to be believed.” The editorial vividly described the neighborhoods:

Shabby houses are surrounded by mountains of junked cars, tin cans, broken bottles, etc…few houses have plumbing, streets and sidewalks are dirt and gravel, a good mixture for mud holes when the rain and snow come. There are no playgrounds, so children play in danger…in the streets, on a junk lot

Unlike narratives that conflated the place with the deficit of its residents, the article took aim at the county governance: “Pleas have fallen on deaf ears giving clear indication that as far as the county commissioners are concerned the colored residents aren’t important.”

Schooling in Fairmount Heights

In nineteenth century Maryland, there were no public schools for Black students outside of cities. Black families would send their children to schools in Baltimore or in Washington, D.C. Between 1866 and 1868, African Americans in Prince George’s County petitioned the Freedman’s Bureau for ten schools.\(^{311}\) In 1872, Black community members took over the administration of these one-room schoolhouses after the Bureau was abolished.\(^{312}\) Similar to a handful of other Maryland counties, even after the construction of these schools by community members, Prince George’s County made no monetary contributions to its Black schools.\(^{313}\) Schooling was limited to the elementary level.

In 1913, Julius Rosenwald, enacting plans laid out by Booker T. Washington, created a philanthropic fund that helped provide for the construction of rural Black schools in the South that would embrace an industrial education model. While Rosenwald Schools were mostly one-room schoolhouses, in areas that were more densely populated in the County, secondary schools were constructed with Rosenwald funds combined with


\(^{312}\) “African-American Historic and Cultural Resources in Prince George’s County, Maryland,” 24–25.

\(^{313}\) “African-American Historic and Cultural Resources in Prince George’s County, Maryland,” 25.
local resources. In 1921, after a new high school opened for whites, Blacks were given the old secondary school in Upper Marlboro. In the fall of 1928, Lakeland High School opened with two teachers and 45 students in the 8th and 9th grades. Highland Park School, the third secondary school for Blacks in the county, opened after Lakeland. By 1932, Prince George’s County had 28 Rosenwald Schools, constructed with local labor, money, and materials as well as with aid from the Rosenwald Fund.

Settled by a number of Tuskegee graduates, Fairmount Heights became a center for industrial education in the County. Similar to other neighborhoods in the County, it was the community of Fairmont Heights that advocated for, planned, constructed, and worked in the schools. The first elementary school in the Fairmount Heights neighborhood was constructed in 1911, but, prior to that, classes had been held in a Charity Hall. Residents had approached the Board of School Commissioners and


requested that an elementary school be built. Designed by Black architect, Sidney Pittman, the school was ready to open by June of 1912 and the building was used until 1934 when the school was moved to a new eight room building.\textsuperscript{320}

In 1950, Fairmont Heights High School opened as a combined Junior-Senior high school to replace the now deteriorating Lakeland High School. It became one of two Black high schools in the county whose students were bused from an area that was 486.17 square miles wide.\textsuperscript{321} The school had to accommodate students coming from extremely rural parts of the county as well as students living in the urban areas closest to the D.C. border.\textsuperscript{322} The school was noted for its development of innovative instructional designs, as well as an outstanding array of vocational programs and its association with Tuskegee and Hampton.\textsuperscript{323} It offered four degrees: academic, general, commercial, and industrial, and its opening marked the first time that Black students in the county were given access to the 12\textsuperscript{th} grade.\textsuperscript{324} The \textit{Washington Post} featured the school in the mid-1950s, interviewing its principal, James Gholson.\textsuperscript{325} Gholson remarked that his job was


\textsuperscript{321} Annual Report 1965: \textit{A Century of Public Education in Prince George’s County: 1865-1965}. (Prince George’s County Public Schools: Upper Marlboro):55

\textsuperscript{322} Ibid

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid

\textsuperscript{324} “Celebrating African-American History: Fairmont Heights, Prince George’s County, Maryland” (Prince George’s County Public Schools, Office of Communications, February 2006).

“to try to make life make sense for our youngsters.” He added: “Students feel this is their school.”\textsuperscript{326} This is reflected in the memories of students, like Ernestine Jones who later recalled “I am very grateful for the teachers and administrators at Fairmont Heights HS. I give the teachers credit for my successes and achievements in life. I thank them for their positive influences, their instructions, their wisdom, their patience, and for their caring attitudes.”\textsuperscript{327}

**Conclusion**

Belair at Bowie and Fairmount Heights, though separated by miles and by the circumstances of their founding, formed part of the same suburban milieu. Belair was planned, folklorically framed as a pioneer oasis in uncharted and unoccupied lands. In reality, it was a mid-century modern white racial project erected on the earth of a slave plantation; Levitt’s construction required both physical and discursive bulldozing. Levitt’s Belair effaced a slaveholding past while marshalling the county’s educational resources in an effort to consolidate white supremacy. Both he and his new residents appropriated discourses of freedom and rurality, and drew upon the imagined heritage of generations of white families who called that corner of the County their home. The migration of homeowners to Belair intensified the need for schools which, the County answered with unparalleled quickness. Fairmount, however, had been unplanned due to a constellation of discriminatory practices. It was a Black suburban enclave forged in an atmosphere of mutual aid, built as a way of insulating its residents from the racial

\textsuperscript{326} Vesey

\textsuperscript{327} “Celebrating African-American History: Fairmont Heights, Prince George’s County, Maryland,” 14.
violence and hostility of the more remote places in the County. As the population increased, so too did the need for schools. But instead of including Fairmount as a beneficiary of a massive distribution of state and local capital—the nearly 90.4 million dollar construction program that focused on Bowie—the School Board looked upon the schools and the people of Fairmount as liabilities. Their continued existence was a persistent reminder to the department of Health, Education and Welfare, nearly a decade after Brown, that the County had not desegregated its schools. As the County publically and officially busied itself with the work of desegregation, it actively invented two places that contravened its policies: a white suburban community where residents enjoyed enough political power to bring about the construction of state of the art schools, and, a ghetto, where poor Black migrants and black middle class homeowners were reminded daily of their powerlessness as their schools and neighborhoods were first neglected, and finally, seen as the county’s legal bargaining chip.
Chapter 3
“A Planned Effort for Racism”: School Closure and Urban Renewal, 1965-1972

In 1968, Fairmount Heights, part of a long history of Black struggle in the county for residential stability and educational access, found itself in the middle of an area slated for urban redevelopment. The neighborhood was described in the grant application as a place where “‘Hanging with the gang’ is more valued by teenagers than academic success.”328 But this was not the view that a teacher of Fairmount Heights took of her own community, writing, in a 1969 letter to a School Board member, “I am troubled that somewhere in some of the news stories and in some of the interpretative reports that appeared in the local press that some of the positive aspects of our school have not been presented.”329 Todd Endo, a planner at Fairmount Heights also reflected similarly on the school: “it was just an ordinary high school, no better no worse.”330 As the above quotes demonstrate, stakeholders laid claim to competing representations of the same educational and residential space.

This chapter will explore the discursive construction of Black schooling spaces in Prince George’s County by focusing on Fairmount Heights High School and the surrounding neighborhood. I situate Fairmount within the struggle for Black secondary

328. Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners “Application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for a grant to plan a comprehensive City Demonstration program” (Prince George’s County, Maryland: Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners, 1967):37


330. Todd Endo (former planner at Fairmount Heights) in discussion with author, August 2015.
education in the South and within pre-Brown school equalization policies at the state level in order to reveal the ways in which the Black suburban enclave and its high school were produced as racialized spaces in the public imaginary through a language of blight and a flattening of social experience. These public perceptions complemented and strengthened urban renewal initiatives and the county’s policy of school closure as a desegregation technique, proposed in light of repeated demands from HEW after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Finally, I will look at how Black community members, students, and educators sought to contextualize their school and neighborhood through mobilizing an alternative version of their school and neighborhood that drew upon relational notions of space in an attempt to destabilize the narrative that white policymakers put forward.

Using faculty statements opposing school closure, grant applications for urban renewal, annual reports, superintendent addresses, school board minutes, and personal interviews, I identify two competing ways in which people at the time drew on space and understood the spaces central to their lived reality of school desegregation, in order to look at how words themselves are able to exert power on reality through policy. This requires asking three interrelated questions: How did Fairmont Heights get “produced” as an unequal educational space in relation to the surrounding metropolitan area, both physically and symbolically? How did different spatial imaginaries relate to race? How

331. While there was a spectrum of thought in both the white and Black communities, I focus on two viewpoints in relation to the policies put forward by the predominantly white School Board: the Fairmount Heights Faculty Statement from 1968 and the Model Cities 1967 grant application to look at social struggle with implications for how power makes use of space and how people engaged in social struggle speak back.
did people draw on language to mobilize these imaginaries and what sort of changes were
effected as a result?

Black Secondary Education through the 1960s

Recently, literature has emphasized the positive role that Black schooling spaces
played in Black communities and has attempted to address the question of whether
integrated schools were necessary to advancing African American educational
achievement.\footnote{332} In order for us to understand the importance of Fairmount Heights to the
surrounding community, we must situate in a larger struggle for Black secondary
schooling.

In his study on Black secondary schooling, John Rury analyzed the factors which
contributed to educational attainment. In the 1940s, there was an absence of high schools
in rural communities, where the majority of southern Blacks lived.\footnote{333} Many attended
schools that only offered only one or two years and no diploma.\footnote{334} Other factors such as
land ownership and agricultural work affected school attendance and completion. A
majority of Blacks in the South lived in rented homes and were employed in tenant


farming, representing the poorest rung of society. Students from families that rented attended schools at less than half the rate of children of Black farming families who owned land. For non-farm home owning Blacks, the most privileged class by these indicators, 32.3 percent enrolled in secondary schools compared to 55.7 of their white, non-farming, home owning peers.\textsuperscript{335} Success at the high school level was also complicated by a lack of preparation at earlier levels of schooling, due to poorly resourced facilities, pressure to join the labor market, and interrupted schooling as a result of agricultural work.\textsuperscript{336} Schooling opportunities increased through the 1930s and 40s as schools were erected, often as a result of grassroots organizing among landed Black community members.\textsuperscript{337} Schools were better in cities, not only offering more courses and drawing upon more resources, but also employing teachers, administrators, librarians, and other black, middle class professionals.\textsuperscript{338}

In the post-war period, the South lost population due to the loss of war time industry and the gradual transition from agricultural work; the region needed economic development. Whites realized that providing schooling for Blacks was important to securing a future for the region.\textsuperscript{339} This was met with some opposition and critique; if blacks became educated, would they not question their place in the Southern cultural

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\textsuperscript{336} Rury, 33.

\textsuperscript{337} Rury, 35.

\textsuperscript{338} Rury, 39.

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order? The word of the day was “equalization” which applied to establishing relative parity in Black and white teacher pay, mandating that black and white students attend school for the same number of days, and, updating the black schools in terms of the technology of the times (e.g. libraries and laboratories).\(^\text{340}\) The NAACP took up equalization as a method of ensuring that resources might make their way into Black schools. Frightened white leaders knew that litigation that surrounded equity of resources had the potential to expose the frailty of school segregation as a system; for them, equalization was a way to stave off questions of integration.\(^\text{341}\)

Equalization was a policy that Marylanders embraced. In 1949 in a Report on higher education for blacks in Maryland, the committee recommended to the governor that the state was “faced with a legal as well as a moral obligation to provide for the Negro student facilities equivalent to those available to the white student…the only alternative would be the complete or partial abandonment of its segregation policy.”\(^\text{342}\)

State Superintendent, Thomas Pullen quietly pursued a policy of equalization. While he


made no public statements, his approach to the “problem of desegregation” was made clear in a series of letters he sent to an attorney in Virginia, when, in 1951, Pullen began corresponding with Archibald G. Robertson. Robertson represented the commonwealth of Virginia in *Davis v. Prince Edward County Public Schools*, 1952, which was one of the five cases that was eventually combined into the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.343

Robertson reached out to Pullen to help craft his case, in particular with regard to disputing the idea of psychological damage and undue disruption that desegregation would cause. Robertson also asked Pullen to be a witness for the commonwealth of Virginia. While Pullen declined to testify on the grounds that his perceived neutrality on the subject allowed him to avoid conflict in his own state, he sent several letters to Robertson which provided Robertson with arguments and evidence, and give us a glance into Pullen’s personal stance on the issue. Pullen agreed that the “problem of desegregation is disturbing,” and he advocated a dispassionate approach that focused on equality instead of on desegregation. He told Robertson what had worked in Maryland: “The answers are fairly simple: remove all inequities and do so before the courts act. As a matter of fact, move before the protests come from the negroes. This does not mean to “go overboard” merely do what is fair, do it gracefully, and do it quickly”344

Perceptions of Black Schools

Evidence shows that, just like white schools, the quality of Black secondary schools varied and that curriculum-wise, there was relatively little difference between Black and white secondary schools.\(^{345}\) Teacher and staff qualifications were also on par with one another, with the credentials of black teachers sometimes exceeding those of whites.\(^{346}\) Literature has highlighted the care and concern students felt, the self-confidence that was engendered, and the high levels of support students received.\(^{347}\) By the 1950s, many Black high schools were also focusing on academics, not simply on industrial or vocational education.\(^{348}\)

The 1960s, however, marked a shift in the location and dilemmas surrounding Black secondary education. Over five million people left the south between 1941 and the late 1970s and, “within one generation, a people who had been mostly rural became mostly urban”\(^{349}\) As Blacks migrated from the south, the question of Black education


\(^{348}\) Rury, 72.

became less of a rural question and more of an urban question.\textsuperscript{350} Additionally, these new migrants were often seen as a threat to community progress.\textsuperscript{351} As enrollment increased, there was a new dilemma: larger numbers of students needed to be served which resulted in overcrowded, under-resourced, and understaffed facilities.\textsuperscript{352} These observable challenges were combined with a heightened preoccupation regarding lower academic achievement in Black schooling spaces, an issue that resonated with the public as the question of integration was placed on the table. White families did not want to send their children to what they perceived as academically underperforming and inferior schools. Of course, lagging achievement indicators, while compelling and simple, missed the complex challenges that black schools faced. By the 1960s, all-Black schools that had formerly only served portions of the Black population (usually the most academically qualified), had expanded to serve a broader segment of the population\textsuperscript{353} The expanded enrollment of sometimes ill-prepared students in schools that were often deteriorating and neglected also had an effect on achievement; students learning in these conditions often scored below district averages.\textsuperscript{354} These sentiments about poor academic achievement

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{351} Rury, 118.
\textsuperscript{352} Rury, 127.
\textsuperscript{353} Rury, 131.
\textsuperscript{354} Rury, 131.
\end{quote}
were legitimated by outsiders: Black schools were rarely judged as equivalent to white schools under most southern accreditation systems.\textsuperscript{355}

School Desegregation Policy in the 1960s

Whereas before desegregation, the County had embarked on an equalization campaign, a move which led to the construction of Fairmount Heights in 1950, immediately following the \textit{Brown} decision, Prince George’s County School Board adopted the policy that was to remain in effect with small modifications until 1965: freedom of choice. Students were allowed to apply to attend the school closest to their homes, a move that would ostensibly allow Black children who were bused past the closest neighborhood school to arrive at their distant segregated school, the opportunity to choose a transfer. This put the burden of desegregation on individual families and students. In 1965, the County, pressured by the federal government, moved to desegregate its schools using “attendance areas” or, in the county’s words, boundaries established “without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”\textsuperscript{356} Simply put: children would attend the neighborhood school closest to their residence.

Between 1965 and 1967, Fairmount Heights was one of several all-Black schools that operated using an attendance area. But while students included in the attendance area of a given school were compelled to attend the school in their neighborhood, most of the schools targeted by the policy were located in the poor, rural, and mostly Black areas of the county.\textsuperscript{357} Although Fairmont Heights was located in the same general geographical

\begin{footnotes}
\item[355] Rury, 131.
\item[356] Hope, \textit{Long Day’s Journey}: 165
\item[357] Ibid., p.169
\end{footnotes}
area as two majority-white schools—Central High School and Bladensburg High—it pertained to a separate attendance area. Redrawing attendance areas around neighborhood schools as a means of desegregation meant little when the neighborhood was as residentially segregated as Fairmount Heights, and when the policy came with a provision that students could apply to transfer out of “hardship.” Though the County assured HEW that “a request based upon the issue of race (desegregation or segregation of either the present or requested school) shall not be considered a hardship,” it was not uncommon for white families who happened to live in the attendance area surrounding the Black school to apply to transfer out.358

358. Ibid., p. 166
Figure 8 A map of the 1965 attendance areas superimposed on census tract data shows the way in which the attendance areas effectively maintained school segregation.
When the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare charged Prince George’s County with non-compliance in January of 1968, it appealed to HEW for technical assistance and eventually submitted a revised plan which was released on August 27, 1968. The plan included closing Fairmount Heights and three other schools as well as pairing the remaining “Black” schools with white schools to create a 50-50 Black white teacher ratio. The plan was amended in October to make Fairmount into a “model learning center,” a plan that was never actualized and was understood by many at the time as being a pretense for closure.

As the School Board looked for a desegregation plan that would be palatable to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, it found in Fairmount Heights a “realized myth” which functioned as a policy “ingredient.” If Fairmount Heights was blighted it was a direct result of having been systematically underfunded and neglected, but its construction as an abstract space effaced its history. Inferiority stood in as a common sense understanding of not just the inadequacies of the physical plant, but of the Black children and staff who populated the neighborhoods and classrooms. The space was rendered abstract through the agency attributed to “growth,” through the descriptors

359. Hope, *Long Day’s Journey*


361. Hope, *Long Day’s Journey*


363. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*: 236
associated with its physical and human dimensions, and through the erasure of social interaction, replaced by a vocabulary of political-economic productivity and discourses of blight. The production of Fairmount Heights as unequal and deficient, invoking the myth of Black pathology and representing Fairmount Heights as a blighted slum and the school, by extension as substandard, allowed the County to pursue a desegregation policy through which, it supposed, closing the historically Black school would count as integration.

**Urban Renewal in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area**

The desegregation policies proposed in the late 1960s approached neighborhoods as static and bordered entities, at a time when the county was in an extreme period of flux. While Fairmount had been a historically Black neighborhood, it too was changing as Black migrants from the South and from Washington left the city and crossed the Anacostia River. This was not simply a local phenomenon: by the 1960s, African American neighborhoods in many central cities had reached the city limits, “spilling over” into adjacent municipalities. Civil rights legislation and economic prosperity of the 1960s helped nurture and grow a new Black middle class that sought residence outside of the city. But these Black suburbanites of 1960s and 1970s often found themselves in older, inner ring suburbs with lagging municipal services, failing schools, and a high incidence of crime. The neighborhoods to which they moved lacked resources, especially with regard to schooling. In the Washington, D.C. metropolitan

364. Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 211.

area, two urban renewal initiatives provide insight into the co-constitutive nature of race and space and the effects this had on desegregation policy. The first was the revitalization of Old Southwest, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Washington, D.C. which began in the early 1950s but whose effects lingered into the 1960s. The second, a 1967 program called Model Cities that aimed to convert Fairmount Heights and the surrounding census tracts into a model neighborhoods area. These two enterprises provide insight into how urban space was racialized, how language was summoned to make sense of racial difference, and how a policy such as school closure could be a natural coda to a period of astonishing and highly unequal growth.

While city rebuilding was nothing new, it had changed in its intent and in the legal mechanisms that empowered municipalities to remove undesirable buildings and people. A social and political response to rapid industrialization and migration that looked to impose order on chaotic urban locales, city rebuilding (soon to be known as urban redevelopment and then urban renewal) emerged from the “modern housing” and slum clearance movements that sought to raze the tenements of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{366} The intellectual heritage of slum clearance as an ordering principle for planning was predicated on seeing land in terms of potential value—moral and monetary—and seeing some people as more or less deserving of residence.\textsuperscript{367} As theorists and activists, from the 19th century to the Progressive Era refined their understandings of the relationship between the character of the urban poor and the conditions in which they lived, what


\textsuperscript{367} Zipp, 369.
remained constant was a belief that changing physical spaces could yield moral and public health benefits.\(^{368}\) White or white ethnic slum-living signified lower class status and, in many cases, foreign birth, but the image and rhetoric of Black slums reflected exaggerated perceptions of fear: “the metaphorical stigma of a black blotch on the cityscape bears the added connotations of moral degeneracy, natural inferiority, and repulsiveness.”\(^{369}\)

Similar to the manner in which white home ownership had become a normative practice through discursive flows and governmental policy, slum clearance, too, had a supporting infrastructure. The Housing Act of 1949 contained provisions concerning urban redevelopment (later urban renewal) and public housing.\(^{370}\) The act had the purported goal of ensuring “a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family.”\(^{371}\) Where it did have arguably the biggest impact was in urban redevelopment. Title I of the act set out $1 billion in loans to aid cities in acquiring “blighted” land for redevelopment.\(^{372}\) Unlike provisions for public housing which drew ire, a complex coalition of local politicians, real estate developers, and planners

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368. Zipp, 369.


supported the passage of the legislation which included urban redevelopment. The political appeal of viewing complex social problems as physical dilemmas—demolish the building, clean the city—touched people across the political spectrum.373

Legislation, however, needed a discursive arm to justify its aims and to meet legal challenges. Local power brokers now had the imprimatur of the federal government and they crafted local languages of blight, coded in epidemiological terms of illness, contagion, spread, and creeping threat.374 These “discourses of blight” relied on reframing public use doctrines by representing blight as an encroaching illness on the otherwise healthy urban landscape.375 Blight could turn every neighborhood into a slum if left unchecked. This framing gave local governments the ability to use eminent domain, by broadening the takings clause regarding public use and, in essence redefining property rights and public interest.376 Slums were spatially objectified, bounded storehouses for complex and intractable social problems.377 This work was accomplished through imputing “social, moral, and medical pathologies to particular bodies and spaces.”378


376. Wendell E. Pritchett, 18.


378. Hanlon, 736.
But what of the people who had made their lives in redevelopment areas? In 1950 the National Capital Planning Commission created a comprehensive plan for Southwest D.C. Covering 560 acres, the plan outlined the clearing most of the existing structures and the relocation of the 23,500 people, mostly Black and all, overwhelmingly poor who had called Southwest home. By 1959, the families of Old Southwest had been relocated and the Health and Welfare Council embarked upon a study. The structuring hypotheses for the follow up study relied on several questions: do slum dwellers create new slums? How did the families feel about their relocation? Is their housing stock improved over the dilapidated structures of Old Southwest? And, “to try to determine the degree to which the families still “grieve” for their old homes in Southwest.”

While many families remained in the Southwest area, in public housing built on the outskirts of the modernistic new waterfront developments, a great number of families moved further out of the city, across the Anacostia River and into census tracts bordering the Black suburban neighborhoods in Prince George’s County, such as Fairmount Heights. Displaced families reflected on the loss of community, a sense of alienation, an inability to access community services, and difficulty making friends. Ex-residents


380. Thursz, 3.

381. Thursz, 8.

382. Thursz, 26.

383. Thursz, 54.
were also skeptical about the way in which public use had been wielded by the District: “They gouged the poor and bought the land cheap, and then sold it to a New York company at a fantastic price.”\textsuperscript{384} The report concluded solemnly: “There is a price that is paid for progress. The cost of establishing the almost futuristic Southwest complex has been borne in part by those who inhabited the old Southwest slum…urban renewal was the destruction of their only solid base…it was the loss of all that was familiar and the sudden exposure to forces alien to them and still today quite incomprehensible.”\textsuperscript{385}

**The Model Cities Act in Prince George’s County**

Only a year after the District’s Health and Welfare study had complicated the benefits of urban redevelopment, Prince George’s County’s Board of Commissioners found itself enticed by the possibility of addressing what they considered to be substandard housing and living conditions near the District border. By the late 1960s, the population of Prince George’s had almost risen to 661,770.\textsuperscript{386} But, not surprisingly, the County was unevenly developed. Whereas the county average for family income in 1967 was $87,453, it was $10,114 in Fairmount Heights and the surrounding areas closest to Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{387} By 1970, 98.75% of the residents who lived in

\begin{itemize}
  \item 384. Thursz, 68.
  \item 385. Thursz, 71.
  \item 387. Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners “Application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for a grant to plan a comprehensive City Demonstration program” (Prince George’s County, Maryland: Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners, 1967)
\end{itemize}
Fairmount Heights would be Black and 6.68% of the residents of the neighborhood would make less than $1000 a year. The run-down structures, higher rates of infant mortality and tuberculosis infection made the county seat in Upper Marlboro uneasy. The Board of Commissioners began an application for federal funds to make Fairmount Heights and the surrounding census tracts, into a Model Neighborhoods Area.

Part of President Johnson’s War on Poverty, the Model Cities Program was meant to address pervasive inequalities through grants for public housing and economic development programs by bolstering civic participation and faith in local politics. The Model Cities initiative required that urban areas engage in “problem analysis” and “project activity programming” to “develop strategies which are appropriate for the observed local pathology.” But it was premised on imagining urban spaces “as a dark, brooding, violent space, ready to explode” and the drafters of the Model Cities grant application in Prince George’s County represented the Model Neighborhoods Area in particular ways in order to be eligible for federal money.

388. Social Explorer Tables(SE), Census 1970, Social Explorer & U.S. Census Bureau

389. Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners


391. Charles Olken “Economic Development in the Model Cities Program” Law and Contemporary Problems, 36, no. 2, Community Economic Development: Part 2 (Spring, 1971): 205-226. It was meant to be, in the words of the Title I of the act, “…a comprehensive attack on social, economic, and physical problems in selected slum and blight areas through concentration and coordination of Federal, State, and local public and private efforts. (p. 206-7)
Urban decay was not supposed to be part of the *suburban* experience. An OpEd in the *Post* mused at the contradiction but ultimately agreed on the necessity of the funding: “There is no doubt that these funds are essential, no matter how novel and incongruent the use of ‘Model Cities’ to attack a suburban slum.” The money was meant to address the problems of a growing population, or, as the *Post* described it: “A black ghetto, with conditions mirroring those in Washington slums that many Negroes had hoped to leave behind, is rapidly developing in Prince George’s County.” What was at stake was the transformation of a suburban refuge into a blighted urban center. Planners set out to “prevent a suburban replica of the urban ghetto in Prince George’s.”

Perhaps to be palatable to a wide range of localities, the Model Cities Act did not explicitly require integration; it relied on voluntary movement of displaced Black folks into white neighborhoods and on improving neighborhoods to bring about integration naturally. Critics charged the program with building “gilded ghettos” because of its

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394. Drosnin, “Prince George’s Ghetto Mirrors City Slums.”

insistence on improving the quality of neighborhoods and not on integration, per se.\textsuperscript{396}

Even the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, Francis Aluisi, didn’t see housing and segregation as related, remarking in an interview “The Board of Education is meeting the challenge...the principle of segregation and integration means nothing to me. Children should go to schools closest to home.”\textsuperscript{397}

Aside from being critiqued by civil rights groups for the lack of attention paid to integration, local programs, such as the Model Cities program in nearby D.C., were censured for not ensuring proper citizen participation in the initial planning stages especially with regard to choosing which neighborhoods would comprise part of the demonstration area.\textsuperscript{398} The County Commissioners, working with the newly formed Community Development Department, scheduled an election to choose a 29 member “Model Neighborhood Action Board,” to oversee planning. The board’s plans would go to the Commissioners for approval or revision. Those plans would then be sent to HUD and, if approved, the Board would oversee the development program.\textsuperscript{399} Community members who ran for the Board felt genuinely excited about the prospect of a community-driven approach to renewal and believed in the potential of the program to


\textsuperscript{397} Drosnin, “Prince George’s Ghetto Mirrors City Slums.”


help build up areas of the county that had been systematically overlooked for decades.\footnote{145}

In October of 1968, the county was awarded $233,000 to plan an antipoverty program for a 23 square mile section of the county.\footnote{146}

\textbf{The Storying of Fairmount Heights}

The storying of Fairmount Heights and the surrounding area relied on constructing the space as abstract, as a space that passed as an absence despite its having been painstakingly produced and crafted.\footnote{147} The use value of abstract space, in turn, was political, equipping those in power with a political and ideological tool that functioned primarily through the manner in which it concealed, in plain sight, the conditions through which the space had come to be produced.\footnote{148} In the case of Fairmount Heights, this occurred through “discursive reduction.”\footnote{149} This was effected through the way in which “change” itself was attributed agency, creating an origin story of the space whose

\footnote{400. Jennifer Hock, “Bulldozers, Busing, and Boycotts: Urban Renewal and the Integrationist Project,” \textit{Journal of Urban History} 39, no. 3 (May 2013): 433–53. Hock’s examination of Roxbury and the attitudes Black Bostonians had toward urban renewal is similar to the way in which Black Prince Georgians ambivalently interfaced with schemes to improve their living situations. Furthermore, Hock’s work shows the importance of attending to place in considering how racial formation is dynamically related to spatial production.}

\footnote{401. Douglas Watson, “Pr. George’s Gets Funds to Aid Poor: County Gets Funds For Poor,” \textit{The Washington Post, Times Herald} (1959-1973); Washington, D.C., October 15, 1968.}

\footnote{402. See Lefebvre, \textit{Production of Space}: 285-6 and 289, and Wilson, “The Violence of Abstract Space”: 518.}

\footnote{403. Lefebvre, \textit{Production of Space}: 236}

relationship to the past was incomplete, and through descriptions of blight and the flattening of local social experiences into a political-economic logic.

Drafters of the application identified the problem of poverty and inequality in the county as rapid growth that outpaced their ability to provide needed services:

The population increases at a rate well in excess of 800 new residents each week of the year, and the county now serves more citizens than five states of the union. From this fantastic growth—and the increasing statistics will be with us for years—comes both the Pride and the Problem in Prince George’s. As the landscape changes and develops, so must the way of life—personal, economic, civic, and governmental. 405

By seeing growth as the primary problem and, alternatively as the primary strength of the county, the planners attributed agency to this “growth.” The community description was surprisingly free of people; “population,” “landscape,” and “statistics” were abstract stand-ins for the people who lived in and the physical structures that reconfigured suburban space. The use of “population” rendered people both quantitatively measurable and abstractly governable while “statistics” become a proxy for the variegated experiences of humans, the mechanism that turned individuals into a calculable population. 406 Moreover, the description assumed a universality within the population that erased how racial identity mediated subjective experiences within capitalist growth. While the relationship between social and physical space seemed to be highlighted in the

405. Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners: 11-13

use of “landscape” as a provocateur of “personal, economic, civic, and governmental” change, the word “landscape” relied on conceiving of space as primarily physical which erased socio-spatial, not to mention historical, experience and diminished human agency. This was reflected earlier, in the application introduction: “New subdivisions and apartment complexes and industry develop the need for more roads, services, police, and fire protection and above all more schools.” Subdivisions, apartments, and industry were, quite literally, given agency (“develop the need”). The work that this framing did was to silence social actors and to depersonalize and mystify how these neighborhoods themselves had come to be formed as well as how these representations came to have power.

The discursive reduction of social space into an abstract space also occurred through the language used to describe the neighborhoods in the application and through the flattening of social experience and the ascendance of a political-economic logic of value. This concerned the definition and description of “blight” that was complicated by the “imprecision and elasticity of the concept itself.” In their description of Capitol Heights (next to Fairmount), the drafters emphasized the physical signifiers of a “lack of care”: “inadequate yards, vacant lots which tend to serve as a junk collector.” Throughout the descriptions of the census tracts included in the Model Neighborhoods Area, the application used the following descriptors: junk, bad land use, blighting, vacant, derelict, obsolete, substandard, deficient, deterioration, abandoned, inadequate. These

407. Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners: 4

408. Gordon, Mapping Decline: p. 188

409. Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners: 7
physical markers of blight were detailed in the application: “Some part of the MNA contains many of the physical characteristics of slum areas: obsolescence, physical deterioration of structure, improper and faulty arrangement of lots, poorly designed roads, inadequate water and sewerage facilities.”

The application also used the space to detail the characteristics of the people who lived within it: “The social factors that are associated with blighted areas and detrimental to the residents of the area are also present in many parts of the MNA: low education and skill levels, poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, disease, crime and delinquency, high welfare rates.” This was also elaborated as a cultural problem inherent to the space:

There is a minority group subculture often with extended family connections. Women, often supported by welfare, dominate many families. “Hanging with the gang” is more valued by teenagers than academic success, and the men, who are generally employed in casual unskilled tasks or unemployed, are typical of Liebow’s “street corner man” and are not workable in the family. The children do not see many models of successful adults and learn from life that the poor and particularly the Negro poor, are unlikely to succeed.

Abstraction required envisioning the space and the people in it as unproductive; the Model Neighborhoods Area and its residents were res nullius, waiting to be developed according to the needs of capital accumulation. The spaces, defined according to their

410. Prince George’s County Board of Commissioners:5
411. Ibid., p.5
412. Ibid., p.37
physical coordinates as related to major thoroughfares and streets and avenues, were seen merely as unused, poorly used, or “unimproved.” The people in them and the physical structures could be described using similar, if not identical terms.

Community Response to School Closure

If discourses of blight helped empower politicians interested in urban redevelopment, they also had an effect on how white community members fearful of integration came to perceive the schools in neighborhoods on the receiving end of urban redevelopment initiatives. These perceptions were joined with federal embrasure of Black school closure as a viable means for desegregation. The collision of urban renewal initiatives and school desegregation policy in 1968 both sanctioned an official discourse and brought about a new form of community power. Attending to this historical moment tells us important things about how language and space came to be resources for people engaged in social struggle during the era of school desegregation. As policymakers constructed Black schooling in the county as an abstraction, high school faculty looked to the discursive realm as a forum for confrontation. They realized that how outsiders and technocrats thought about community spaces mattered and that the rationales that underpinned these various representations had effects on policy decisions. As such, faculty deployed space as a weapon, and sought to texture the space with their

413. In particular the discussion of “intensive use” and “unimproved land” falls in line with seeing the space (and people living there) as passively waiting for redevelopment: “Cedar heights area is a large area with many problems. Because of the size and complex nature of the problems, it is well suited for planning as an intensive improvement project. The West Fairmount Heights area contains a substantial amount of unimproved land in a strategic location. A much more intensive use of the land can be developed in this location and the area may be suitable for a non-assisted project”
experiences. They exposed the construction of space in the hopes of decentering and denaturalizing well-worn narratives of blight and inferiority.

School Closure as Federal Policy

A June 1967 pamphlet from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, entitled: “Schools Can Be Desegregated,” provided a rationale for desegregation, and explored the prerequisites for successful integration. It also put forward what it called “desegregation techniques” which it illustrated in simple graphics. School closure was among the techniques. The Commission explained the policy to a lay audience and provided an example of its resounding success:

The closing of a segregated or racially imbalanced school and assigning its students to other schools in the system is a technique similar to the establishment of central schools. Closed schools often have been utilized for other purposes such as a nursery school or a laboratory school. This was effectively done in Xenia, Ohio, where a formerly all-Negro school has been converted into a demonstration school which utilizes new educational techniques and is attended by a cross-section of students in the community. The superintendent of schools in Xenia said the plan would not fail because this previously all-Negro school “is the city’s prestige school

Federal policy, then, upheld school closure as a technique for desegregating schools. School closure was legally defensible because of fungible and racist differences in definitions of educational quality; Black schools would be closed when they were inferior

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to the surrounding white schools. But, educational differences were nearly impossible to
measure and were not an intrinsic failing of the staff and students in all-Black
communities; rather, they were a failure on the part of municipal, county, state, and
federal governments to fund adequately and support them across decades. An article
written during the height of school closure published in the *University of Chicago Law
Review* puzzled not at the ease with which local school boards closed Black institutions,
but rather at the reluctance of courts to see the closure of Black schools as a constitutional
issue.415

> White schools remained open while Black schools were closed because in white
> schools, so the reasoning went, a “more effective educational environment could be
> maintained.”416 This had the ancillary benefit of appealing to white families who
> wouldn’t have to send their children into “undesirable” neighborhoods to schools that
> they considered inferior.417 But the toll on Black institutions and people was steep.
> Absent local schools, it would be Black kids who would bear the burden of busing.
> Schools had also provided a physical center for valuable community activity. Together,
> these factors had the potential to engrain more deeply educational and spatial
> inequalities.418 But school closure was more than the sum of its parts; it also represented
> an intangible and psychic danger, a law review article warned: “The symbolic impact of
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415. Thomas S. Martin, “Inequality in Desegregation: Black School Closings,”
The *University of Chicago Law Review* 39, no. 3 (1972): 660,

416. Martin, 660.

417. Martin, 658.

418. Martin, 659.
school closings has particular significance to Blacks; the unavoidable implication is that Black schools are not good enough for white students and that the cost of integration for the Black community is the loss of its schools. In numerous cases in the late 1960s and early 1970s, circuit courts found no violation to the 14th amendment when it came to the closure of Black schools, with one judge opining: “although people are equal and governmental classification by race will not be tolerated, neighborhoods are not. Reasonable administrative discrimination between neighborhoods in determining the location of public facilities such as schools is not subject to judicial intervention where those facilities remain available for use by all.”

419. Martin, 659.

Figure 9. This image from the 1967 "Schools Can Be Desegregated" pamphlet outlines school closure of one of several as a viable techniques for school desegregation. Note how the White schools remain intact.
Pushing Back Against Closure

In the fall of 1968, the Prince George’s County Board of Education, supported by federal policy precedent and case law, proposed closing Fairmount Heights Senior High School. After becoming aware of the proposal to close the school, the high school faculty drafted a statement that they sent to Superintendent Schmidt before the Board of Education meeting at which they planned to speak. Over 400 people attended the meeting held in November of 1968. The text produced by the group constructed both space and time and functioned as a mode of resistance. Through texturing and recontextualizing events and discourses that the Board took for granted, the faculty offered up an alternative construction of the space not as abstract, but rather as fluid and relational and pushed back against the school’s proposed closure and the uncertainty that surrounded its future.

Posed as a series of questions, the 1968 statement communicated with and directly cited the Brown decision, the county’s own schooling philosophy, and the Kerner Report. This dialogicality showed the spatial sense of the teachers; their schooling space was understood by them to not simply be local, although it was that as well. They understood that the space of the school and the neighborhood were produced, negotiated,

421. Sims “Negroes Build Strength”


423. Fairclough, Analysing Discourse.
and represented at a variety of time and space scales, scales that came together to take on local meanings but could only be understood *relationally*.\(^424\)

Using *Brown*, the faculty quoted the decision, well known to the Board. Then, the faculty attempted to recontextualize the particulars of Fairmount Heights as a schooling space against the universals of an American system of undemocratic race relations:

We find it offensive that the question of desegregation becomes one of paramount importance only when the pressure of losing federal funds is applied to the County as occurred in 1964 and again this year. We emphasize the stigma placed on our position as members of the faculty of a school with an all Negro student population, in a society where segregation has become synonymous with inferiority. This stigma is also felt by the students we teach. It is reaffirmed in the 1954 Supreme Court decision.\(^425\)

The statement offered an alternative interpretation of the Board’s motives in putting forward a plan, de-privileging official accounts of desegregation processes as well as acting as a source of local historical memory. Faculty then textured the Board’s abstraction of local schooling spaces by situating these spaces within the contours of American law and positioning them as a local product of layers of social signification and

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\(^424\) Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura “Social Geographies of Race: Connecting Race and Space.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34 no. 11 (2011): 1933-1952. Their spatial sensibility is similar to what Neely and Samura have called racial space

\(^425\) “Faculty Statement by Fairmount Heights Faculty” (November 15, 1968) Series 1, Box 2, Folder 18 *Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries*. 


racist policy. In this way, the faculty’s spatial imaginary emphasized history, relationality, and movement as opposed to taking an abstract view.

Continuing to build on their dialogue with other official texts, faculty followed with a discussion of the County’s own philosophy, which they quoted:

The school since it is a part of a dynamic, ongoing, democracy, must of necessity deal with changing conditions. Organized education has always faced the problem of keeping its program alive and responsible to changing conditions. As [sic] the same time, it must ever keep before its pupils the heritage of rights they enjoy and their responsibility to preserve these rights and to pass on to the next generation unsullied the unique blessings of a democracy.426

They ended with this rejoinder: “We call to the Board of Education’s attention, the significant changes that have taken place in all phases of American life and in our county since 1954 that make segregation in any form incompatible with the needs of the time.”

Weaving in official discourses, the faculty recontextualized them by citing the county’s own idea of change before redefining the concept for themselves.

Change had been central to the County’s post-war discourses of progress and growth, evidenced in its educational philosophy and in its framing of urban planning for the Model Cities program. For the County, changing conditions referred to changes wrought by suburbanization and population increase which, in turn, put new material demands on the school system. For the County, change occurred from outside, agentic in

426. Ibid.
and of itself. It was something to be responded to through the implementation of new instructional plans, school construction, and the use of technology. For the faculty, change was human, and they redefined modernity and progress as having a moral center. Recontextualizing change and growth reconfigured the school as a relational space, showing its dynamic position in relation to the shifting demands of history.

Community activist Sylvester Vaughns spoke against integration at the November 15th meeting, accusing the Board of Education and the federal government of racism:

the dialogue between HEW and the Board of Education is a planned effort for racism. Give us black teachers who are good teachers. Give us black administrators. They can do the job as well as any white. There will never be true integration. You will not serve to scuttle the hopes of black children and the identity of a whole people.427

In fact, the Post reported, in an article about the burgeoning political power of Black suburbanites in the County, that “few speakers supported integration as an end in itself. The primary concern was quality of education, and integration was seen as a desirable but not a necessary corollary to it”428

Although the Board didn’t close the school that November, Fairmount’s future remained shaky. It was under almost constant threat, the object of study, intervention, and


planning. The uncertainty of its future impacted the learning and working conditions of faculty and students. In June of 1969, this led Myrtle Fentress, a long time faculty member, to write a letter to the School Board that echoed the faculty statement from earlier in the year. Also deploying a relational and fluid sense of space, Fentress emphasized the effect that perceptions of Black schooling spaces had on the community, taking up County discourses as a means of intervention and recontextualization:

Since the November hearing, all that we have learned about the disposition of our school has been gleaned from the local press. It has been a year of constant frustration for students and teachers as we read stories in the local press that have indicated that the educational experiences in our school are at a very low level. Words such as “upgrading,” “raising the level,” and “strengthening the curriculum,” in these stories have suggested that the quality of the teaching and the learning at Fairmount Heights is significantly below that of the other secondary schools in the County. Students and teachers have been taunted on occasions by their colleagues and peers from other schools in the County about the fate of our school. Our friends in the community have been given the impression that ours is a dying school and that our demise is imminent.429

For Fentress, “upgrading,” “raising the level,” and “strengthening the curriculum” functioned as discursive flows that helped construct the school as an abstract space and turn it into an object of policy. Superintendent Schmidt answered her letter with his actions: after a discussion at a national convention, Schmidt hired three Harvard graduate

students who proposed to turn the school into an urban model school. This, he believed, would placate HEW. By October of 1969, the Post’s coverage of Fairmount focused on opposition to the “Harvard Plan,” with a headline: “Fairmount Begins to find Black is Beautiful.” A parent commented: “isn’t this just a way of making the school good enough for whites, to draw them to our school? They (the school board) wouldn’t do this just for our children.”

A school board official pointed out the central conflict: “If Fairmont’s going to be a community school, it can’t very well be an integrated school. The whites live in a different community.” The Post was inclined to agree, ending the article with an editorial flourish: “the more heavily this black community is involved in running its school, the harder it will be to take in white outsiders.”

Nearly a year after the original effort to close the school, the Board was forced to adopt new attendance areas that would become effective in the fall of 1970. By the spring of 1970, the Harvard graduate students would resign, citing the “broken promises” of the School Board. In an angry resignation letter, Todd Endo, one of the Harvard graduate students, took aim at the superintendent, exposing the farce of school reform in the County: “Since the board of education lost its desegregation battle with HEW, the superintendent’s interest in the improvement of education at Fairmount Heights High School has waned. Since compulsory desegregation was forced upon him, he seems to


431. Feinberg

432. Feinberg
have concluded that the creation of a model school was unnecessary. With funding for school improvement pulled and new attendance areas drawn in a feeble attempt to pull white students into Fairmont, the school remained under-populated and neglected, peripheral in all senses except for being central to every desegregation plan submitted to HEW.

In 1972, a committee was convened that again sought to close the school. Over 600 people gathered in the gym as teachers, students, and civic organizations testified. The Model Cities Board, a cross section of community members who were involved in the grant program, made a statement:

Let’s take a close look at the facts, the reason that this committee is recommending the closing of Fairmount heights is because it is presently under populated, and the real issue is the staff is attempting to desegregate the county’s high schools at the expense of the black community. We therefore seriously urge this committee to retract its recommendation to close Fairmount Heights until all high schools in the Prince George’s county have been studied as an instrument for desegregation…we oppose any plan that makes any reference to closing of Fairmount Heights high school


435. Model Cities Board Statement, April 24, 1972, series 1, box 2, folder 19, Ruth S. Wolf papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.
The Board made the tacit promise that it would keep enrollment in the school at a stable number, but in September, angry teachers attended another hearing on the school’s future. Social Studies teacher Robert Rothenberg spoke on behalf of the faculty

We are not particularly pleased to be represented here today. We would far prefer to be going about the task for which we have been trained as professionals—the education of our young people. But once again we feel compelled to speak out. Once again we are faced with a proposal that threatens the existence of our school. Once again we are confronted with half-truths and lies of omission.  

Rothenberg drew people’s attention to the well-worn story of separate but equal and the county’s repeat failures to integrate, but he focused on what he perceived as the Board’s current unofficial policy of active neglect—it had failed to keep enrollment at a steady rate because it had allowed many mostly white families living in the modified attendance area to transfer out, so that they wouldn’t have to attend the school. Rothenberg spoke through a series of accusatory questions to which he knew the answer: “Why us? Why close Fairmont Heights? Inferior teaching? Lack of learning? Excessive absenteeism? Has there been any charge substantiated or even made concerning the quality of a Fairmont Heights High School education?” Rothenberg’s statement implicated the Board in furthering segregation within the County. Through selectively enforcing policy, the board gave legitimacy to the racist perceptions of the white community when it allowed white students to opt out of integration.

436. Richard Rothenberg, September 26, 1972, series 1, box 2, folder 19, Ruth S. Wolf papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.  

437. Rothenberg.
Conclusion

Between 1968 and 1972, the faculty’s openness to engage how representations of space mattered to the local community was an attempt to make these spaces visible as constructs enacted through language, not as natural. The school space for the faculty of Fairmount Heights was understood as fluid, historical, relational, and interactional. By attending to difference and inequality as central to the representations of the schooling and neighborhood space, faculty envisioned racial subjectivity and spatial production as twinned processes. Unlike abstract understandings of Fairmount Heights enacted in official discourses that rendered the space passive and static, these texts of resistance understood space and race as relational, or as a sense of daily negotiations that both occurred within and produced space as they occurred.

Fairmont Heights remained open, but in January of 1973 the County began the final chapter of what had been a long, embittered desegregation process: court ordered busing. The County’s previous desegregation policies, stretching back to the Brown decision, had included a freedom of choice transfer policy, the closure of several historically Black schools, the redrawing of attendance areas and a return to “neighborhood schools.”438 All of the policies were predicated on the supposed inferiority of Black educational spaces and on the perception that Black students were unable to adhere to the behavioral norms of white institutions.439 As busing brought together

438. A Long Day’s Journey into Light.

students from Cheverly, a majority white, middle class neighborhood, and from Fairmount Heights, these different spatial imaginaries clashed and competed, as the next chapter will show.
Chapter 4

The Moral Geography of Busing, 1972

On March, 29, 1972, Sylvester Vaughns, along with several other Black parents, brought suit against the Prince George’s County Board of Education, charging the County with perpetuating a dual school system. The 1971 Swann decision had put busing for racial integration on the table as a permissible technique of desegregation, opening up opportunities for local suits like Vaughns’. In a summary judgment, Judge Frank Kaufman, quoted the 1971 Swann decision as he ordered the county to file a status report by August to bring it into Brown-Swann standards. Busing for racial integration as a component of the County’s desegregation plan would go into effect in January of 1973 for the County’s elementary schools and in the following fall for its high schools.

White middle class parents from white neighborhoods such as Cheverly who had previously attended the all-white Bladensburg High School were faced with the imminent prospect of sending their children into the Black middle and working class area of Capitol Heights and Fairmont Heights to attend all-Black Fairmont Heights Senior High.

Busing inspired intense emotions which influenced the politics of place and race in suburban America. Polls released before the 1972 election showed that 73 percent of the public opposed busing for racial mixing. Busing conjured images of armed guards,


441. A Long Day’s Journey into Light.
or, in the words of then-Senator, Joseph Biden, represented a crisis that appeared to be a ‘domestic Vietnam.’ In suburban Washington, D.C., a 1971 advertisement in the *Washington Evening Star* for Parents Against Busing warned readers: “School days should be happy days, but unless better education is available to all—without the dangers and waste of busing—they will be days of fear, polarization, and ignorance.” At the national level, President Richard Nixon told his silent majority of white Americans: “There is no reason to feel guilty about wanting to enjoy what you get and what you earn, about wanting your children in good schools close to home, or about wanting to be judged fairly on your ability.” War, fear, guilt, and moral danger pervaded the emotional politics of busing, which was also accompanied by a set of prescriptive moral geographies that sought to dictate where Black and white bodies ought to belong.

This chapter will begin by exploring how busing came to be a powerful political construct by outlining the ways in which busing was talked about at both the national and state level and considering the distinct experiences that Black and white community members had had with busing prior to 1972. Finally, the chapter will tease out discourses of neighborhood, political freedom, and morally suitable schooling spaces, three strands that constitute the moral geography of busing in Prince George’s County.

Attending to the moral geography of busing can help us understand how the distinct spatial imaginaries within Prince George’s County, constituted over decades,

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444. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 5
were retained, refined, and complicated in a new era of desegregation policy. Reactions to busing contained a variety of racialized moral assumptions that took form across space and were codified in policy and affirmed in practice. These moral assumptions revolved around ideas of freedom and liberty regarding public education, moral judgements about the suitability of Black schools for white families, and an anxiety about how busing would lead to morally inappropriate racial intimacies through the way in which it would dissolve neighborhood boundaries. The moral geography of busing emerged in editorials, letters to the editor, and articles published in the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Afro-American* between 1969 and 1973. This geography also unfolded in the words and stories of Black and white community members who were affected by the policy, as they spoke at public hearings and rallies, and as they began to engage in grassroots activism that nudged the County closer and closer to an elected School Board.

**Moral Geographies**

Morality and ethics have been central to the work of geographers who seek to understand how space is related to judgements of value.⁴⁴⁵ Moral codes regarding geography relate to the way in which humans navigate a number of interwoven charges within the spaces of their daily lives. This includes the way in which humans conceptualize and enact “the conditions and temptations of the communities or anonymities of their cities; the obligations and geographical imaginaries of their empires; the rhythms and intimacies of their social networks; the freedoms and liberties of their

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states and citizenries; or, in relation to modernity and its dreams of moral universalism.”

Moral geographies make assumptions about belongingness, and, as Tim Cresswell asserts, are based on “the idea that certain people, things and practices belong in certain spaces, places and landscapes and not in others.” These assumptions are linked to perceptions of the morality of certain groups of people and their regulation within/across spaces. Historical work on moral geographies has considered regulation of gender and sexuality, looking at prostitution and public health, for example or, preoccupations with people of ill-repute, such as the dangerous mobility of the “American tramp” which took the form of progressive-era moral panic. Moral regulation is understood as a set of practices, guided by discourse and materiality, which is structured to combat what is perceived and positioned as improper behavior. This regulation has high stakes, existing as a politics of problematizing behavior, culture or values of an “other” on the basis of moral grounds and for the purpose of imposing regulation.

Busing, as a policy, had an implicit morally regulative goal of forcing equality through the movement of bodies across unequal spaces. But white opponents to

446. Legg and Brown.


450. Howell, 194.
busing sought to harden borders and boundaries, to create a moral geography that would exclude Black kids from white schools and would help protect white kids from Black schools. This geography of belongingness and exclusion was founded on moral judgements about Black Prince Georgians. It revolved around naturalizing the neighborhood unit as a moral community, white entitlement to educational freedom, and judgements about the suitability of Black schools. Local reactions to busing, in turn, were shaped by national political discourses and local historical experiences with the bus as a technology of school segregation.

**The Politics of Busing**

On the one hand, busing referred to the literal busing of students from their homes to school. Prior to *Brown*, riding school buses had largely been the privilege of white students or, it had been the experience of Black students who rode on buses past all-white neighborhood schools on their way to faraway Black schools or to Black schools in another district as inter-district busing was a common practice. On the other hand, busing (read: forced busing or busing for racial integration) also referred to a construct situated within the racial politics of school desegregation, produced in media and policy, through law and activism. Busing, in this sense, emerged as a metonym for desegregation. As *Swann* applied across the country, politicians seized upon busing as an issue, assessing the emotional valance of it and making it fit in to their larger political

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aspirations and the desires of their constituents. President Nixon, congress, and Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel all took anti-busing stances bolstered by a variety of rationales.

Already vying for re-election, Nixon dedicated a substantial portion of his 1972 State of the Union Address to the issue of busing, emphasizing educational quality as the most important goal of American schooling: “I repeat my own firm belief that educational quality—so vital to the future of all our children—is not enhanced by unnecessary busing for the sole purpose of achieving an arbitrary racial balance”\(^452\)

Nixon didn’t define unnecessary, but his words no doubt reassured their intended audience: nervous white suburbanites who lived in close proximity to Black urban centers.\(^453\) As the election year progressed, Nixon continued to use busing as a tool to cultivate the frustrations of white Americans to the point where busing became a symbol for white frustration. Unlike the ugliness of outright segregationists, opposition to busing could masquerade as genuine concern for (white) educational excellence. Despite anti-busing appearing to be a more rarified version of racism, the Post still drew a parallel between Nixon’s electoral strategy and the earlier politicking of George Wallace:

“President Nixon could, as Wallace apparently has done in Florida, make busing a symbol for the general sense of frustration felt by the white, working class, not-so-silent majority.”\(^454\)


453. Childs.

In the House, anti-busing representatives drafted a constitutional amendment that would prohibit student assignment to schools on the basis of race. The amendment stated that “no public school student shall, because of his race, creed, or color, be assigned to or required to attend a particular school.” The irony of the amendment was not lost on Post staff writers who went beyond the literal language of the amendment to interrogate its purpose: “This reads like a pro-civil rights statement. But its purpose is to prevent busing for racial balance, though its sponsors insist that they support quality education for all and that the amendment is not intended to perpetuate segregation.” The Post condemned the anti-busing legislation as ‘The Urban Chaos Act of 1972’ and slammed it as an elitist piece of legislation meant to preserve the good fortune and happiness of middle class white suburbanites at the expense of the well-being of poor white ethnics and Black community members.

At the state level, Maryland governor, Marvin Mandel opposed busing, but aimed to remain aloof from local controversy. He commented: “The courts have lost their focus completely….Communities are fighting communities, parents are fighting parents and kids are fighting kids, and no one is concerned with the basic principle of education.”


456. “Anti-Busing Amendment Gains on Hill.”


458. “...And the Court Order in Prince George’s,” The Washington Post, September 5, 1972.

Mandel couched his objections in a preoccupation with educational quality: “You are trying to draw a fine line. We should not look just at racial balance…if it (busing) produces quality education, better education, I think we should be for it. I don’t see any evidence that it does.”

He also reflected on the social effects of integration through busing, emphasizing the familiar/strange: “Busing..takes children out of their familiar surroundings. It affects their ability to learn because they are not with people of the same pattern so they don’t learn as fast.”

Black and White Experiences with Busing in Local Context

Despite the fear surrounding busing policies, Black and white County students had long ridden on school buses. When Fairmont Heights High School opened in 1950 as one of two black schools in the county, its students were bused from an area that was 486.17 square miles wide. Former teacher, John Williams recalled: “We didn’t have enough buses, so we had to have shifts to take the kids back and forth to school. I had students who came from Accokeek, 21 miles one way, so we had to spend extra hours after school to rotate the bus to take the kids home. I saw the discrimination right there.”

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461. Cohen

Fairmont had to accommodate students coming from extremely rural parts of the county as well as students living in the urban areas closest to the D.C. border.  

Busing had long been a ‘hard fact of life’ for Black citizens Black citizens who remembered the one-room school houses in the county that they had attended, schooling that stopped in grade seven, linked transport to class privilege. As Black students progressed through the primary grades, the only thing that ensured their ability to continue with secondary education was often the ability of their family to provide transportation. In some cases, Black families remembered their children walking more than a mile to catch a bus that would transport them over 10 miles away to their school. It was generally white children in rural areas who had access to the modern miracle of the school bus. One columnist at the Baltimore Afro-American mused at this irony: “How things do change. In Alabama, I understand, it used to be a privilege for children to ride the bus to school, but then, practically none of them were Black. The members of the other race, you see, had their own little schools, all within walking distances of their homes”


464. Ibid.

465. Ibid.

466. Ibid.

The Black press was quick to expose busing as a white, political construct, mired in racism. One columnist at the *Afro-American* led with an assertion: “The national debate over busing has been degraded by the deliberate spread of misinformation and myths to confuse the public.” Acting as a corrective to the white anti-busing crusaders who talked about the disruption busing would cause to their communities and their children, the *Afro-American* continued to publish critical pieces on the issue: “The public’s misunderstanding of the real factors behind busing helped to make it one of those controversial things that evoke an emotional response…the real issue is and always was quality education for the children. There’s no plot to rope all youngsters onto buses. When Black children were bused past all-white schools to attend all-Black ones, no one complained about busing. If busing could be used as a device to defy the law, it now can be used as a device to comply with the law.”

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Figure 10—This undated clipping, found in the papers of the League of Women Voters at the University of Maryland, Special Collections, pokes fun at anti-busing crusaders.
Black suburbanites located in poorer and working class enclaves such as Fairmount Heights, Capitol Heights, and Seat Pleasant (all within the Model Neighborhood Area) and in Black middle class neighborhoods populated by federal workers were both encouraged and discomfited by what seemed to be the eventuality of some sort of County-wide busing policy. On the one hand, busing had provided a platform for white community members to publicly debate the quality of Black or majority-Black schools. This psychic attack stung many Black suburbanites: “There has been ambivalence in the black neighborhoods from the suburban Negroes who have pride in their schools and have been wounded by the unfounded white fears and rumors of violence and crime in the quiet residential neighborhoods that surround the two schools.”

Other opposition to busing was quite simply a result of the fact that Black Prince Georgians were tired of having to capitulate to white politicians over the manner and pace of desegregation. Preston Freeman of the North Brentwood Citizens Association expressed his frustration: “We of the Negro community are totally disgusted with the thinking that whenever integration is to take place the Negro community must bear the full burden.”

Still another viewpoint, although critical, emphasized the necessity of busing to ensure quality education for all students. In an editorial in the Afro-American, Roy Wilkins parsed the unfair reputation of Black schools in the white community but ultimately found hope in the promise of busing: “The neighborhoods, except for a relative

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Few, are no worse than those in any poverty-stricken slum area. But Blacks know full well that the schools are inferior. They have complained about these schools over the years. Busing at last has rescued their children.  

For white students in the County, riding on buses was not a new concept. In all-white neighborhoods such as Cheverly, the majority of students already rode buses on a daily basis. What was threatening, however, was the specter of busing for racial integration. Before the court order, rumors of busing for desegregation disrupted the peace: “Many of those who oppose the board’s action see in it, not only problems for their children but the threat of a mass exodus—the end of Cheverly as they have known it.” In a November 1969 meeting of the Cheverly Citizens Association members were stumped as they attempted to come up with a resolution about the County’s desegregation policies. While one motion simply called for a total opposition to ‘busing,’ several of those in attendance noted that Cheverly students relied on buses, especially at the secondary level. Instead, the group agreed to word their resolution as: “opposed busing to accomplish the redistricting plan to achieve racial balance.”


473. Denton, “Pr. George’s Calm In Busing Tangle.”


Education lawyer Paul Nussbaum was heard musing in the courthouse elevator: “When is a rose, not a rose, not a rose? When is a bus, not a bus not a bus?”

The Hymn of Neighborhood

If buses themselves weren’t the problem with busing, what was at stake was the sacredness of racialized residential spaces, themselves linked to oblique moral judgements regarding the value of the lives of the people who populated them. The neighborhood emerged as a powerful place that anchored many of the moral claims related to busing. An editor at the Post took note: “the busing issue does not often have much to do, as everyone knows, with physical distance. It has a great deal to do with turf. Black children are frightened by being sent into hostile white neighborhoods, white children are frightened by being sent into hostile Black neighborhoods, and even minor violence generates unpleasant reverberations.”

Turf, or neighborhood, invoked a sense of belongingness, or of not belonging, and hinted at the complexities behind determinations of which bodies deserved to belong in which spaces.

Neighborhood however, was as much an imagined place as it was a material location. As federal mandates sought to destabilize unfairly drawn attendance areas, the unit of neighborhood gained stricter boundaries in people’s minds and appeared more impermeable in people’s descriptions of it. This was the case even though County neighborhoods and their schools had never been bounded or immutable entities to begin with, and even as life became increasingly spread throughout the metropolitan area. One


columnist from the Post pointed to the hypocrisies central to busing, citing neighborhood as a concept that inspired anti-busing demands: “We are given hymns to the concept of neighborhoods. The neighborhood school is untouchable—this is the society where the father commutes to work, the mother wants a second car to drive around to shopping centers, friends and family are scattered around the country. We live in distances easily—to go purchase a bargain, to have things delivered, to reach places of work or recreation.”

School Board member Ruth S. Wolf, herself a resident of Cheverly and the mother of two school-aged children, disputed the notion of neighborhood in a series of public statements where she worked to try to prove that the County had always already been unstable. In working papers, letters, and statements, she challenged the perceived stability of neighborhood schools: “Somewhere there may be a school system with fixed attendance lines around a describable neighborhood. But here in Prince George’s, where changing boundaries have been the rule, we will be hard pressed to prove that what we never had even existed” She further elaborated this thesis in a letter to Governor Marvin Mandel, where she included several tables to substantiate her claims. Wolf wrote Mandel: “You can count on five fingers the schools where the boundaries have remained absolutely stable-Colman Manor, Chillum, Meadowbrook, Cooper Lane, and Holly Park…The facts are all there. Growth has necessitated changes. But it has also required


that we change the boundaries of so many schools so often yet achieve so little integration in some, while others were shifting radically in racial composition.\textsuperscript{480}

Regarding busing and desegregation, an interviewee of the Office for Civil Rights also articulated a spatial imaginary predicated on separate worlds and amplified by white fear of change:

White people in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s knew what desegregation was all about: ‘we wanted to get into their world.’ They didn’t want to come into our world because they didn’t believe it contained anything of value. They were mistaken, of course, but not wrong. They were victims of the blindness caused by racial separation.\textsuperscript{481}

**Freedom as a White Moral Imperative**

Making use of the neighborhood as a unit was central to a concept of freedom that was articulated as a white moral imperative. Freedom, as part of the way in which white residents constituted the moral geography of busing, meant the freedom to send one’s children to whichever school one wanted and to be free of government encroachment. This emerged in the maternal politics of busing as women asserted their right to choose their children’s educational path. It also framed public action in opposition to busing.

Women were central to the moral claim to freedom and the *Post* attempted to capture the emotions of fear and anger that had politicized housewives; the educational


\textsuperscript{481} *A Long Day’s Journey into Light*, 150.
disruption and the perception of the overreach of the state became a rallying cry. As antibusing school board member Sue Mills told the Post during the Vaughns case: “What gives anyone the power to offer children as sacrificial lambs to further a fanatic crusade? If the plaintiffs in this suit are successful, every school child in this county will suffer. What sin have our children committed to deserve this callous treatment?”

Mills’ biblical moralizing was slight compared to the demonstrations that occurred after the 1972 court case. The Post covered a rally that occurred at majority-white Friendly High School, in an area unaffected by Judge Kaufman’s court order. The article, beginning with a paragraph overview of the 1972 court case began to describe the protest:

Someone touched a match to [Judge Kaufman’s] effigy, and it started flaming from the legs up. Crisps of Blackened paper floated on the cold wind out over the football field, over the heads of a few Black girls who were walking by and now stared at the burning paper figure. The rally—about what could be done to stop the judge’s order—started.

There, a student was quoted as referring to Kaufman as a dictator, language that was mirrored in a quote from an article by the same news writer about parent reactions to


484. Ibid
busing, a mother remarking, “Judge Kaufman is just like Hitler.” The article was aptly titled: “Busing: Raw Emotion.” Student protest and unrest in the home was dutifully covered by the Post as mothers mobilized around the issue: “When you start playing with mothers’ little babies—you get a lot of response” said one mother about her decision to join the protest. This invasion into people’s homes also inspired one grandfather: “They could shoot me today if my grandchildren didn’t have to be busing [sic]. And I’d be happy to die, too.”

The Moral (Un)Suitability of Black Schools

As evidenced by the objectification of Black schooling spaces such as Fairmount Heights, Black schools were rendered racialized spaces through discourses of blight, through their physically observable deterioration, and through federal policy that saw them as disposable. Those processes, occurring before white families were directly faced with the prospect of having their children bused to historically Black schools, took on a heightened moral component when busing came into view. As early as 1971, after the district had changed the attendance areas to help integrate Cheverly and Fairmount, eight white parents went to circuit court to attempt dispute the boundary change. Their argument, heard while the Swann decision was still pending, hinged on making a case for the moral unsuitability of Black schools for white suburban children. Cheverly parents

485. Ibid


testified “that children who walk to Fairmont Heights must cross unsafe bridges and walk past railroad tracks where “certain undesirable elements” are found.”

After the Swann decision and court order, this same reliance on morality, couched in terms of danger, criminality, and the undesirability of Black spaces, was exemplified in a January 1972 article that projected fears of busing: “New Junior High: An Emotional Issue.” The article personalized the tension, literally welcoming readers into white mother Charlotte Allen’s living room as she—rather unsympathetically—confessed her fears to staff writers after her child had been mugged: “Mrs. Allen looked directly at a visitor in her comfortable living room and said intensely: ‘He was jumped and beaten by Negroes’ She paused, eyes sparkling with emotion: ‘Niggers, I’ll say. I don’t care. I’m from the South, sorry.’” The article continued down the street, the staff writer capturing the fears of Allen’s next door neighbor: “I just think they (Blacks living near the school) are a lower class…really, I don’t know if after dark I could bring myself to go down there.” When the reporters asked a third neighbor to react to the two women’s views, he commented “People have become more sophisticated in the last few years so they don’t come right out and say they don’t want to be with Blacks.”


490. Ibid
The *Post* expanded the article to talk to Black families about their hesitation with changing schools. In contrast to the fearful politics of being caught in a Black neighborhood after dark, one Black community member emphasized the systematic ways in which the school and neighborhood had been neglected as more Black families moved there: “less attention was paid to schools in the area.” Community members’ reactions to the proposed transfer policy retained a calmness: “I don’t know if we want to be integrated so much as we want equal opportunity. I don’t think we want to be next to them (whites) any more than they want to be next to us.” The realism of the quote was followed with a pithy and profound social critique: “White people will send their children to their 15th cousin’s house to keep them from going to a Black school.”

**Conclusion**

Despite a great nervousness and anger at the 1972 court order, Prince George’s County seemed to avoid the large scale violence that marked other public responses to busing across the country. Superintendent Hassel complemented students on a “quiet and serene” first day of busing in an open letter in February of 1973. 491 But by the spring, principals confided in school officials that the biggest problem in the district was “maintaining discipline and control” and by April, the superintendent told the *Washington Post* that the district needed a “law and order crackdown” and he encouraged teachers to expel students (no students had been expelled since 1970).492 There were


reports of some white teachers referring to Black children as “bused” students or calling them by the name of their sending school.493 Racial differences were expressed as behavior problems linked to particular neighborhood spaces, exemplified in the words of one white principal, who spoke candidly about his inability to address the misbehavior of Black students transferred into his school because they “had the ghetto experience.”494 As the prescriptive moral geography of busing aimed to sketch out who belonged and who didn’t belong in particular schools or neighborhood spaces through claims to freedom, debates about the moral suitability of schooling spaces, and an emotionally charged construction of neighborhood units, change was inevitable.

Opponents to busing and desegregation, fighting a losing battle, turned their attention instead to the schools that had been integrated. There they found another possibility for contesting desegregation: the concept of danger. Danger served two purposes for the white majority. It was a powerful way of perpetuating segregation either through the removal of those deemed dangerous, or through the flight of white students to parochial schools to avoid what they saw as dangerous school spaces. In local context, danger became a way in which white conservatives could regain control over what they perceived to be a lawless, liberal district. These two motives came together in Prince George’s County in 1973.

On the one hand, danger became a powerful tool as local conservatives pressed for an elected School Board. On the other, danger became a justification for local policy

493. Ibid. 398.

494. Ibid. 404.
that sought to remove students from public schools to stem the disciplinary crisis, a move that disproportionately targeted students of color. When the Governor of Maryland signed legislation that allowed the County to hold School Board elections in 1973, grassroots community activism deployed danger as a key part of their issue campaign. Conservative organizations opposed to busing looked forward by looking back; they championed a return to basics in school curricula, and believed that the focus on integration had eroded the quality of education. They sought to extirpate students who didn’t match their vision.
Chapter 5

Danger, Discipline and Desegregation, 1973

As early as 1970, anti-busing organizations such as Citizens for Action (CFA) began to talk about student disruption as a way of reaching out to concerned citizens. In an open letter to the People of Prince George’s County, the organization called for a grand jury investigation into incidents of school violence that CFA characterized as Militant, disruptive and abusive actions (perpetuated by a minority element of our school population) which are endangering the lives of administrators, teachers, and the great majority of the student body and threatening the very existence of our school system and our democratic way of life.

After the 1973 court order, violence in County schools became an issue around which several conservative grassroots organizations agitated. This activity also paralleled and referenced a national concern with increasing crime rates in the 1960s and 1970s, especially among youth. That same spring, the Maryland House of Delegates passed legislation that gave Prince George’s County an elected, nine-member school board. Previously, the Board had been appointed by the governor. The campaigns for the School Board generally revolved around “discipline, drugs, and desegregation,” and candidates capitalized on the general dissatisfaction with busing present in some

495. Citizens for Action, “Memo from Citizens for Action to the People of Prince George’s County,” n.d., Special Collections Ann Hull Papers, Papers Series 1, Box 8 (Education 2 1966-1970), University of Maryland, College Park.

segments of the community, deploying colorblind rhetoric that linked desegregation to violent crime.497

Discourses on race and space which produced schools as dangerous, emerged during the School Board election and led to a new technique of exclusion in the early 1970s: revisions to the student disciplinary code. This chapter will look at the political fallout from the court order and will focus on how integrated schooling spaces became imagined as dangerous spaces. This spatial production had two local uses. It enabled white political conservatives to win seats on the elected School Board, and it also was the driving factor for bringing about revisions to the disciplinary code. The revisions, in turn, codified the perception of schools as dangerous and resulted in the removal of Black students. I will situate County policy within larger discourses of public and school danger before considering how grassroots organizing led to a conservative coalition of anti-busing organizations whose activism culminated in revised disciplinary codes.

**Crime Wave and Juvenile Delinquency**

There is a great deal of disagreement about the factors that contributed to the increase in crime in the early 1970s. Some scholars point to baby boomers coming of age which resulted in a larger number of potential offenders, the dismantling of trade unions, and the effects of deindustrialization.498 Others wonder if crime statistics are less of a


reflection of an increase in crime, and more of a reflection of changes in the system or in reporting.\textsuperscript{499} Still others focus on the role of the media and posit that reporting that focused on extreme places such as New York City, shaped public perception of increasing crime.\textsuperscript{500} Despite the reality of increased crime rates, the 1970s demonstrate the unique way in which space and race, crime and youth culture came together as lawmakers sought to use legislation to address the problem. Legislation imagined racialized subjects in space; it referenced a suburban imaginary and white victimhood. It also visualized a non-white offender, external to the moral respectability of middle-class living. Delinquency legislation also indexed shifting understandings of youth culture as distinct. These assumptions about victims and offenders in turn, had an impact on school discipline.

After WWII, as “teenager” became a distinct developmental category, the government took an interest in delinquency policies, the majority of which scrutinized Black youth in urban areas.\textsuperscript{501} It was President John F. Kennedy who first framed delinquency as a national problem and proposed and passed the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act of 1961 which was meant to address “alienation” and its manifestations—unemployment, poor housing and health, and inferior education.\textsuperscript{502} As


\textsuperscript{501} Elizabeth Kai Hinton, \textit{From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime : The Making of Mass Incarceration in America} / (Harvard University Press, 2016), 33.
Elizabeth Hinton has shown, this early attack on delinquency became rebranded by the Johnson Administration as the War on Poverty. The War on Poverty drew upon a consensus about Black urban criminality that had a direct origin in the urban unrest of the mid-60s, and it created federal policies that were meant to have a prohibitive effect on future rebellion. President Johnson effectively rolled the social welfare goals of his Great Society program into a suite of programs and corresponding state actors that were aimed at forecasting and preventing criminal activity. Federal intervention in law enforcement was animated by belief in the innate criminality of Black Americans, and the government effectively, though perhaps unintentionally, created a network of overlapping systems and practices that eventually led to the contemporary phenomenon of mass incarceration. The combining of these two goals of the War on Poverty—social welfare and anticrime—saw the welfare aims outweighed by a concentration on anticrime.

Anticrime legislation, of which delinquency prevention was a part, contained assumptions about race and space. Predicated on a belief in Black criminality, anticrime legislation also presupposed a site in which it would be enacted and a site over which it

502. Hinton, 32.


504. Hinton, 11. Thus the War on Crime and “law and order” politics, instead of emerging with the conservatism of Nixon, were direct products of liberal-minded policymakers and governance. By the early 1970s, when it was clear that white youth were being imprisoned due to punitive policies, certain offenses were decriminalized and the carceral state expanded to create the label “potentially delinquent” for Black and brown urban-living youth who fit a number of qualifying factors.

was protector. The 1968 Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, passed by congress and signed into law by Lyndon Johnson is an example of anticrime legislation, situated in race and space, that used an imagined victim as grounds for its passage. The legislation governed through using metaphors and through the concurrent mobilization of truth and (state) power.\textsuperscript{506} For example, President Johnson’s use of “local” and “neighborhood” in the language of the law summoned images of private homes set against the background of encroaching cities.\textsuperscript{507} Included under the state’s promise of protection were not only wealthy suburbs, but also industrial neighborhoods of white working class Americans who had recently become part of the middle class through New Deal policies.\textsuperscript{508} This legislation imagined citizen needs through the prism of crime, based on a “crime victim” subject.\textsuperscript{509} This victim was racialized and situated in space—white, suburban, middle class. The legislation implied who was worthy of protection and which crimes counted.\textsuperscript{510} In addition to being racialized and spatialized, the legislation itself had an imagined location that carved out borders and belonging based on criminality and, on its opposite, respectability. The locations legislators imagined themselves protecting were “safe and


\footnotesize{507. Simon, 118.}

\footnotesize{508. Simon, 119.}

\footnotesize{509. Simon, 96.}

\footnotesize{510. Simon, 96.}
respectable residential areas, typically in the suburbs, with a definable margin against which crime, poverty and, typically, minority demographics are pushing.”

If the anticrime legislation of the late 1960s and early 1970s had an idealized spatial location and a pre-ordained citizen subject, it also signaled a preoccupation with youth culture and delinquency, as youth violence was seen as a bellwether of increasing violence in society writ large. Tangled in notions of adolescence as a developmentally and legally distinct category from both childhood and adulthood, juvenile delinquency legislation aimed to work out the best approach to juvenile offenses and the most appropriate way of addressing them in schooling spaces. Desegregation efforts complicated and challenged this conversation as local desegregation policies often resulted in racial conflict among students in school. In fact, scholars have pointed to desegregation as “the genealogy of crime as a political problem in schools” as many violent conflicts emerged as districts took steps to desegregate. Additionally, as legislation was drafted to address the rising tide of juvenile offenses, gang-related violence, and the perception of danger in public schools, it was tinged by racialized approaches to offences and a distinction between salvageable offenders and criminal youth.

511. Simon, 96.


514. William S. Bush, Who Gets a Childhood?: Race and Juvenile Justice in Twentieth-Century Texas (Athens, UNITED STATES: University of Georgia Press,
Attitudes regarding the social value of children had morphed between the late 19th and early 20th century into our current concept of modern childhood.\footnote{Viviana A. Rotman Zelizer, \textit{Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children} / (Basic Books, 1985).} This transformation of what it meant to be a child, in turn, brought about a change in the relationship state and non-state actors had to children.\footnote{Zelizer.} As children became “priceless,” and were no longer relied upon as economic contributors due to child labor laws, reformers and legislators sought to address juvenile offenses and to mark them as distinct from those of adult offenders.\footnote{Zelizer.} Industrialization, urbanization, population growth and change, and new legal mechanisms for responding to juvenile offenders combined and became formalized around the idea that the proper response to offenses was to try to mold and shape the juvenile into a productive and conforming member of society.\footnote{Thomas J. Bernard and Megan C. Kurlychek, \textit{The Cycle of Juvenile Justice} (Cary, United States: Oxford University Press, 2014), 35, \url{http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rutgers-ebooks/detail.action?docID=590178}.} Re-capturing the nation’s attention in the 1950s, juvenile delinquency was famously popularized in a five part \textit{Saturday Evening Post} article, “The Shame of America.”\footnote{James Gilbert, \textit{A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s} (Oxford University Press, 1988).} The authors, the Executive Director of the Senate Investigation of Juvenile Delinquency and the Chief Counsel to the Investigation, warned Americans: “we must combat the
influences in the family and in the community that make children more susceptible to waywardness. Second, we must concentrate our greatest efforts on locating as early as possible the children who are most likely to become delinquent, and giving them the kind of help they need.”

But the delinquent of the Evening Post’s imagining was a white middle class delinquent caused by bad parenting; a criminal by fault of situation, not of nature. As politicians and suburbanites talked about the growing problem, the line between juvenile delinquents, given privileged status because of their adolescence, and juvenile offenders, who were incarcerated, deepened and became racialized and spatialized.

Young offenders became central to public debates and to political conversations about crime control by the late 1970s. Based solely on arrest records, youth under 21 committed 18% of homicides in the 1960s and 25% of criminal homicide (reported by police) in 1975. The Federal Bureau of Investigation crime report from 1975 pointed to some trends: youth violence occurred in cities more than in non-urban areas, it was usually committed by boys as opposed to girls, and it was also concentrated among “low social status, ghetto-dwelling urban youth.” These statistics took on a life of their own.

524. Zimring, 75.
525. Zimring, 85.
as they referenced an “image of the violent young offender” which, had a powerful emotional valence and which reflected “generational, racial, and other societal conflicts which pervade urban American life.” The numbers themselves were complicated by differing definitions of violence and elastic notions of what youthful offenders or juvenile offenders were across different (state) legal contexts.

**Danger and Public Schools**

Between 1967 and 1975, American perception of public schools reflected this preoccupation with rising crime rates and generalized anxiety about youth culture. President Lyndon Johnson’s interest in “slum schools” as part of his War on Poverty would morph into Richard Nixon’s moratorium on busing with an emphasis on equal opportunity. By 1975, mainstream outlets such as *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report*, would be writing about the dangers lurking in American schools and professional organizations would publish reports about how to identify dangerous students and how best to curb disciplinary problems. As schools struggled with how to incorporate new populations of students into their institutional spaces, they also came to be represented as sites of increasingly violent and criminal activity. These representations, in turn had the corresponding effect on white power structures of preserving white suburban educational

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526. Zimring, 102.

527. Zimring, 70.

spaces from the contagious risk of Black and brown city school students. This occurred through a focus on justifying the removal of unruly students.

In 1967, President Johnson convened a commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. “Delinquency and the School” formed its own section of the commission’s report, with multiple columns dedicated to “slum schools.” Slum schools were described as dilapidated, and the children who attended them were seen as difficult to educate: “the deficiencies of the slum school are further aggravated by a widespread belief that the intellectual capability of most slum children is too limited to allow much education.”

The focus of the Commission’s recommendations was on providing resources so that students could be successful. Among the resources proposed were provisions for better teacher training, the development of more engaging curricular materials, and the availability of updated equipment and technologies. Schools, the Commission argued, should adapt to the unique needs of students, as opposed to casting them aside; they should connect students’ outside worlds to the world of the classroom and should help students envision their futures as productive citizens.

While school integration imposed in advance of residential desegregation in theory could subject as many nonslum children to inadequate slum schools as it


530. Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, 73.
exposed slum children to good nonslum schools, in fact the influence on school policy generally exercised by middle-class parents would most likely result in rapid upgrading of poor schools to which their children had been sent.\footnote{531}{Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, 73.}

While location (e.g. neighborhood) was proxy for both class and race, the analysis was predicated on a structural, albeit paternalistic, understanding of poverty and racism. The culprit of the “slum school” children’s lack of success was their poverty, not a deficit that lay within them.

That same year, hearings for the proposed Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act took a more punitive approach to the problem of youth criminal offenses and the danger these young people posed to schools.\footnote{532}{“The Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act of 1967,” Pub. L. No. HR 7642, § House Committee on Labor and Education (n.d.), accessed March 30, 2017.} The narrative section that outlined the rationale behind the legislation provided several possible explanations for the increase in delinquency, including rapid changes in the world that had left children unmoored and without clarity about their futures. While the act engaged race as a meaningful category, like the President’s Commission before it, place seemed the biggest determinant of delinquency—cities, supporters of the act maintained, were the problem. If cities were the problem, the drafters of the act believed that schools were the solution. But unlike the more charitable and resource-driven approach of the President’s Commission, the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act was less interested in root causes of misbehavior, and more interested in a palliative approach to its symptoms.
The act aimed to place the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in charge of addressing delinquency. In a breath, schools became enforcing institutions. Said one expert who testified: “It is a law enforcement problem but it is also an educational problem. I think we need to attack this thing in schools.”\textsuperscript{533} Attacking this issue in schools required the use of a complex suite of metrics for identifying dangerous students and the creation of administrative apparatuses to process these newly-produced threatening students. School failure, truancy, general unmanageability, and behavioral problems were proposed as characteristics of a dangerous student. Law enforcement and schools twinned as the decade drew to a close and school desegregation and urban rebellion came to a head.

In 1971, more legislation took up the themes that had marked earlier discussions about delinquency, and hearings for a proposed Safe Schools Act took place in New York and in Boston. The Safe Schools Act was proposed to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to include provisions for funding law enforcement and security patrols in schools.\textsuperscript{534} The hearings before the House Subcommittee on Education were scheduled to take place across the country to provide a broad sampling of local experiences. In calling to order the initial hearing, Chairman Roman Pucinski from Illinois outlined the bill: “The Safe Schools Act, as I understand it, is designed to find some way to eliminate crime and violence from our schools while at the same time protecting the rights of students, teachers, and administrators.”\textsuperscript{535} Pucinski then provided

\textsuperscript{533} Ibid. sec. House Committee on Labor and Education 142.

a rationale for the Act, listing the statistics and survey results that corroborated the 1967 Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act’s worst fears: crime in schools had doubled since 1964 and, the problem of dangerous schools had escaped the cities and had begun to impact the suburbs. Like the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act before it, the Safe Schools Act aimed to identify and classify students with disciplinary issues, including a sample referral sheet for assessing student risk. Among the factors used to identify dangerous students were probation, excessive absence, excessive tardiness, and being identified as a “problem student” by the staff of the school.

The 1971 Act failed to materialize, and in 1973, Representative Jonathan Bingham from New York championed the Act again, this time, citing the increase in violence since the original drafting of the bill in 1971. Bingham emphasized that schools had changed from spaces of childhood indiscretion to dangerous places where criminal activity had replaced benign misbehavior: “The incidents which are occurring, and about which we must be concerned, are not mere infractions of school rules dunking pigtails in inkwells, talking out of turn, or pushing and shoving in hallways. They are serious violations of law.” While the 1971 hearings had dedicated time and space to deliberating on the methods for identifying non-compliant students, the 1973 proposal set about formulating technologies for ensuring safety. Its appendices and supplementary

536. Safe Schools Act, 8.
537. Ibid. sec. Committee on Education and Labor 41.
materials included lists of punishable offenses in schools, social scientific research on safety in schools, testimony by local school leaders, and tables upon tables which tallied crimes committed by dangerous students ranging from extortion to assault and murder.

As these debates occurred in Congress, so too were they occurring in print media. A 1970 *Washington Post* editorial declared that the U.S. education system was “in danger of collapse” and that hard drugs and violence had replaced the quaint “failure to teach Johnny how to read.” A United Press article around that same time outlined violence in Los Angeles public schools, but dedicated the rest of the multi-column article to bullet points listing violence that had occurred in such varied places as Mississippi, Michigan, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts. The *Washington Post*, republishing an article from the *Christian Science Monitor* outlined the results from a national inquiry into the issue of school violence, publishing tactics that officials had deemed appropriate for stemming the violence. But where the 1967 Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice and the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act had avoided racializing violence, and the Safe Schools Act had focused instead on economic disadvantage, the popular press honed in on the relationship between school integration, race, and school violence. Said one *Post* staff writer in advance of President Nixon’s report on the state of the nation’s schools: “The fact is that something perilously close to

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a race war has now begun in just about every integrated high school in the United States.”

If the mainstream white press published articles with nearly apocalyptic headlines, the Black press did the critical work of connecting the dots—with integration, it remarked, came new ways of excluding Black and brown community members from their right to a public education. The Baltimore Afro-American reported on hearings on school violence being held in the District of Columbia. The district was under scrutiny for violence in its schools and for its acrimonious integration efforts. Principals testified about muggings and other assaults. The columnist, with a bitter sense of humor, exposed the gap between reality and representation: “All these horrendous narratives and statistics even exceeded the Biblical description of Sodom and Gomorrah. The only missing Biblical links in the hearing were some Archangels to destroy the crime infested wicked schools and wanton children of the District.” Coverage in the Baltimore Afro-American zeroed in on the way in which suspensions and expulsions had “disenfranchised” Black students, resulting in “student pushout” This preoccupation with violence was the result of white policymakers and administrators whose disciplinary expectations were steeped in racism. Expulsion, in this regard, wasn’t a response to increasing violence, but


merely a “knee jerk reaction by school officials to children who pose problems because they are different in any number of ways.”


While juvenile delinquency was by no means a new phenomenon, the late 1960s and early 1970s marked the emergence of a renewed fascination with it as reflected in the numerous commissions, hearings, legislation drafts, reports, and articles. Interest in solving this social problem required the mobilization of state institutions and resources and brought about a new form of understanding and classifying non-compliant or non-


normative students and a new location for the origin of these student problems. The
perception of schools as violent places justified the entrance of the criminal justice
system into schools, as schools became saddled with the burden of enforcement, and
education became bound with law and order. Committee hearings and legislation, Op-Eds
and the reports of professional organizations also structured the way in which the general
public began to think of schools, especially in those areas mired in the process of racial
integration. “Danger” became a truth about public schools, a reality around which
desegregation efforts and opposition in local context would coalesce.

**On the Ground: Grassroots Organizing, School Discipline, and Desegregation**

By the early 1970s, several local civic organizations with a number of different
ideological commitments, maintained an interest in Prince George’s County’s efforts to
desegregate. The League of Women Voters had long supported desegregation measures.
Ruth Wolf, a former president of the League and a mother of school-aged children had
gone on to serve on the School Board, bringing the ideological commitment of the
League to a more general audience. League newsletters and pamphlets provided timelines
of desegregation legislation and thoughtful social analysis. Another pro-integration
organization, The Coalition for School Desegregation, formed in response to the
proposed closure of several historically African American schools in 1970. It included
more than 30 civic organizations from the D.C. metropolitan area. The Coalition
couraged organizations to send delegates to regular meetings and to follow School
Board policies that supported integration.\(^{548}\) On the other side of the ideological

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Special Collections League of Women Voters, Series 3, Box 4 (Organizations: 1971-
1973), University of Maryland, College Park.
spectrum, anti-busing organizations included the Citizens for Action (CFA) and the Citizens for Community Schools (CCS). Citizens for Action had been founded around the same time as The Coalition for Desegregation, but in response to “disorders” at an all-white high school that occurred after attendance areas were redrawn to include Black students from a poorer neighborhood near the District line. CFA had petitioned, brought suit, and protested; it regularly took out multiple ads in the local press, encouraging county residents that “it’s your fight too.” CFA depicted County schools as a dangerous wasteland against a background of nostalgia for a dual school system:

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the Prince George’s Board of Education have made a mockery of public education. QUALITY EDUCATION is no longer a goal. Neighborhood schools, once the cornerstone of our community and Nation, have become the targets for destruction. Yet, the asinine game of racial roulette continues

Citizens for Community Schools which boasted 40,000 members, and had three chapters across the county, had built strength after the January 1973 court order for busing; it took up the mantel of CFA. Emboldened by President Richard Nixon’s

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moratorium on busing and by his words, CCS would alter the county’s educational landscape and the public’s perception of County schools.

In April of 1973, purportedly in response to the distress of teachers and administrators, Board member Rodney Johnson proposed creating a separate school for problem students—“The principals are crying for help” he commented to the Post. A week later, Superintendent Hassel issued a directive that authorized the permanent expulsion of disruptive students; racial tension was blamed, in part, for the disruption. A final incident at a junior high school that left nine students injured, caused more than 100 parents to gather with politicians and community leaders and School Board members. The school’s principal described the scene: “It’s quite obvious that there’s a culture-type conflict between some ghetto-type homes and New Carrollton Homes [the students who caused the conflict] come from homes where they normally fight and use foul language.” By July of 1973, the Board welcomed the findings of a task force that had determined it made sense to transfer “chronically disruptive” students to segregated


facilities.\textsuperscript{556} Disruption was, however, a slippery term, and varied across schools. Standardization was required.

School Board Election

In the Spring of 1973, around the same time that the appointed Board debated creating separate educational spaces for disruptive students, the Maryland House of Delegates passed legislation that gave the county an elected, nine-member school board. Previously, the Board had been appointed by the governor.\textsuperscript{557} Governor Marvin Mandel had compromised with anti-busing protesters who had been keen to replace pro-integration members on the Board, but he kept the provision that the election be districted instead of general, so that some of the more concentrated Black areas of the county would have the chance at representation.\textsuperscript{558} The County was divided into nine districts, and primaries would be held to determine two candidates who would move on to the general election.

CCS and various other community organizations, seized the opportunity to put forward candidates who would support their agenda. CCS played an important role; both conservative and liberal candidates responded to the organization’s surveys and sought its potential endorsement, catering to its base.\textsuperscript{559} CCS aimed to take control of the schools


\textsuperscript{558} Walsh.
and promised to improve student discipline by removing habitually disruptive students, ending busing and sex education, and returning to “traditional” educational mores and practices.\footnote{Krause.} Although busing and a return to basics were championed, candidates shied away from addressing what \textit{Post} staff writer Charles Krause pointed out as the key issue at stake:

the major issue, many of the candidates agree privately, is the proper role of the nation’s 10\textsuperscript{th} largest school system in a county that has undergone a decade of turbulent growth, experienced a large increase in the number of black students in its 234 schools and is still attempting to overcome the emotional and educational problems that came with a court-ordered desegregation plan implemented last January.\footnote{Charles A. Krause, “School Board Candidates Air Views: School Board Candidates Air Views in Prince George’s Race,” \textit{The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973); Washington, D.C.}, October 27, 1973, sec. METRO Local News Obituaries Weather.}

After low turnout for the September primary, campaigning reached a high point as candidates debated one another.\footnote{Charles A. Krause, “Interest Seen Gaining In Pr. George’s Race,” \textit{The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973); Washington, D.C.}, October 17, 1973, sec. METRO Local News Obituaries Comics.} Colloquially distinguished from one another as “traditional” and “progressive” by the press and public, the candidates’ viewpoints

differed substantially, especially regarding discipline and curriculum content. One CCS-backed candidate argued that teachers should have greater latitude with regard to doling out punishment and that they should stay in communication with families: “Basically, you can tell when a child needs a whump on his behind from mommy or daddy.”"563 A skeptical progressive candidate, Maureen Steinecke, criticized the traditional candidates, indicting them with “looking back to a world that never was, back to the good old days of the little red schoolhouse” 564 She wasn’t totally wrong; one traditional candidate, Roy Wells, campaigned around the County, staging his rallies by bringing with him his own scenic art: a large, portable little red school house. 565

In the November election, conservatives captured 6 of the 9 seats on the elected Board.566 Framing the victory as a mandate from the people, a conservative member remarked: “The message was pretty loud and clear. What the public wants is a responsive school system geared to basic education in a nondisruptive atmosphere in neighborhood schools.”567 Jesse Warr, the only Black Board member, and a holdover from the days of


564. Krause.


an appointed Board was less convinced: “Traditional education is only a catch word, an excuse for getting back at Jan. 29 (the day the County’s court-ordered desegregation plan was implemented)”568

Disciplinary Code Revisions

Discipline and danger continued to form a large portion of the dialogue about County schools after the election, as the conservative members made good on their campaign promises to bring back order and usher in traditional values. The Board’s vision for a transformed district came up against the lack of standardization across schools regarding disciplinary rules and the tremendous variation of neighborhood contexts that were colliding due to court-ordered busing. In order to reconsolidate conservative white control over the district, revisions to the disciplinary code would have to refine the limits of the punishment that was meted out and non-compliant students would have to be identified and classified.

In May of 1974, the Board considered a “stringent new disciplinary code” that would restore corporal punishment.569 The code outlined offenses, ranging from littering to possession of weapons. Prior to 1974, there had been no county-wide code, and autonomy had been given to principals and schools. Board conservatives, still pushing for a return to “traditional education,” championed the code which included vague language: “indecency, insubordination, disrespect, unauthorized distribution of printed material and

568. Krause.

petitions, unauthorized student protest.”\textsuperscript{570} Even the Board lawyer warned members about the constitutionality of suspending students for such vague and yet all-encompassing terms.\textsuperscript{571}

In response to these critiques and to the protest of parents and students who called the code repressive, the Board voted to allow Superintendent Hassel to prepare a modified code that would minimize the use of suspension and expulsion as first courses of action. Under the proposed code, suspension and expulsion were offered as first responses. Hassel commented on the importance of the disciplinary code to the normal functioning of schools: “[it] can’t be a repressive atmosphere but it can’t be a country club either.”\textsuperscript{572} The code went into effect on November 4\textsuperscript{th} and it classified offenses and listed maximum and minimum time for suspensions for each offense. Although Board members maintained that the code was not racially motivated, when asked by the \textit{Post} about the connection between desegregation opposition and discipline, Superintendent Hassel, remarked “I think some of the concern [about discipline] is a reaction to court-ordered busing.”\textsuperscript{573}

\textsuperscript{570} Krause.

\textsuperscript{571} Krause.


By the next year, HEW surveyed the country and determined that Black students had been suspended at twice the rate of white students. In the 1973-74 school year, when the district had 28.9% Black students, 48.2% of suspensions were given to Black students. At the elementary level, with 30% Black students, over 67.5% of suspensions went to Black students. The NAACP filed suit against the school district for this disproportionality.

Central to the suit was the contention that “black students are suspended for minor infractions for which white students are not suspended” Superintendent Carl Hassel called the suit “ridiculous,” defending the policy to the Post: “we have worked diligently to see that all students have an opportunity for full educational development in the Prince George’s schools…suspension is a last resort, and if a student needs suspension after all the other things have been done, you suspend them on the basis of what they’ve done, not on the basis of race, religion or national origin” The Board’s attorney, Paul Nussbaum reflected on the suit as evidence of a lack of personal responsibility: “I have further noted over the years that every single time a youngster gets himself in trouble, whether


577. Colen.
with the schools, his parents, the police, or anybody else, it is never his fault and its always the result of some type of discrimination.” Conservative School Board member Sue Mills, coming off of her recent School Board victory referred to the suit as “the most dastardly charges I think I’ve ever listened to.” She fundamentally opposed the NAACP’s argument: “What they’re looking for is a racial balance on suspensions and that’s going to ruin us…that’s all we’ve got left.”

The suit was settled out of court only after the Superintendent agreed to issue a five page clarification on the code of conduct that detailed why suspensions and expulsions should be used as a last resort. Suspensions did, in fact decline by more than 20% the following year—for white students. The district continued to be under scrutiny for the large number of suspensions—almost 17,513 in 1975. Discriminatory policy wasn’t seen as the problem as white school members still looked for alternative explanations for why Black students were suspended at such a high rate. Maureen Steinecke remarked “If black youngsters are misbehaving in large proportions we have to

578. Colen.

579. Colen.


punish them, but we have to be darn sure that pupils are being treated equally”\textsuperscript{583} The 
Post summarized labor leader, Toby Rich’s position on the matter. While Rich, 
representing the teacher’s union, admitted that integration had presented disciplinary 
challenges, he defended teachers, acknowledging that there had been “peculiar problems 
relating to the adjustment of black students to the new code but that teachers on the whole 
were fair and impartial”\textsuperscript{584} Superintendent Edward Feeney, newly appointed by the Board 
in 1976, conservative members having made good on their promise to oust Carl Hassel, 
had another explanation: “[the unequal suspension rate] perhaps shows that we aren’t 
meeting the needs of black students…that they are acting out their frustrations at the 
schools”\textsuperscript{585}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The grassroots pressure generated by Citizens for Community Schools and other 
anti-busing activists reshaped the school system. CCS successfully drew upon racialized 
and spatialized discourses of danger and framed the district’s educational problems 
around these discourses. Danger served a strategic purpose, bringing conservative whites 
into power who had felt displaced as the County became increasingly less white and as 
the federal government impinged upon what they perceived as their right to a segregated 
education. The CCS voting bloc had successfully created a district-wide set of protocols 
and standards that apprenticed schools into the criminal justice system. These protocols 

\textsuperscript{583} Becker.

\textsuperscript{584} Elizabeth Becker, “Black Student Suspensions Up in County,” \textit{The 
Federal Diary/Obituaries/Classified.

\textsuperscript{585} Becker.
and standards, clinging to vague language, had a direct effect on their desired targets: the “disruptive” Black students who found themselves being bused into white educational spaces.
**Conclusion: “…cleaner, whiter, richer, safer than where you are”**

In 1965, James Baldwin and William F. Buckley debated the question: “Has the American Dream been achieved at the expense of the American Negro?” at Cambridge University. Speaking before Buckley, Baldwin invoked space as central to the historical understanding of this question. Looking around the room, he paused and spoke:

> If you walk out of Harlem, ride out of Harlem, downtown, the world agrees what you see is much bigger, cleaner, whiter, richer, safer than where you are. They collect the garbage, people obviously pay their life insurance, their children look happy, safe…you’re not. And you go back home. It would seem then, of course, that it’s an act of God that this is true… that you belong where white people have put you.

To Baldwin, space was central to the way in which racial identity and the public meanings surrounding it were negotiated. His description of Harlem relied on not only the sense that some bodies belonged in certain residential spaces and some didn’t, but on the corresponding meaning that these spaces had for the people both inside and outside. These representations were largely disconnected from the context of their initial production and served almost as an “act of God” to legitimate an American racial order. Understanding the materializations of racial discourses was central to Baldwin’s response that the American Dream *had* been achieved at the expense of Black Americans.

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In thinking about the history of school desegregation, much can be gained from a conscious and genealogical engagement with space. This framework has the potential to open up new insights into how segregation and desegregation as a “regime of practices” functioned by creating and recreating space and racial identity in local ways. And, as Baldwin reminded us, fifty years ago, by looking at space, we can understand not what happened, but how what happened came to be seen as inevitable.588

In Prince George’s County, the disciplinary code revisions that had been championed by white conservatives in the 1970s as part of a larger opposition to demographic and political changes in the district, had a series of intended and unintended effects. In 1973 the code was intended by its authors to consolidate the control of a conservative majority on the School Board. It became a mechanism for opposing school desegregation through the use of discipline as a means of determining who was and wasn’t able to access public educational resources. In contemporary terms, the metrics, tactics, and penalties established in the 1970s comprise what has come to be called a “zero-tolerance” policy, the unintended effects of which are still felt in the County.

Throughout the 1970s, Prince George’s was known in the metropolitan area for having the strictest disciplinary codes of the surrounding Maryland and Virginia counties, including the District of Columbia. By 1976, Prince George’s had begun to study the increased number of suspensions after 17,513 students were suspended in 1975, the majority of whom were Black.589 More than a decade later, suspensions were finally on

588. This echoes Foucault’s interest in a genealogy of punishment: “Rather than asking what, in a given period, is regarded as sanity or insanity, as mental illness or normal behavior, I wanted to ask how these divisions are effected.” (1994, p. 224)
the decline, but Black students represented more than 78% of all those suspended. By 1990, residents had begun to take stock of the effects as Black students continued to be overrepresented even as the number of whites living in the district decreased.

As the demographics of the county changed, the utility of busing for racial integration disappeared; by the late 1990s, the county was almost 70% Black, up from 8.68% in 1960 and 13.85% in 1970. The need for the court order was disappearing and in 1998, a judge ordered an end to mandatory busing. By the 1990s, the now majority-Black County succeeded in its first steps toward self-determination as it elected its first Black county executive. The County addressed issues of segregation with a plan that included the creation of magnet schools, located in predominantly Black areas to attract white students. After the court order was lifted, the County chose to create


592. Social Explorer Tables(SE), Census 1970, Social Explorer & U.S. Census Bureau


three sub-districts which were balanced in terms of race and socioeconomic status, with the hope that through school choice—students could attend whichever magnet within their sub-district—integration would come about. This hope was not realized and was further dashed when budget cuts in 2004 forced the elimination of 33 magnet programs in the County.  

Despite the end of the court order, the changes in the County’s racial composition, and the election of governance that had the possibility of more accurately reflecting the needs of the County’s residents, it wasn’t until 2013 when the state of Maryland began encouraging districts to minimize their use of suspensions and expulsions that the County reviewed its disciplinary policies. The county set about drafting a student rights and responsibilities pamphlet and began to implement PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System) as a way of decreasing suspension rates. This was motivated, in part, by a 2012 suit brought by the Justice Department against schools in Meridian, Mississippi on

595. Jennifer B. Ayscue and Los Angeles. Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles University of California, “Settle for Segregation or Strive for Diversity? A Defining Moment for Maryland’s Public Schools” (Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles, April 1, 2013), 3, Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles. 8370 Math Sciences, P.O. Box 951521, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521. Tel: 310-267-5562; Fax: 310-206-6293; e-mail: crp@ucla.edu; Web site: http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu.

596. Ayscue and University of California, 4.


behalf of students. The Justice Department alleged that the school district had systematically violated students’ rights to due process so as to operate a “school to prison pipeline.” Assistant Attorney General, Thomas Perez explained: “It is in all of our best interests to ensure that children are not incarcerated for alleged minor infractions, and that police and courts meet their obligations to uphold children’s constitutional rights.”

Today, contemporary economic indicators reveal that Prince George’s County has become a “hybrid poor/urban-middle-class suburban district…closer demographically to the District of Columbia than it is to the neighboring predominantly white Montgomery County.” School enrollment changed substantially from 1989, when 28.1% of the school population was white to 2010, when only 4.4% of enrollment was white, making the district predominantly nonwhite. And while test scores are an imperfect measure, the county’s performance of 3rd and 8th grade students on the PARCC was lower than the state average and well beneath other counties—25% proficiency in English and 15% in Math. The state of Maryland as a whole has become increasingly more segregated as


600. “Justice Department Files Lawsuit in Mississippi to Protect the Constitutional Rights of Children.”

601. Ascher and Branch-Smith, “Precarious Space.”


the white share of public school enrollment has decreased; whites accounted for 61.9% of public school students in 1990 compared to 43.4% in 2010.\textsuperscript{604} 85.7% of Black students in the state attend “apartheid schools,” or schools that are 99-100% minority. These racially segregated schools are overwhelmingly poor, with nearly 72.8% of the students classified as low income.\textsuperscript{605} In 2010, the typical Black student in Maryland attended a school that was 62.4% Black, while the typical white student attended a school that was 66.7% white.\textsuperscript{606} In the Washington metro area, these statewide trends are also reflected: nearly a quarter of black students attend apartheid schools.\textsuperscript{607} As this dissertation’s opening vignettes indicate, Prince George’s County is both a symbol of Black self-determination, of having accessed the bounties of the American suburban dream, and a reminder of the sturdiness of racism and its attendant discriminatory policies, practices, and legacies. Nowhere is this more apparent than in County schools.

Thinking about discourse and representation in the context of school desegregation does not mean that language, and language alone, has explanatory power. In fact, attending to the political economy of school construction and suburbanization, yields important insight. Policy, capital, curricula, and social activism are necessary components of a comprehensive understanding of desegregation. But they are not sufficient for understanding how segregation as a set of practices has become normalized,\textsuperscript{604, 605, 606, 607}

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\textsuperscript{604} Ayscue and University of California, “Settle for Segregation or Strive for Diversity?,” 9.
\textsuperscript{605} Ayscue and University of California, 9.
\textsuperscript{606} Ayscue and University of California, 9.
\textsuperscript{607} Ayscue and University of California, x.
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in and through successive “truths,” over decades. They tell us little about how these truths were constructed in reference to the material world in ways that not only led to a grossly unequal distribution of educational resources, but to the common sense understanding that certain people were more or less deserving of these goods.

In Prince George’s County, truths about schools, neighborhoods, and race underpinned techniques of exclusion that took the form of official policies. While these policies had the putative purpose of ameliorating inequality along racial lines, in effect, they did the opposite. Set in Maryland, a racial space that was consciously produced and selectively remembered, these desegregation policies stretched from 1954 to 1974, and they illustrate the creative adaptiveness of white supremacy. These policies begin with school and home construction and the concomitant educational resource hoarding by white suburbanites, as exemplified in the comparative example of Belair at Bowie and Fairmount Heights. As Belair blossomed into a community of wending cul-de-sacs and new single-family homes, its development signaled which parts of the County belonged within the safety of suburban living and which places were marked as not suburban, not white, and thus not part of the body politic. These assumptions, in turn, led to the subsequent policy of school closure, a policy aided and abetted by the federal government, and bolstered by claims of the educational inferiority of Black schools and the innate criminality of residents in Black neighborhoods. School closure, though embraced with the stated goal of desegregation, had the actual aim of destroying Black educational traditions and hampering self-determination in the County. These techniques of exclusion built upon each other, moving from proposals for school closure to the way in which busing first and discipline next became part of how student learning
opportunities were shaped by racial and moral assumptions. These beliefs shaped the somatic norm of schooling; white bodies were *in* place, while Black bodies were unruly, undisciplined, and out of place. As schooling and neighborhood spaces were made and remade, remembered and forgotten, constructed and destroyed, what race meant was equally unstable, subject to changing truths. Throughout these policies, the education of Black students in the county hung in the balance.

This story, of course, could have taken place in many locations, and the desegregation policies I consider are hardly unique to this one locale. But my choice to approach a majority-Black, inner-ring suburb of Washington, D.C. genealogically, is timely because while educational inequity is often framed primarily as an urban problem, current configurations have created an opposition between older, inner ring suburbs and ex-urban development. Inner ring suburbs, typically inhabited by people of color, such as Prince George’s County, face unique educational histories and challenges. Its history lends itself to a spatial approach that critically examines how space and race were produced over time.

When we think spatially, we can think about how spaces are produced physically—through public policy and school reform initiatives, through court cases, and through flows of capital we can also think about what physical spaces mean to the people who live and work and go to school in them, what they symbolize to the larger neighborhood and metropolitan areas in which they are located, and how these meanings and associations get taken up in school policy often, with disastrous and lingering effects.

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