Antibusing Riots,
Fall 1974

The ferocity of the antibusing riots that broke out in 1974 were unique to Boston. Ghetto riots had convulsed the nation during the 1960s, and these disturbances took place in Boston as well. But the desegregation of Boston's public schools spawned working- and middle-class opposition that lasted for years, and had no match elsewhere for their duration. In 1974 twenty-four other cities, including Los Angeles, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, and San Francisco, received federal busing orders. Boston's "outcry set the city apart," and made it "the Little Rock of the North," concluded the the Boston Globe. Major violence enveloped the poorest white neighborhoods, especially in South Boston, Charlestown, and Hyde Park. Then retaliatory violence for white aggression on blacks burst forth in the poorest sections of black Roxbury.
Thus, in the 1970s, first working-class whites, and then poor blacks in retaliation, used violence to repudiate a legal system that seemed unjust and exploitative. In these instances, stifled and powerless people sought outlets and expression in communal social violence when the legal/political system seemed to ignore or spurn their interests. A factor that contributed to this fierce resistance was an onslaught upon neighborhoods and community autonomy that happened in the late 1960s.

The Political Consequences of Urban Renewal

Urban renewal had as grave an impact upon white lower classes as it had on poor blacks. Renewal efforts affected entire neighborhoods. For example, between 1957 and 1959 Boston’s West End was bulldozed in the name of urban renewal. Wiped out were thirty-eight blocks, forty-one acres, and homes for nine thousand people. Developers bought the cleared land at low rates and erected a cluster of high-rise, luxury apartments. In addition, Mass General Hospital was expanded. The working-class West Enders scattered throughout the city, forced to pay higher rents and suffering psychologically after the obliteration of their tightly knit, urban “village.” Similarly, Boston’s East End neighborhood suffered widespread clearance due to the expansion of Logan Airport. Removal of the old elevator tracks in Charlestown and the building of a community college created dismay and anger among the working-class people who lost their homes. Large numbers of poor whites found that their neighborhood situations grew worse because of housing shortages, gentrification, and higher rents due to renewal bulldozing policies. Streets and playgrounds went unrepaired, crime rates went up, mortgage money became scarce, housing projects went into disrepair, and many municipal services to these neighborhoods evaporated.2

It became obvious that urban renewal monies could revitalize the downtown and rehabilitate areas for middle- and upper-class residences, but the urban planners conspicuously ignored the wishes of the working-class communities. One anthropologist argued that the major cause of the extreme antibusing response that followed was due to urban renewal policies that created the “New Boston.” Antibusing, he wrote, was “a protest against the social and economic dislocation experienced by lower-income whites in the creation of the New Boston.”3 The decay of the neighborhoods and the focus upon downtown
business revival resuscitated the old hatreds between the classes that had been so prevalent in the past.

An increasingly popular political sentiment against renewal became evident in the rhetoric of politicians seeking election to higher office. City councilor Gabriel Piemonte ran unsuccessfully for the mayoralty on such a platform in 1963: He declared, “We are tearing down homes without replacing housing for this same economic group. We have moved thousands of families with no thought, no interest in providing suitable housing replacements. Progress doesn’t give us the right to trample over human beings.”4 As the mayoral election of 1967 approached, the anger of the neighborhoods became apparent by the appearance of a populist candidate, Louise Day Hicks. The chairperson of the Boston School Committee and staunch opponent of racial desegregation, Hicks launched a direct attack upon incumbent mayor John Collins and his urban renewal policies. “My chapeau is in the ring,” she declared. “I urge those citizens who want a cleaner, safer, happier and prouder city—a city that puts service to Bostonians ahead of service to contractors, nonpaying institutions and special interests—to join me in this campaign.” Hicks summed up the feeling of the residents of the neglected neighborhoods: “What the people wanted was to be heard by City Hall, but they found that the mayor belonged to big business and special interests.”5 Another major issue for Hicks was the prevention of busing and the protection of neighborhood schools in all-white communities. She ran a campaign based on innuendo and scare tactics, avowing to the white neighborhoods, “You know where I stand.” Her grassroots popularity frightened the business community and moderates, and they coalesced behind the banner of the up-and-coming young secretary of state, Kevin H. White.

The 1967 mayoral victory of Kevin White over Hicks signaled a time of compromise and harmony for all groups. White was seen as a conciliator between the troubled neighborhoods and the downtown business interests. In campaigning for him, Senator Edward M. Kennedy raised the divisive issue of Hicks’s racism, and of her failure to reach out to the business interests of the city. “Boston needs a mayor who can command respect,” Kennedy declared, “from its sister cities in this state, from the leaders of commerce and industry who made the decisions on whether to bring jobs here or move out.”6 After his election White worked to placate activist neighborhood groups by halting rampant housing demolition and giving local communities a voice and a means to air grievances through his “little city halls” initiative. He also worked to deflect
racial tensions with his “Summerthing” neighborhood programs. Between 1968 and 1975, the White administration spent over $500 million on neighborhood capital improvements, a vastly greater sum than that spent by the previous administration. At the same time, the new mayor championed the pro-growth desires of the business community. But the coalition of business and neighborhood groups managed by White fell apart with the economic recession of the early 1970s and the emergence of the busing controversy of 1974.

The Desegregation Decision

While Boston’s poor blacks expressed their sense of powerlessness by choosing direct action in 1967, the city’s small black middle class took more socially accepted modes of promoting equality. Supported by the NAACP, blacks tried to fight segregation and inequality in Boston by focusing on the schools. Black activist Mel King recalled this decision:

On the one hand, we were up against an archaic school system filled with people who were not accountable to the city as a whole or to the black community specifically, and on the other hand, we faced the specter of social and institutional racism. Some blacks, myself included, were naive enough to think that because we were in Boston, the “cradle of liberty,” the folks in charge could be counted upon to change and deal with the problems once they were pointed out. We soon learned.

Segregation of the Boston schools was easy to prove. By the early 1960s, blacks attended schools with a majority of black students, few black teachers, and insufficient funding for textbooks, supplies, health care, and physical facilities in comparison to white schools. When black leaders such as Ruth Bateson, Mel King, Thomas Atkins, and Royal Bolling, Sr., among others, complained, the all-white school committee ignored their protestations.

Indeed, the school committee refused to take simple steps that would reduce segregation such as redistricting, building schools between white and black neighborhoods, or increasing citywide or magnet schools. Led by Hicks, school committee members were more concerned with patronage than education. Maintaining “lily-white” neighborhood schools meant continued patronage, re-election to the school committee, and access to a future political office.
Faced with a stubborn school committee, blacks turned to the state legislature. In 1963 a member of the black caucus, state senator Royal Bolling, Sr., filed a fourteen-word bill against racially “imbalanced” schools. Passed in 1965, the Racial Imbalance Act cited schools with more than 50 percent minorities as imbalanced. The state could refuse to certify imbalanced schools and deny them state funding. But the act was vague and weak. It did not require integration of all schools, prohibited involuntary busing, and made it easy for school districts to comply by taking simple remedial steps. The Boston School Committee, bowing to its political orientation and its white, working-class constituents, refused to abide by the law under any circumstances. The committee members resisted it for nine years, worked with other Boston politicos to have it rescinded, and unsuccessfullly petitioned the courts to declare it unconstitutional. They even voted in 1966 to classify 670 Chinese American students as white to keep the number of imbalanced schools down. In fact, from 1965 to 1972, by redistricting they deliberately increased the number of imbalanced schools from 46 to 67, enlarging the number of blacks enrolled in imbalanced schools from 68 percent to 78.6 percent. As a result, the state denied Boston over $52 million in education funding. Defiant, the school committee promoted lobbying efforts and demonstrations, insisting to its constituents that resistance would be successful. All the while the committee increased its political standing.

Other efforts by the black community to integrate the schools proved unsuccessful. Boycotting the schools, paying for busing of black students to all-white schools (Operation Exodus), accepting the invitation of suburbs to bus black high school students (METCO), and the creation of private “freedom schools” all had little affect upon the segregated school system of Boston. Finally, with nowhere else to turn, in 1972 the NAACP on behalf of fifty black parents, charged in federal court that the Boston School Committee had violated their rights under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

The 1974 school desegregation order of the federal judge W. Arthur Garrity, of Wellesley, ruled that the evidence was overwhelming that the Boston School Committee had “knowingly carried out a systematic program of segregation.” Focusing on the demonstrated racism of the school committee, he ordered that they come up with a desegregation plan by September 1974. The recalcitrant school committee, elected by the neighborhoods because of their promise to protect the white “neighborhood school,” dug in its heels and re-
fused compliance. Garrity responded by putting the Boston schools into federal receivership and imposing a solution upon the city.

It took Garrity fourteen months to reach his judicial decision. He had less than two months to find the means to carry it out. Searching for a solution, he made a serious error when he selected an old and repudiated desegregation plan of the state board of education. This faulty Phase I plan used busing to integrate 19,000 students at one-third of the city’s schools. The plan fixed on the two poorest high schools in the city, all-white South Boston High School and predominantly black Roxbury High, while the suburbs remained untouched. It linked South Boston with Roxbury and white Hyde Park with black Mattapan, and excluded Charlestown, the North End, East Boston, Brighton, and much of West Roxbury. Those bused included 1,700 students traveling between Roxbury High and South Boston High. The busing plan involved an area of six different public housing projects, all in poor neighborhoods. Garrity thus enraged the working-class people of white neighborhoods, who invoked the sanctity of the neighborhood school. They complained that Boston’s two poorest neighborhoods were to undergo busing, while suburbs like Garrity’s hometown of Wellesley remained lily white and untouched.

Boston’s white ethnics and their leaders had certainly fostered segregation. The plan imposed upon them had nothing to do with promoting educational quality—only integration. It exempted the well-to-do who had fled the city, exacerbated already high racial tensions, and recalled the old class warfare between the Yankees and the Irish. On this occasion, however, people of Irish descent were on both sides of the controversy. A journalist theorized that fourth-generation, assimilated, suburban Irish Americans supported busing for Boston as part of their new allegiance “to political and social ideals which transcend ethnicity or neighborhood.” Middle-class Irish in the suburbs repudiated the tarnished spoils system of city hall politics in favor of a new regional politics based on social responsibility, including their responsibility to black victims of poverty and racism.

The Response of the Neighborhoods

In part because of this Irish feud, busing unleashed a bitter and violent response. The working-class inner-city Irish, led by city council president Louise Day Hicks, reacted to Garrity’s decision with numerous demonstrations, legal
battles, and wholesale violence. The antibusers formed an organization, ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights), and members vowed, “I will not pledge allegiance to the Court Order of the United States, or to the dictatorship for which it stands, one law, under Garrity . . . with liberty and justice for none.” After ten years of promising that busing would never come to Boston, Hicks and the other elected antibusing leaders had failed their constituents. Nonetheless, they urged continued resistance in the face of a court order. The Committee’s failure to prevent a perceived “unjust” situation by legal means raised the specter of an alternative form of resistance.

The violence that occurred in Boston from 1974 to 1976 astounded the nation and smeared its reputation as the cradle of liberty and hub of intellectual liberalism. “In the early 1970s Boston replaced Little Rock as a symbol of white opposition to school desegregation,” commented the authors of a book on the subject. “Boston school desegregation was the most difficult in American history.” Many factors accounted for this fateful response to school busing, not the least of which was the city’s political history, its economic situation, and its geography.

The political success of the ethnics in twentieth-century Boston colored the way they would respond to desegregation. Political leaders such as James Michael Curley empowered the working classes of the city by rewarding them for political loyalty that was based on their ethnic identity and class affiliation. Boston’s working classes believed in a culture of pragmatic politics. Problems were solved through workable compromises based upon winning elections and making deals. The Irish “pols” regarded the public schools as political plums, where patronage and not education was the guiding principle. Many believed that by protesting they could prevent busing from happening. One commentator wrote, Bostonians believed “that busing was not a constitutional remedy for previous lawbreaking and political abuse, but was simply some sort of political maneuver that could be ‘fixed’ like a traffic ticket.” Moreover, lower-class Boston and its middle-class political leadership witnessed the success of public demonstrations in the civil rights and antiwar movements. Also, surveys taken between 1973 and 1975 showed that the majority of antibusers were not primarily racists who believed blacks inferior. More important they felt angry because outsiders manipulated them to achieve the national goal of school integration that they had no interest in satisfying. Having suffered through the attacks of businessmen and
developers because of urban renewal, poor whites distrusted social reconstruction remedies imposed upon them without their political input.

The busing crisis took place in the worst of economic times for Boston's lower classes. A national recession in the early 1970s brought on by the world oil crisis and the stagflation caused by the Vietnam War depressed the nation and severely affected Massachusetts, with its defense-related industries. Unemployment in the state reached 7.3 percent in 1973, well above the national average of 4.8 percent. The closing of shipyards and the loss of blue-collar jobs in general badly hurt a working class unfit for the high tech and service jobs now permeating the marketplace. While Boston suffered from a 12 percent unemployment rate overall in 1974, the rate hovered about 15 percent for ethnic South Boston and Charlestown, and 20 percent for black Roxbury. That Boston was the nation's costliest city in which to live worsened conditions for the jobless. The recession forced the cutback of many municipal jobs that were the bread and butter of the working-class patronage system. At the same time, affirmative action lessened the job pool for whites and increased their resentment against blacks. In South Boston, described by probusing leaders as "the most chaotic setting in Boston in the 1970s,\(^\text{14}\) the employment rate for young males and the median family income were well below the rest of the city. "Southie" also contained a higher than average number of families on public assistance. Facing unemployment in the "manual and semiskilled trades," they attacked "black people who were competing with them for scarce jobs," wrote an anthropologist.\(^\text{15}\)

The most virulent response to busing took place in three white neighborhoods—South Boston, Hyde Park, and Charlestown—and centered on their high schools. Hyde Park is a 99 percent white enclave in southernmost Boston. Water separates the other two neighborhoods from the city. South Boston is a peninsula jutting out into Boston Harbor, and the Charles River separates Charlestown from the downtown area. Never included in the busing plan was East Boston, across the harbor and connected by two tunnels. Only sporadic violence occurred there. These are isolated and insular communities, proud of their traditions, hostile to outsiders, and parochial in their attachment to their schools. In 1974 the people living in these neighborhoods could not move or send their children to private schools because they were too poor.

For example, in 1970 South Boston was a community of 38,500 that had a small lower-middle class but was predominantly working class and 95 percent
white. Those of Irish descent dominated, with 35.8 percent of the population, followed by Canadians with 16.5 percent, Italians with 11.9 percent, Lithuanians with 9.7 percent, Poles with 6.2 percent, varied other Europeans with 14.5 percent, and assorted others. Only 43 percent of residents twenty-five years or older had graduated high school. Nonetheless, South Boston High School was the focus of community identity, particularly the activities of the football and hockey teams. The sense of being a special community predicated upon a shared togetherness was quite tribal. It promoted pride, but also intolerance of outsiders. Antibusing activist state senator William Bulger of South Boston described this special community feeling in his memoir:

In the distance soared the pale towers of Yankee Babylon, their alien frigidity made bearable by what we perceived as the warmth and color of the hanging garden of South Boston, where we lived.

The center of the city was, at the same time, next door—and remote as the Pole. . . . We were a Neighborhood: an enclave so discrete that we sang “Southie Is my Hometown” and referred to a trip into the central part of the city as “going to Boston.”

Years later, after the implementation of school integration in South Boston, one anonymous resident complained about the loss of his neighborhood: “They took our schools, they took our public housing. The average person here can’t go anywhere.” Both the bringing in of black outsiders, and the sending out of their cherished children to alien neighborhoods threatened community pride and the people’s cultural identity. The perceived onslaught upon neighborhood hegemony resulted in a tumultuous and hostile rejection of busing by the residents of Boston’s working-class ethnic areas.

The antibusing leadership, made up of local politicians and a large cadre of women and men volunteers from the neighborhoods, all publicly denounced violence as a tool for resistance. Their response was public demonstrations, lobbying, petitioning the courts, and an inflamed rhetoric that promised victory in the face of what appeared to be an inexorable court order. The state representative Ray Flynn of South Boston said, “We must continue to resist and vigorously oppose this tyranny dressed in judicial robes, but we cannot allow our resistance to resort to rock or bottle-throwing or confrontations in our city streets.” State senator William Bulger proclaimed, we “have no ill will for any-
one . . . we regard as the grossest injustice that judicial order which strips away our parental rights." On another occasion he commented on the "dangerous" Roxbury schools: "My belief, speaking rather softly, is that the crux of the problem is that the people in South Boston see no reason why they should send their children out of the community to other places." Antibusers heaped vituperation upon Judge Garrity. City council president Gerald O'Leary labeled him "the basic product of an elitist society." Councilman Albert "Dapper" O'Neil cursed him: "God will look down on him for what he's done to the neighborhood concept and the American way of life." Senator Bulger characterized Garrity as having "the sensitivity of a chain saw and the foresight of a mackerel." The constant call of these leaders to resist under all circumstances, however, won no victories. The resulting frustration generated a willingness upon the part of some of their constituents to use violence as an instrument to achieve their goals.

The Resort to Violence

What followed, from September 1974 to the fall of 1976, was the outpouring of staggering violence, almost daily and continuous for three years. An antibusing activist of the South Boston Information Center gave his views on violent resistance in an interview with a sociologist: "We have never offered excuses for our actions. We may be guilty but we'll still fight you. We might go out in back here & fight, and I might tear your eyes out. It's wrong, maybe, but we'll stand by our actions." The rioting chiefly took place in the four neighborhoods of South Boston, Hyde Park, Charlestown, and Roxbury. Excluded from the Phase I busing plan in the first year, Charlestown was peaceful in 1974-1975. Indeed, a fact-finding federal commission reported in August 1975, after the first year, that "substantial progress was made in Boston in 1974-75," and although "serious disorders . . . took place in and around four schools," that "desegregation proceeded in a peaceful and orderly manner in and around 76 schools." Although it was true that most of the city's neighborhoods included in the busing plan bowed to the law, in the neighborhoods mentioned earlier, violence reached unimaginable proportions.

If one applied the 1966 Massachusetts state statute defining riots—when five armed or ten unarmed persons meet in unlawful assembly—then almost forty riots occurred over this three-year span (1974-1976). If one considers a
gang of youths throwing rocks at school buses as armed, or judges a group swinging cut-down hockey sticks attacking passersby or police similarly, then armed rioters generated most of the mayhem that took place. Some riots happened when the police used force to disperse demonstrators, since they came prepared with missiles and sticks. What follows is a litany of the three years of violence largely gathered from the Boston newspapers. This is an incomplete narrative that focuses upon the major episodes and only a few of the many minor events recorded.

Foreshadowing the violence to come was an event that was not a riot, but showed the mood of the antibusing forces. On September 9, 1974, three days before schools opened, a group of moderates organized a meeting at City Hall Plaza to air grievances and defuse any violent intentions of hardline antibusers. The Boston Globe's columnist Mike Barnicle privately invited Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy to address the crowd. While Kennedy and his deceased brothers had been totems of intense devotion by Boston's ethnics, this was no longer the case once the senator came out in favor of the busing plan. Surprising the audience with his appearance, Kennedy ventured to speak, but the hooting crowd of eight thousand drowned him out with jeers, catcalls, and songs. The audience yelled out epithets such as, "You're a disgrace to the Irish," "Why don't you put your one-legged son on a bus for Roxbury!," and "Why don't you let them shoot you, like they shot your brothers." Most of the crowd turned their backs on the senator, singing songs and creating an enormous din. Others began throwing tomatoes and eggs at the platform. Organizers hustled Kennedy off the platform and began moving him through the crowd toward safety at the nearby federal Kennedy building. Then, according to one newspaper, "He was rushed by angry mothers who stepped in front of him with clenched fists." One woman kicked him in the shins, another hit him on the arm. He made it to the building, but the surging crowd pressed against the glass doors and shattered the glass. They splattered the building's front with eggs, jeering Kennedy all the while. The fact that the powerful Kennedy name no longer had any cachet with Boston's Irish Americans showed the intensity of their feelings toward busing. The opening day of school in South Boston set the standard for violent resistance for the next three years.

South Boston Resists and Rioting Spreads

On Thursday, September 12, seventy-nine schools out of eighty successfully and peacefully bused and received their schoolchildren. The one exception was
South Boston High and its Annex on L Street. It was a hot, hazy morning, and from the heights of South Boston, one could view the harbor. The old, yellow building of South Boston High is at the top of a hill, and that morning graffiti adorned its walls: “Everyone should own a Nigger,” “No Niggers in South Boston,” and “Kill Niggers.” Several hundred people—mostly teenagers, but also men and many older women—loitered across the street from the school in front of the triple-deckers. Several carried signs that read, “Bus ’em Back to Africa,” “Klan Kountry,” and “French-fried Niggers for Sale.” A high police official warned the milling reporters to make way: “Make sure you leave a little passageway for the kids who might have balls to show today,” he said. When the first buses appeared carrying black students, the crowd was “in a frenzy.” Chants of “Here we go Southie” filled the air as bystanders threw the first rocks. Screaming Southies hurled chunks of wood, beer cans, and bottles at the yellow buses. Other missiles included bananas and pieces of watermelon. The police formed a line with clubs extended, and moved toward the crowd on the sidewalk to disperse them. The crowd flowed down side streets, only to reemerge and throw their missiles once again. Police on horseback charged the crowd, but the rioters kept coming back throughout the long day. A Swedish correspondent reported, “It’s like Belfast. The women look the same, talk the same, and seem to be just as tough. Anytime there’s any trouble you see them egging the kids on.”

At the end of the school day the police, now wearing blue riot helmets, pushed the crowd away so the black students could board the buses and leave. At the L Street Annex, a bus had its windows shattered as it was leaving. Flying glass cut several children, a monitor, and the bus driver. A stone injured a police officer, resulting in his hospitalization. Police arrested four Southies for disorderly conduct. Only 124 students showed up for school—56 blacks and 68 whites—out of 1,300 registered at the high school. At the L Street Annex, 92 attended out of 600. Almost none of the juniors from South Boston appeared at Roxbury High. A boycott was in force.

A reporter given access to City Hall wrote that Mayor White and his aides were in shock from the actions at South Boston High. White said, “Southie was a bad experience to everyone there. Not much physical damage, but great psychological damage to the kids on the bus.” The actions of the people of Southie would slowly infect other neighborhoods, and gradually the violence would escalate. On day two of busing, police confronted a crowd of 400 to 500 in front of South Boston High. Once again, crowds pelted police with missiles as the rioters went through the macabre dance of advancing and retreating be-
fore the charging police lines. Police arrested twelve in that melee, and later in the day, they arrested two women and two juveniles who did not disperse when ordered. White teenagers threw bricks at an empty school bus. In Roslindale police arrested two boys for stoning a bus.

The following Monday, day three, another group of police clashed with a crowd in South Boston at O Street and East Broadway at 10:30 in the morning. An unauthorized parade of antibusers confronted the Tactical Police Force (TPF), a special police unit that had been formed to deal with antiwar demonstrators. TPF and mounted police pushed the crowds up side streets, only to face them again when they re-formed. A reporter described what happened next:

And now there is violence. Men scuffle on the street. The TPF jumps one man and tries to get him into a paddy wagon. . . . The cops are throwing their own people [Irish] into the paddy wagon, and as they struggle with one man, another beefy one tries to rescue him. . . . They wrestle the big guy to the ground. Four or five of them are holding him down. Another TPF cop holds by his hair the guy who tries to help the other.24

Police arrested twenty-two young men for disorderly conduct. Police Superintendent-in-Chief Joseph Jordan blamed the violence on the very poor. “A lot of people in South Boston might not be aware that people who come from the other side of the tracks, so to speak, are involved in promoting unrest.”25 Skirmishes between police and youths occurred throughout the day, with crowds dispersing and re-forming again and again. During the melee a brick hit Detective Francis E. Creamer, and he hurt his head when he fell to the pavement. He went into cardiac arrest and died three weeks later. That same day police arrested seven men for sitting in the middle of a street. Then over one hundred youths rushed the Andrew Square subway station, beating blacks and vandalizing telephone booths and benches. The TPF poured into the station with nightsticks swinging, sending the crowd out into the square. Stoning of buses continued. A brick hit a black cabdriver as he drove through the D Street housing project.

South Boston women wore protective helmets in the street. One woman complained to a reporter about the people’s sense of powerlessness: “Nothing is
said here about the people and what they want.” Other women echoed the complaint of the white lower classes that the power structure ignored them. One mother said, “In America the voices of the people are supposed to be heard. The black people are being heard, but we’re not. We want our kids to go to our schools. They say the schools belong to everybody. Well, we’re part of everybody.” Furious at the police presence, another woman talked of the injustice they faced: “We want our rights,” she said. “We want our children close to home. Look at it around here. You’d think we were in Russia.” Once again, disaffected poor people, denied what they believed to be their rights, broke the law to express their anger and make known their plight. What was happening in South Boston was just the beginning. A reporter wrote of that moment, “Whether peace is attained depends on whether the violence is contained in Southie. It becomes clear in the days and weeks to come that containment has failed.”

Day four was a quiet one, with only sporadic, minor violence. Youths stoned two buses heading home from Hyde Park High School. Five white teenagers stoned a Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) commuter bus in South Boston. That evening roving bands of young men in Southie caused several disturbances, stoning police cars, pulling fire alarms, and setting small fires. Throughout the first four days, fighting broke out in schools between blacks and whites. On day five black youths in Mattapan threw rocks at the integrated Boston Technical High School soccer team as it practiced. Day six, Thursday, September 19, was more violent.

Student fighting between the races was so bad at Hyde Park High School that school authorities called in the TPF to quell the disturbance. Four students needed hospitalization. The headmaster then closed the school for two days. Someone fired shots through the front door of the Jamaica Plain High School. Stoning of buses continued in Southie, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Dorchester. In South Boston that evening, the TPF brawled with a crowd of over 500 that tried to break into the high school. Antibusers accused the police of brutality for using clubs and tear gas to disperse the crowd. On Columbia Road in Dorchester a gang of blacks slashed two white students. Two whites assaulted a black MBTA driver.

For the next two weeks, from Friday, September 20, through Friday, October 4, random, minor instances of violence happened throughout the city. There were frequent bus stonings, some assaults on bus drivers, and on one occasion,
shots were fired into the all-black Columbia Point housing project. Interracial fights broke out almost daily in the high schools. Incidents of whites attacking blacks and vice versa occurred throughout the busing communities and in neighborhoods bordering white and black areas.

On Friday, October 4, a major antibusing rally took place that would harden attitudes and cause more violent outrage. After a parade led by state senator William Bulger, state representative Ray Flynn, school committee members John Kerrigan and Paul Tierney, and city council members Louise Day Hicks, Albert O'Neil, Christopher Iannella, and Patrick McDonough, the rhetoric became inflammatory. Bulger was defiant: "This is no time for the faint of heart. The enemy can go straight to hell," he shouted. When asked if busing foes had a chance of success, he retorted, "You bet your life we have." Flynn promised that "opposition to busing is never going to cease." Hicks reiterated the position that forced busing denied people their rights: "We are here today to preserve our freedoms. The most important freedom is freedom of choice." Only a rare voice of protest spoke out against the inflammatory rhetoric of the antibusing leadership.

Reverend Thomas F. Oates, a Catholic priest and assistant director of the Priest Personnel Office, blamed "politicians who have not told the truth" about the crisis. He accused them of selfish motivations for their antibusing stance, saying they "dragged out hopes for the repeal of a law when they knew and they know there is no repeal." He said they should be "telling their constituents that it is wrong to throw stones and yell obscenities at children." A scholarly observer agreed, and pointed to the plight of the poor working classes: "To maintain their power and safeguard the jobs of their clients, Irish-American politicians manipulated the resentments and fears of parents who did not want their children bused miles across town and who felt they were losing control over their lives." The hard-liners of the antibusing leadership incited their followers to renewed violence, which began with a confrontation with the police.

The Police and the Yvon Incident

The police were largely Irish and against busing. Their union, the Boston Patrolmen's Association, had donated money to antibusing causes. Yet when called upon to protect the peace, they did their jobs. More important, as they became the object of the crowd's missiles and the target of their jeers and taunts,
the police soon lost their patience with their fellow Irish. A TPF officer remarked, "After the third or fourth rock comes flying, you tend to forget the righteousness of their cause."

As the crowds became more defiant and aggressive with the police, the police began to lay into the rioters in a more vigorous manner. The actions of the police, especially those of the TPF, incensed the antibusing forces. Such was the case in the Rabbit Inn affair of South Boston, which began the evening of an antibusing rally.

The Rabbit Inn was a notorious bar and alleged hangout of a criminal Irish-American gang called the "Mullens." The bar was across the street from the populous Old Colony housing project, inhabited by poor, white Irish Americans. Throughout the busing crisis, false rumors spread that led the police to fear that the Mullens gang was preparing to commit major acts of violence using guns and dynamite. The Rabbit Inn was a place from which anonymous phone calls lured the police to areas where hidden gangs threw missiles and generally harassed them. On the evening of Friday, October 4, a police cruiser responding to a call had its windshield smashed by a brick thrown from just outside the Rabbit Inn. When the officers tried to arrest the brick thrower, the bar emptied, and some thirty-five men fought off the outnumbered police officers. On Saturday night, the TPF, in riot gear and with black tape over their badge numbers, raided the bar. Eye witnesses told of police "busting heads" and destroying the merchandise and furniture in the saloon. Antibusers rallied against the TPF, calling for their ouster from South Boston. Eventually, a police investigation suspended four policemen and cleared nine others. Nonetheless, the Rabbit Inn affair and hatred of the TPF and the police in general ignited more violence.

On Monday afternoon, October 7, a large crowd milled around the Old Colony project, protesting the police brutality at the bar across the street. At that moment, a black, Haitian-born immigrant, Jean-Louis Andre Yvon, drove through the area on his way to pick up his wife, at work in a nearby store. The crowd surrounded his car,-rocking it and smashing its windows. They dragged Yvon from the vehicle and beat him with sawed-off hockey sticks. He fled, but the crowd caught him and unmercifully cudgeled him with sticks (all of this was caught on camera by news crews). Two policemen tried to get Yvon out of the crowd's hands, but they found themselves under attack. One of the policemen fired shots over the heads of the rioters, and they momentarily dispersed, allowing for Yvon's rescue. "He was going to be dead if I didn't fire shots," said
News of the Yvon incident rang through the city, and the next day, October 8, blacks retaliated.

English High was a new, largely black school located in the Fenway area of Roxbury. The busing plan called for white students from West Roxbury to attend until the school reached a one-to-one racial ratio. On Tuesday morning someone pulled a fire alarm, and the students emptied out into the streets. White students and black students refused to reenter the school, wandering around in groups. Scuffles soon broke out between them. Blacks near the Mission Hill and Orchard Park housing projects began throwing rocks and other missiles at passing cars with whites inside. The Mission Hill area became “a battleground” between black rioters and the police. Rioters on rooftops hurled projectiles of all kinds down on police cruisers. Some 1,500 black students began walking up Tremont Street “smashing windows and hurling rocks.” The TPF arrived and battled with the rioters. Police reported thirty-eight injuries, but seem to have made no arrests.34

Newspaper headlines the next day reported, “Black Gangs Terrorize 3 Areas” (South End, Roxbury, and Jamaica Plain) and “Black youths rampaged through the streets and housing projects in retaliation for disturbances in South Boston.” One police official called it “open guerilla warfare.” A victim described the scene: “I saw crowds six deep, mostly blacks . . . They were throwing baseball bats. I was hit on the side of the head . . . my car had eight dents from baseball bats and I was bleeding profusely about the face from glass cuts.”35 In another part of Boston, police arrested eighteen juveniles for disorderly conduct and unlawful assembly in front of Roslindale High School.

On October 9 the violence escalated. Throughout Roxbury the TPF faced black youths hurling rocks, both at the Dudley Street MBTA station and around the Orchard Park housing project. Police arrested ten blacks and two whites, and eleven persons were reported injured. The police closed off the area to traffic and ordered bars and liquor stores closed. The violence continued, with looting beginning on Washington Street, cars stoned, and a white motorist beaten. One black youth said to a reporter, “I don’t want nobody to get killed, but all people don’t feel that way. Southie started it all by beating up that black guy the other day [Yvon]. We’re just getting revenge.”36 The youth admitted that South Boston High was his school assignment, but he had never attended out of fear for his safety.

Antibusers received a big boost in their fight against busing on October 10,
when President Gerald Ford supported their position. “I respectfully disagree with the judge’s order,” Ford declared to the nation. Mayor White lashed out at this statement, characterizing it as a threat to civil and human rights in Boston and a “challenge [to] the rule of law throughout the land.” The quarrels of the politicians did nothing to help the neighborhoods. At the end of four weeks of busing, police recorded 149 arrests and 129 injuries, with property damage estimated at about $50,000.

The October violence demonstrated that Mayor White and his police had lost control of the situation. Kevin White’s administration vacillated throughout the busing crisis. The mayor, who never actively supported the law, sought to distance himself from the conflict, partly owing to his aspirations for higher office. White asked Judge Garrity to supply federal marshals to guard the schools and prevent serious injuries to students. “This city is under great emotional strain and stress . . . what we have here in this city now is hysteria, and hysteria breeds violence,” wrote the mayor. He went on, “We can no longer maintain either the appearance or the reality of public safety and the implementation of the plan in South Boston without endangering those sections of the city which have been relatively calm and peaceful.” The plea for federal marshals angered the antibusing faction. Representative Flynn replied, “Force will only beget force. The people of South Boston have a proud tradition. They don’t like to be pushed around by police or by Federal Marshals either.” Garrity rejected White’s request, requesting the mayor to use all state resources available. White went to Governor Francis Sargent, who then provided three hundred state troopers and one hundred policemen from the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). Because of continuing violence at South Boston High, state troopers took over patrolling the school’s corridors on October 10. Unfortunately, they remained there only until December 3. From October through December, the worst places of violent confrontation were in the corridors of Hyde Park and South Boston high schools and their surrounding areas.

*The High School Riots*

Hyde Park and South Boston high schools continued to be the scene of countless brawls and interracial fighting throughout the school year. On October 15, two separate altercations occurred at Hyde Park High. One began with girls fighting in a rest room while students changed classes. A young white stu-
dent, Joseph Crowley, helped a white girl against attacking black girls, when a black student stabbed him in the stomach. The pitch of fighting increased, and authorities had to summon the entire 125-man TPF to end the disturbances. The melee resulted in injuries to seven white students and one male teacher, who suffered a head wound. Police arrested Crowley's sister outside for throwing rocks at a school bus. The headmaster closed the school for two days and asked for more police protection. At that point, Governor Sargent mobilized four hundred National Guardsmen because the situation had become "increasingly volatile and explosive." He asked for federal troops, but President Ford denied this request. The Republican Sargent was running for reelection, and an "outraged" Mayor White accused him of using the busing violence for political purposes. The antibusing forces continued their demonstrations and parades, both downtown and in South Boston. At South Boston High, the violence erupted into a major disaster.

After the state troopers left, December 4 to December 10 were six days of continuous brawling in the school and police scuffles with picketers outside. Tension was high. On December 11, during the volatile time when students were in the hallways changing classes, James White, a black student, stabbed Michael Faith, a white student, because of an insulting remark. Another student witnessed the stabbing: "I was walking by the office to class," he said, "when a black boy shouted a comment. I saw a flash of silver. Mikey grasped his stomach and tried to walk. He slumped to the floor in a pool of blood." An English teacher, Ione Malloy, froze when she saw Faith "lying motionless on the floor between the auditorium door and the front staircase." Pandemonium followed, as described by Malloy.

White students fled the building, and very quickly, the small group of picketers outside swelled into a large and angry crowd. Though Faith was not dead, the crowd believed he was and roared for revenge against the bused black students inside. Word of the stabbing spread, and the streets continued to fill with unruly protestors. Police reinforcements quickly appeared to face a crowd estimated from 1,800 to 2,500 screaming people. Amid the shower of missiles raining down on the police, authorities wondered how they would get the black students safely out of the building and to their buses.

Making their way to the scene were members of the antibusing leadership, including Hicks, Bulger, and Flynn. Seeing that the police were unable to get the crowd to voluntarily disperse, Hicks took up a police bullhorn and spoke to
the crowd. She agreed that they had a right to be there and to resist, but said they must let the black students leave in peace. The crowd turned on her with epithets like “Shut up Louise,” and “Bus 'em back to Africa.” It was too late for the antibusing leaders to control their constituents—they had created a monster that saw violence as its only alternative. Superintendent-in-Chief of Police Joseph Jordan commented, “That was really an angry, hostile crowd, a mob.” A reporter described the melee: “Cans and sticks and bricks were flying through the air like a hailstorm and some of the cops had been hit hard.” Police hit back furiously with clubs, and mounted police charged the crowd time and again, trampling rioters. Youths slashed tires and broke windows on police cars and overturned Superintendent Jordan’s cruiser. From inside the school, the teacher Ione Malloy saw a woman throw a rock that hit a TPF officer in the head, and she wondered if they would “get out of here alive.” The mayhem reached a fever pitch, as described by a reporter: “The violence was unplanned, sporadic, hate­ful, senseless, unpredictable. Here a policeman was hit, there a demonstrator. . . . Later, both sides would complain of brutality. Both sides would be right.”

State police arrived, and authorities conceived a plan to free the entrapped black students. Police were to charge the crowd while empty, dummy buses pulled up in front of the school building. Meanwhile, black students would exit from a side entrance, where other buses would be waiting for them. A newspaper described the difficulties of carrying out the maneuver:

The operation, despite its massive suddenness and its meticulously planned execution was far from easy. South Boston crowds are tough, and this one was more determined than any police had encountered. The horsemen had to bear the brunt of it. They waded into a hailstorm of cans, broken bottles, rocks the size of fists, bricks, boards and eggs—but neither the battered men nor the bloodied horses broke. The troopers in their wake also had their hands full trying to keep the street clear as irate South Bostonians swarmed behind them in a counter attack.

The police succeeded in their ruse, and the students left South Boston physically unharmed, but the psychological terror they experienced remains impossible to calculate. The injured requiring hospitalization by the end of that day included eleven white men and fourteen policemen. Police arrested only three men for assaulting them. The rioters badly damaged six police vehicles. But the
shock of the violence worried authorities so much that they closed South Boston High for the rest of the semester. Many in the black community called for its permanent closure. Black leader Thomas Atkins dubbed South Boston a “jungle” permeated by “adult delinquency.”

Boston’s alternative newspaper, the Phoenix, tried to comprehend the outpouring of hatred and incredible violence by the people of South Boston over the stabbing of Michael Faith:

The only thing last week’s violence proved was the need for a new more human approach by government to the problems of poor, white, urban ethnics. These people at the bottom fringes of the economy were ignored by the Great Society, left out of the plans for social improvement that attempted to bring other minorities into the mainstream of society. It was obvious on the streets of South Boston that their alienation from their government is total, their rage all-consuming.

Frustrated over perceived injustices, and finding no viable satisfactory solutions available, some of the people of South Boston and other lower classes of the ethnic neighborhoods would fall back on the wholesale use of communal social violence intermittently for at least two more years.