Antibusing leaders failed to calm rioters at South Boston High School, December 11, 1974, after the stabbing of a white student. Courtesy, the Boston Globe.

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Antibusing Riots,
1975–1976

The rioting that followed in 1975 and 1976 was not representative of the almost continuous, weekly violence of the first fall term of busing in 1974. What occurred over the next two years were spasmodic eruptions—some quite brutal and long lasting, others a long series of minor frictions and skirmishes. In some places, such as the halls and classrooms of South Boston High, the ongoing tension led to almost daily violent clashes between the races that went on for several more years. In many instances, however, a strengthened police presence, and in 1975/76 the introduction of federal marshals, kept a lid on the simmering hostility.

The authorities prepared extensively for opening day, on January 8, 1975. During the intercession teachers underwent a three-day seminar with out-of-state teachers who had experienced busing. The most violent high schools installed metal detectors and required each student to pass through and give up
obvious weapons and items such as Afro combs, spray deodorants, and other aerosol containers. Judge Garrity issued a judicial riot order that prohibited groups "of three or more persons from gathering within 100 yards of South Boston High . . . between 7 A.M. and 4 P.M." This prohibition allowed police to break up small groups before they became large crowds. Even more important, South Boston high opened with the presence of five hundred state troopers, who were to stay there for three years.

Sporadic Violence

The occupation of South Boston High and its immediate vicinity by such a large number of imposing police forces usually kept the scale of daily violence from escalating into another riot similar to the Faith stabbing imbroglio in December. One trooper kept a record of his experiences in the hallways of the school:

There were so many heavily armed men stationed around the school and its immediate environs, the scene resembled one of those old movies where the native army stands shoulder to shoulder, lining the hilltops all around. In our case, there actually was a trooper every five yards inside the school and out. Believe me, in the beginning everyone of those troops was needed! Just getting kids from the buses into school alive each morning was a major task. Early mornings, everyone was fresh and spoiling for a fight.

Fights were a constant inside the school. We had a flying squad assigned just to classroom situations, but most of the action was in the hallways. Every time the bell signaling a shift of classroom rang it was like the gong signaling a new round of the old Friday night fights.

He noted that numerous brief fights broke out, with other students joining in. Then the troopers wearing riot helmets and carrying riot batons waded in. Students cuffed or kicked troopers in the stairwells, where many of the conflicts began. Altercations in bathrooms or classrooms spilled out into corridors, and teachers were sometimes involved. The "toughest duty" was lunchtime in the cafeteria, where the two opposing groups faced one another with defiant stares.
A line of troopers stood between the groups, and the “tension was incredible,” wrote the trooper observer. The situation at Hyde Park High was no better.

On the second day of school at Hyde Park High after the winter break, a fistfight “erupted into a series of confrontations” with Boston police officers. During the melee, for one frightening moment a student wrested a revolver away from the policeman with whom he was struggling. The officer retrieved his weapon, but from then on police had to pocket their guns before entering the building. Police numbering 225 fought black students and white students, resulting in complaints by school officials over police actions. One administrator commented, “The police left a lot to be desired. The kids reacted. The police reacted. It just blew up.” The Hyde Park High affray resulted in fifteen arrests, mostly black students, and the suspension of classes. Calm set in for a month, but on February 12, racial fights broke out again and lasted for three days. Police eventually arrested fourteen, charging two with the more serious charge of “taking part in an affray,” rather than just disturbing the peace. The TPF were in a brawl that day and arrested three blacks outside the school for kicking a policeman. On the same day, fifty black student passengers on their way home from the school to Roxbury abducted a school bus driver. The students forced him to stop for hamburgers.

No major disturbances occurred in March and April, although the antibusers managed to intimidate and terrorize Senator Kennedy once again. When he spoke at a political forum in nearby Quincy on April 7, an antibusing delegation broke into the meeting and disrupted Kennedy’s speech with loud noise and jeering. The meeting ended abruptly, and antibusing women crowded Kennedy, jabbing him with small American flags as he tried to leave. He found his car tires slashed, and police had to escort him to an MBTA station while the crowd followed and threw stones at the train as it left. The Boston Herald American, a Republican daily, expressed its horror over the attack: “They [the antibusers] behaved more like storm troopers who broke up opposition meetings during Hitler’s rise to power in Germany.” In early May a major violent event happened, but this time it was due to probusing forces.

A national, left-wing organization, the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), organized a march against racism, on May 3, into South Boston. They were to march to Louise Day Hicks’s home, but they soon began assaulting bystanders in a very aggressive manner. According to police superintendent Joseph Jordan and a newspaper report, the violence “was provoked” by 250 PLP march-
ers who "attacked a group of 20 to 30 South Boston youths near the Bayside Mall with belts, wooden canes and karate blows." Over one thousand Southies arrived on the scene with baseball bats, hockey sticks, and rocks, and "attempted to disrupt the march." They pelted the marchers and their buses with missiles from an overpass. One driver described his attempt to get away: "There were at least 100 kids throwing rocks and running toward the bus.... They broke every window in my bus, and in one of the other buses, too." It took three hundred police several hours to end the violence. They arrested eight people, five from Boston and three from New York City, and ten persons were listed with injuries.

The PLP riot sparked another melee, when white students went on a rampage for two days at Hyde Park High on May 7 and 8, after a black student waved a PLP flag. On May 9, hundreds of police pushed back a missile-throwing crowd that threatened black students leaving South Boston High School. Only desultory violence took place in June.

One object of hatred for antibusers was the Boston Globe, and its probusing slant. ROAR members accused the Globe of distorting the news and of not being objective. On June 8 they demonstrated in front of the South Natick house of the Globe's publisher, John J. Taylor. Later that month, on June 21, ROAR protesters picketed the Globe plant in Dorchester; minor violence occurred. Flying glass from shattered truck windshields hurt two newspaper drivers. Unknown persons threw nails in front of exits, disabling trucks. For several nights thereafter, gunshots from passing cars peppered Globe office windows. Racial tensions remained high from June through the summer.

On June 10, a firebomb destroyed the home of a Hispanic family who had just moved into an all-white East Boston street. A brawl between a white gang and a black gang took place on the edge of East Boston on June 18. A Jamaican family that had bought a home in Hyde Park faced shattered windows; family members were stoned almost on a daily basis, beginning on June 19. A black family driving near South Boston's Carson Beach on June 20 had their car windows smashed by rocks. Between June 21 and 23, a dozen incidents occurred involving white youths' attacking cars with black motorists on the outskirts of Southie. In the first week of July, several cars with white youths "invaded" Roxbury neighborhoods, beating black bystanders and then fleeing. Police made no arrests in what they described as "racial incidents."

The Roxbury affair provoked retaliation by black youths, who attacked
white motorists on the evening of July 7. "A name-calling, stick-swinging mob of more than 100 black youths had been menacing and heaving rocks at cars driven by whites," the Boston Globe reported. No one suffered injuries, and the only damage was to a police cruiser. A black police officer, Deputy Superintendent Leroy Chase, tried to find out what had caused the violence by talking to teenagers. He termed the event "one of those out-and-out racial things. It's hard to stop those kids. They talk about the system. They say the police always arrest black people but they never arrest whites." Those interviewed expressed their impatience to Chase over their exclusion from the bounty of American life. "They see black unemployment is twice that in the white community. They wonder how long they're going to have to wait," he said. The black community's frustration over being denied equality of opportunity came to a head over the use of a public recreation area monopolized by whites.

The Carson Beach Riots

Carson Beach, in the heart of lily-white South Boston, symbolized segregation for the city's blacks. Blacks dared not swim or enjoy the sun in this white enclave because they feared white violence. Several black Bible salesmen from South Carolina made the mistake of violating this community taboo. On July 27, the unaware, out-of-town blacks arrived on Carson Beach and were immediately threatened by hundreds of white male and female bathers armed with pipes and sticks. They fled on foot, and the Southies destroyed the blacks' rented car. Crowd members chased the blacks, two of whom were badly injured. The incident extended over two hours; police arrested two rioters. The following Sunday, August 3, a black cabdriver and his three Hispanic passengers were the targets of a missile attack as they drove through the Carson Beach area. Boston's African American community leaders balked at the blatant segregation of their city, and they planned a march and a picnic on Carson Beach on the next Sunday.

The black community insisted on the march/picnic even though authorities feared a major riot might occur. Over eight hundred police were on hand on August 10 when the black motorcade reached a parking area near the beach. Angry whites from South Boston were waiting for them. Police estimated that two thousand blacks and four thousand whites met in a seesaw series of skirmishes at the beach that Sunday. Most of the time, the police stood in ranks on
the sand, separating the two races. The whites hurled missiles over their heads at the blacks, who fired them back. Meanwhile, those on the fringes of the groups met in combat. Fighting lasted for over two hours, with forty injured and ten arrests. Police suffered the most; twenty-seven officers were hurt. The police finally closed the beach and dispersed both whites and blacks.

The whites of South Boston won the day. While a few blacks swam or pic­nicked on that Sunday, they never came back. Carson Beach remained the exclusive domain of South Boston's white laboring poor. Southies used communal social violence to keep it that way. The riot at Carson Beach did not augur well for the opening of the 1975/1976 school year.

The Phase II Plan and the Violent Response

There is controversy surrounding the merits of the Phase II plan, which implemented integration for the second year in Boston. For the purposes of this narrative, it is only necessary to point out that Phase II increased the total number of bused students from 19,000 to about 24,000 and rearranged school assignments for most students. While the plan had its supporters, many hated it more than Phase I, including the teachers, mayor, city council, school committee, ROAR, and most Boston state legislators. One of the experts appointed by Garrity to carry out the plan thought it was a “good one,” but with some deficiencies. “In short, the plan was long on legal remedies, demographics, geographic boundaries, facilities, and organizational structures. But it was short on providing for ‘practical’ remedies involving race relations, curriculum and instruction, and the content of participation.”

The plan excluded East Boston because its two tunnels were easy targets for antibusers bent on disrupting traffic. Included was all-white Charlestown, to which 1,209 blacks and Hispanics would be bused, while 848 townies would make the trip to Roxbury and the South End. As it turned out, the response of the poor working classes in Charlestown was to match the ferocity of Southie when it came to violent resistance.

The authorities and the antibusers prepared for school opening in their own way. Mayor White took a hard line, warning that “absolutely no breach of public safety will be tolerated.”10 The mayor ordered the placement of over 1,000 police, 300 state troopers, and 250 MDC police at troubled schools in an effort to triple the safety efforts of Phase I. Six hundred state guardsmen moved
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into headquarters in South Boston as a show of force and to prevent disorders. Mayor White and his team feared the worst because on September 4, major antibusing violence had occurred in Louisville, Kentucky, with over five hundred persons arrested. Heartened by the Louisville response, Boston antibusers held a rally of some ten thousand followers at City Hall Plaza on September 7, the evening before schools were to open. Antibusing leaders decried the use of violence, but urged continued resistance and an all-out boycott of the schools. Chants of “Boycott!” rang through the plaza. That evening in South Boston, gangs of youths attacked the Fargo Building, which housed the National Guard troops. Youths threw rocks and bottles at guardsmen on sentry duty. One guardsman suffered injuries from a missile, and someone stabbed a police officer in the leg. Later some three hundred youths clashed violently with police in front of South Boston High. That evening white students milled around Hyde Park High and stoned passing cars. The next day, when schools opened, the city was calm, with one exception.

Attendance citywide was low—only 58.6 percent of the students were in school—showing the boycott’s effectiveness. Police reported only one school bus stoning, en route from Roxbury to South Boston. At Charlestown High only 314 students out of 883 enrolled showed up for class. The white townies who did not attend, and their cronies, were in the streets, however. Gangs of youths roamed the streets, hurled rocks and bottles at police, overturned cars, set fires in trash barrels, and stoned firemen. Someone threw an effigy of a black man from the roof of a housing project, with the sign appended, “Nigger Beware.” Other youths danced around with the figure and then set it afire. A large crowd formed in front of the high school, making threatening gestures and heaving missiles. The police official in charge ordered the crowd to disperse: “If this gathering does not disperse in 15 seconds,” he warned, “I will declare it an illegal assembly and you will be subject to arrest.” The crowd did not move, and the official ordered the TPF to move in. “The intimidating, jump-suited squad marched slowly, inexorably into the crowd with nightsticks held before them. Silently, shoulder to shoulder.” They pushed the crowd back and away from the high school. A reporter noted, “It was also clear that the massive police presence, as oppressive as it was to the community, was the only thing preventing Charlestown from coming apart completely.” Nonetheless, the violence in Charlestown continued.

A band of seventy-five youths invaded Bunker Hill Community College
after classes ended and beat up a black student in the lobby. Three hundred young toughs marched up Breed's Hill, overturning and burning cars. That evening they firebombed the Warren Prescott School and then stoned firemen called to put out the blaze. Rioters ignited trash barrels and set up barricades in the streets. The TPF charged; the rioters fled and then reappeared. The skirmishing lasted until midnight.

The massive police presence seemed to incite the rioters of Charlestown. One angry mother gave vent to community feelings: "Here we are kicking ourselves in the rear end to bring up our children and educate them and it's a bit much to be told what to do. I guess it's a feeling of helplessness." The blazing trash barrel barricades and the clash with police continued during the entire first week of school. On the night of September 8, marauding gangs of teens in South Boston began a nightly ritual of stoning police cars and creating general mayhem.

On the second day of school, antibusing women of Charlestown organized a prayer vigil that was held almost daily, bringing them into constant confrontation with the police. Although no violence took place, police handled the women roughly, sometimes using motorcycles to break up their "illegal" protest. Fights inside the schools became commonplace. One observer said Charlestown High "rocked with fights" during the school year. An English teacher at South Boston High reported almost daily fights. On Friday, October 24, described as "the worst day of disruptions this year," police arrested fifteen students at South Boston High. Headmaster William Reid said, "This was the worst day we had since school opened this year." The high level of violence at Southie led the black plaintiffs in the desegregation case to request the closing of the school. Judge Garrity responded by holding hearings in November to ponder what action to take.

Garrity's hearings inflamed the antibusers of South Boston. One antibusing leader, Dan Yotts, wrote a column in the South Boston Tribune threatening violence should Garrity close the school: "Well, if Garrity closes Southie and [Thomas] Atkins [NAACP president] is not wiped out and NAACP headquarters with him, I'm going to be the most surprised and disappointed guy in southie." On December 9 Garrity issued his ruling. He did not close the high school, but he put it into federal receivership and he dismissed Reid, the head­master. That night four white men in a car firebombed the city's NAACP headquarters. Also firebombed was the home of black minister James Coleman. In
further retaliation for the receivership, on December 12 a large crowd of antibusers tried to storm South Boston High, but police turned them back. That evening a crowd succeeded in breaking into the school and vandalizing it. Anonymous leaflets littered the area with the statement: “Our protest must take many forms. Some forms of protest will not be agreeable to everyone, but protest we must.”¹⁵ That violence was the chosen instrument of resistance for some antibusers was nothing new. Direct action at the three high schools and their neighborhoods continued in 1976 during the spring and fall academic terms.

Violence broke out at both Hyde Park High and East Boston High on January 21, 1976. At Hyde Park High, fights had already been occurring for two days running and reached a crescendo. Thirteen hundred black students and white students fought each other throughout the school building. An observer reported, “I looked out to see what the trouble was and it was turmoil. There were several hundred kids fighting all over the place. They were like soldiers, fighting and falling down. Chairs were flying. It was a very, very large confrontation. . . . I saw white students trying to get away by jumping out windows.” Police reinforcements arrived and finally put an end to the mayhem. They arrested eight white juveniles. Superintendent of schools Marion Fahey closed the school, commenting: “today was a deplorable day at Hyde Park High School . . . certainly a setback.” The head of the faculty senate agreed: “Today’s trouble was the worst I’ve seen here.”¹⁶ Racial fighting materialized at East Boston High, even though it was not a bused school. The plan, which never came about, was for East Boston High to become a magnet school the following year, and Easties held a demonstration to protest. The demonstrators soon clashed with police, and three hundred people “threw chunks of ice at police, overturned four cars and again attempted to block cars entering the Sumner Tunnel.” A protestor explained, “Judge Garrity has taken our school. What do you expect us to do?”¹⁷

It is hard to imagine that education in any form took place in these violent-prone schools. South Boston High continued to experience violence. One veteran teacher advised a new colleague, “You get used to the fights, become apathetic.” In February the veteran teacher summed up feelings among the staff: “There is very low morale at South Boston High.”¹⁸

On Sunday, February 15, a riot of major proportions occurred on the heights of South Boston, near the high school. Activist antibusers, the South Boston Marshals, organized a “Father’s March,” for which they had obtained a
legitimate parade permit. Their plan was to start two separate lines of marchers from both the Andrew Square and Broadway MBTA stations, which would meet and join at Perkins Square and parade up to South Boston High. At the Andrew Square station, four hundred marchers led by South Boston politicians held up banners declaring “[George] Wallace for President”; “some demonstrators wearing ‘Resist’ armbands, drinking beer and carrying sawed-off hockey sticks, jeered at police and at a passing nun.” The police were present in large numbers, with the hated TPF, mounted police, and a canine corps as reserve shock troops. There was confusion among the police about where the paraders were actually to march, and they set themselves up to prevent the demonstrators from getting too near the high school, adhering to Garrity’s orders. The marchers maintained that the police blocked their legitimate route and attempted to walk through the police line. Then they began throwing missiles at them.

The crowd pushed the police aside and “raced screaming and chanting up Dorchester Street to meet another crowd gathering at Broadway.” They headed for the high school, where they confronted a large contingent of police, and the battle commenced in earnest. “The youths pelted the police with rocks and pieces of brick and concrete. Many of the officers picked up the missiles and threw them back at the demonstrators.” A rock hit Superintendent Jordan in the leg; he called this attack on the police “the most aggressive” he had ever seen and “an obvious conspiracy to injure police officers.” Finally, police launched tear gas at the mob. A newspaper reported that “tear gas filled the streets near South Boston High School and the area took on a battleground appearance, as nearly 1000 demonstrators faced lines of policemen on foot, horseback and motorcycle.” Police Commissioner DiGrazia called the crowd “two-bit criminals” and “hoodlums.” He said that “there is in Boston today a conspiracy against public order. Our tolerance policies have failed. It is now time to stop this.” Newspapers reported injuries to eighty police officers, and thirteen rioters arrested. This affray was notable for the high number of police injuries and the rare necessity to employ tear gas to scatter the crowd after the two-hour battle. That evening violence broke out in Charlestown that went on for a week and was to have serious repercussions for antibusing forces.

Youths from a housing project fought nightly battles with the police, setting up fiery barricades and stoning officers. Gangs broke windows in a branch library and looted a butcher shop. The ongoing violence caused dissension
among antibusing forces. The ROAR unit in Charlestown called itself Powderkeg, and it was split between pro- and antiviolence groups. Peg Smith, a former president of Powderkeg in 1974/1975, looked on with horror as her son Tim came out of Charlestown High one day in January with a bloody nose and was shoved into a paddy wagon. In February she condemned the ongoing violence in the local paper, The Charlestown Patriot. “We are appalled to see our community destroyed by our children who are being encouraged by certain unidentified adults who lack maturity and guts to come forth and act for themselves.” Another Powderkeg mother, Marie Le Suer, disagreed in the same issue of the paper: “Violence to me is the police I saw attack a young man in this town and maybe the people that are dumping trash and causing commotion feel that is the only way we can be heard. We lost in the courts and we lost at the polls. What is left? Put our kids on a bus??? Obey a law that to us is completely wrong?” The leader of Powderkeg, Tom Johnson, said he was proud of using violence: “I'm not scared to throw a punch at someone who's throwing a punch at me. I'm the bull of the Powderkeg. I don't like marching with a permit. I'm for civil disobedience. All right, you take a rap on the head. Big deal. I've been arrested five times since we started. I'm the most violent member of Powderkeg.” This open declaration in favor of violent action by Johnson and a few others horrified many in the movement and led to its downfall.

Personifying this difference of opinion were ROAR's leader, Louise Day Hicks, and an emerging, militant leader of East Boston, Elvira “Pixie” Palladino. Hicks was secretly in contact with Mayor White, informing him of ROAR initiatives and working with him to put a stop to the violence. In turn, White provided major patronage opportunities for Hicks's followers, thus fortifying her political position. Under Hicks, ROAR also took a position in favor of Senator Henry Jackson for the Democratic presidential nomination. Palladino challenged Hicks's leadership of ROAR, supported violence, and endorsed George Wallace's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. The result was her ouster from ROAR for “disruptive actions” in early March. Palladino countered by creating ROAR UNITED against Hicks's ROAR, INC. Charlestown's Powderkeg supported Hicks. This split deeply wounded the antibusing forces, and because of future legal setbacks, the movement would be over by 1977. For the moment, however, the violence continued, especially during the month of April 1976.
The Landsmark Incident and Its Repercussions

An incident that occurred at City Hall Plaza on April 5, 1976, took on national dimensions and further sullied Boston’s reputation. A delegation of South Boston and Charlestown high school students met at a welcoming city council chamber to protest busing. After their remarks, they left the chamber and paraded through the plaza. Theodore Landsmark, black and executive director of the Boston Contractors’ Association, was hurrying to a City Hall meeting when he walked straight into the marchers. The Boston Globe reported the ensuing events, based on an interview with Landsmark: “Suddenly he was struck on the left side of his body from behind, he said. As he was punched, he heard taunts of there’s a nigger, kill the nigger. Knocked to the ground he felt his eyeglasses break under him, he said. The next few seconds were spent avoiding numerous kicks aimed at him.” The first blow, delivered by South Boston student Joseph Rakes, was from the staff end of an American flag carried for the parade. Landsmark remarked later, “I end up in Boston, with someone trying to kill me with the American flag.” A photographer from the Boston Herald American was on the scene and shot the picture of the black man struck down by the flag. The picture won the Pulitzer Prize and sealed Boston’s reputation as a city of bigotry and mayhem. A helpless Mayor White and other city officials saw the attack from the windows of their offices. Almost immediately, the black community spoke out.

Not only were Southie and Charlestown closed to them, but blacks were not even safe at City Hall. William Owen, a black state representative, read a statement representing the legislative black caucus, accusing city officials of giving “inspiration” to the Landsmark attack. He called for “immediate investigations into the roles of those Boston city councillors, school committee persons, and state legislators who are inciting young people to mob violence.” Black minister Rafe Taylor exclaimed, “They have blown up buses, stoned houses, attacked our children, and harassed Black mothers. The streets of Boston are not safe for people of color. War has been declared on us.” In an interview, Landsmark condemned these same politicians “whose actions have encouraged the violence of the antibusing movement and allowed people to think that not only do they own City Hall, but the surrounding streets as well. I would like to see these people indicted for incitement to riot.” The antibusing forces took a different tack on the incident.
Louise Day Hicks regretted the violence, but said, “I am most fearful of the consequences that will be forthcoming.” The response of the leader of the South Boston Information Center, James Kelly, was a blatant threat: “The outrage over the incident [is] more deplorable than the act itself. If I was an eighteen-year-old student, I'd do the same thing. It could be a long, hot summer. You might come down here. Watch what you write. It might not be safe.” During the next few days, minor racial clashes took place around the city. On April 19, a serious act of retaliatory violence happened in Roxbury.

Black youths attacked a white motorist, Richard Poleet, pulling him from his car and beating him viciously. They “crushed his skull with paving stones. Police arrived to find the victim surrounded by almost one hundred people chanting ‘Let Him Die.’” Poleet went into a coma, and died several months later. The horror of the event stunned the black community and forced the leadership into silence about white aggression against them. Mel King pleaded for racial unity: “What's more important is that people with differences over busing have to come together and say that they have no difference on the issues of violence and safety in the streets. Otherwise, we don't have a city.” Louise Day Hicks rejected conciliation: “A young man lies close to death from the stones thrown by the disciples of Mel King.” Racial incidents increased, especially in the areas bordering white and black neighborhoods.

Many stonings of cars occurred in April, and Mayor White took drastic steps. He asked and received help from the MDC and state police for additional motorcycle officers. Boston cycle officers guided school buses on a daily basis, and the mayor wanted to free them up to contain the stoning incidents. “The bikemen can move more in that area than a car. A bikeman is good for a roving gang; in fact it’s the best we got—that and the horse.” On April 28 another bomb threat at Hyde Park High emptied the building. Black students harassed pedestrians and stoned motorists and police. Then white students stoned black students, and a wild melee began, which finally ended with the help of a large police action. This incident was the last of the major violent demonstrations outside of school buildings. Racial fighting continued inside the schools, however, and in May a terrorist attack occurred; it was the last spasm of antibusing defiance.

The antibusing forces took heart from the support of the Ford administration and the promise that Attorney General Edward Levi was going to present a friend-of-the-court brief in their favor to the Supreme Court. To their cha-
grin, on May 25 Levi announced his decision that his office would not present such a brief. That night crowds invaded downtown Boston and broke windows and threw firebombs into department stores, banks, and other shops. Another symbolic antigovernment gesture was the firebombing of the gift shop connected to the USS Constitution, berthed in Charlestown. Overall damage was minimal, but antibusers were running out of options besides violence.

The End of Large-Scale Direct Action

On June 14 the Supreme Court refused to hear appeals on the issue, and the antibusing forces went down in final and total legal defeat. Hicks responded defiantly, "The people of Boston have been had, and they will respond." Palladino retorted, "Now people are up against the wall with no place to go." James Kelly threatened, "As long as there is forced busing in this city, violence and racial confrontation are unavoidable." But these leaders no longer had much influence over their constituents, who sank into apathy and confusion. June meant the end of the school year and the removal of a major source of discontent for antibusing zealots. Legal means and violent action had both failed, but the antibusing ranks remained bitter and unremorseful.

There were no major violent communal social actions thereafter, and on the surface, peace came to the beleaguered city. That was not the case, however, for South Boston High. Opening day of year three, September 8, 1976, was relatively peaceful. However, the night before, Charlestown youths "hurled rocks and bottles from roofs of the housing project and at ground level" at police, hurting two U.S. marshals. That same evening in Southie a crowd stoned an MBTA bus with a black driver. At opening day in Hyde Park, Roxbury, and Dorchester local youths stoned buses bringing in outsiders. The major staging area for resistance to busing was South Boston, especially at the high school. "Sporadic fighting, frequent demonstrations, and oppressive tension characterized South Boston High's 1976/1977 academic year," wrote two scholars.

The new headmaster, Jerome Winegar, brought in by Garrity from the Midwest, described one such day, May 13, 1977, near the end of his first year: "Three hundred students came in today, and 290 of them came in to fight. Usually the fights are over by lunch time, but today they went on right up to and including the last period of the day." By the end of the school year on June 22, the new headmaster had lost his optimism:
Coming from the Midwest, I always had this feeling of Boston as this great bastion of liberalism, of learning and of allowing people the freedom of doing their own thing.

After seeing it I will never again feel inferior about coming from the country. The whole image of Boston is changed. Boston is backwards. And I just can’t believe that the people of this city just sit still and put up with all this.33

The following academic year, 1977/1978, was tranquil compared to the years before. Moreover, the antibusing leadership found themselves out of office.

In their runs for reelection in November 1977, Hicks and John Kerrigan on the city council, and Palladino on the school committee, went down to defeat. They had been promising victory for over ten years, and their angry constituents turned their backs on them for this failure. Moreover, for the first time in Boston's history, voters elected a black, John O'Bryant, to the school committee. (Apologists argued that voter apathy in Southie, Eastie, and Charlestown, plus the fact of O'Bryant's Irish-sounding name were the reasons for his victory.) Desegregation and busing were now an accepted fact of life for Boston, and a federal judge was running the school system.

Some Results of the Antibusing Riots

Federal control over the Boston schools did not come to an end until 1985. After eleven years, on September 3, Judge W. Arthur Garrity relinquished his authority to the Boston School Committee. It is not the purpose of this narrative to make judgments on the success or failure of desegregation efforts in Boston. Desegregation took place, and the schools have ample numbers of black teachers and administrators for the first time since the busing crisis began. There is some question about the quality of the city's schools. John Coakley, Garrity's desegregation chief of implementation from 1974 to 1984, said, "To the extent you can quantify educational services to individual children, it has regressed because of desegregation and fiscal realities. Twelve years ago the education provided to the average white child was far better than that for the average black child. Today, the educational inadequacy is probably equal."34 But the first black man elected to the school committee, John O'Bryant, said that the court order "set up mechanisms whereby all schools were monitored, not just for inte-
gration, but also for the quality of academic programs." The new school system required upgrades in the curriculum, which also became standardized for the first time. Moreover, the integration decision popularized the magnet school concept, and initiated partnerships with business and schools of higher education. Controversy continues over the merits and demerits of the Boston school system since desegregation.

Because of white flight (probably exacerbated by resistance to busing) and the increased use of private schools, the majority of students in the system remain minorities. The schools are 50 percent black, 16 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian, and 25 percent white. This is also due to the peculiar demographics of Boston. The 1990 U.S. census showed that two-thirds of the city's population were white adults, most of whom were childless. The result is that fewer whites attend the Boston schools in 1993 than in 1974. Located in an all-white neighborhood, South Boston High has more black students than white students.

A study of the city in 1985 reports that "the neighborhoods of Boston remain profoundly segregated." Fewer than 1 percent of the residents of South Boston, Charlestown, and East Boston are minorities, with only 1 percent in West Roxbury and 2 percent in Roslindale. Roxbury's racial profile is 93 percent minority, and Mattapan's is 92 percent minority. These figures demonstrate that violence and the threat of violence, and the collaboration of realtors and bankers have kept Boston segregated.

Racial tensions remained high in the city decades after the antibusing riots; several incidents occurred over the years. To cite only a few examples: In November 1977, Charlestown gangs attacked black tourists visiting the Bunker Hill monument. In September 1979, youths stoned a busload of blacks on the way to Southie. During the same month, a sniper shot and killed a black football player during practice at Charlestown High. In October, black students and white students battled each other outside South Boston High. The following year an unknown white assailant stabbed a black man to death in Charlestown because of racial motives. Blacks attacked whites in Dorchester in February 1982. The following May, whites firebombed a black home in an all-white neighborhood in Dorchester. In 1985 Charlestown townies stoned a van containing a black man and a white man. In 1990 Ray Flynn, who had become mayor of Boston, characterized race relations in the city as "delicate and fragile." As late as 1993, racial violence raked South Boston High. A newspaper described the circumstances: "Racial tensions that had smoldered for a week at South Boston High
School erupted yesterday into a rock-throwing, window-smashing melee that involved more than 200 teen-agers and sent two students, two police officers and Mayor Flynn to the hospital. Continuous outbreaks of racial violence tainted the city.

The violence of the busing crisis ended, but the acrimony and hatred engendered by it lived on. A woman who headed an antibusing group explained the impact of the desegregation issue on her feelings:

I’ve got a hold of an anger—wow, I never knew this old lady ever had this kind of anger. What a great feeling to be able to take it out on all those ridiculous decisions, fight them. We’ve got a lot of people joining us who’ve lived with this anger all their lives. They knew they had it, they just didn’t know what to do with it. It’s the only good thing about the busing movement. It allowed me to find that anger, and brother, am I angry—every minute of the day.

As late as 1993, a South Boston resident wrote an angry letter to the Boston Globe explaining the bitterness of the neighborhoods as “a response to 40 years of demolition (West End, Barry’s Corner), gentrification (Charlestown, North End), attempts to replace whole neighborhoods with public housing projects (Southie, Charlestown) and an attitude prevalent among the downtown crowd and at your newspaper that we out here in the neighborhoods need to be told how to live.” Helpless frustration turned the ethnic neighborhoods of Boston into cauldrons of violence.

The violence affected many innocent victims, including large numbers of schoolchildren. Besides the physical affects of the violence, the psychological impact of the rioting was incalculable. A few examples from the writing of South Boston high school students illustrate how violence terrorizes. A black girl wrote a poem in her English class about her first day at Southie:

My first day of Southie was really a bad trip
You could not speak out or make one little slip,
they gave us a warm welcome out there in the school
They called us NIGGERS and considered us all FOOLS.
They stoned all our buses, and hurt our friends
I thought this nightmare would never end.
A white girl wrote, “I don’t want to keep walking into South Boston High feeling like a prisoner.” When the English teacher asked a black student what he had learned at the end of term in 1977, he replied, “Nothin’. All you learn in this school is to hate—whites to hate blacks and blacks to hate whites. I’m going to a private school next year.” But was racism the all-consuming cause of this crisis?

In a scholarly poll taken among antibusing forces, pollsters found that by and large these ethnics did not favor or believe in white superiority. They believed segregation was bad, but they opposed forced compliance; hence their slogan, “resist forced busing.” “The principle rational for desegregation protest in Boston is perceived injustice and perceived social harm,” wrote the author of the poll-taking study. A journalist characterized this helplessness: “the people are angry at their own impotence. Like a lover who cannot bring himself to love, they strike out in anger.” In September 1975, the deputy director of the Charlestown Kennedy Family Service Center gave a similar description of antibusers, saying “they realized they were powerless to act. Whatever potential for violence there is reflects this degree of powerlessness.” Twenty years after he had led antibusing protests, state senator William Bulger voiced the same refrain: “The American dream, if analyzed thoughtfully, is not wealth or business success as such. It is to have control over one’s life. . . . Urban ethnic groups, lacking affluence, find a significant measure of that ideal in the continuity of tradition and order and familiar institutions of their communities.”

Again, this narrative does not condone the act of rioting; its purpose is to explore the circumstances that brought the violence to fruition. The lesson here to remember is that wronged people may commit wrongful acts. There is an irony to the notion of powerlessness leading to violence in the busing crisis. It took most of the twentieth century for the Irish and other ethnics to wrest control of Boston away from the Yankees. Once in power they did exactly what the Yankees had done before them. They looked out for their own interests and used their newly won political power to protect and preserve those interests. One of their strong desires, right or wrong, was to control their schools and their neighborhoods according to their vision of community. They saw nothing wrong with denying African Americans free access to their communities or to
equal access to the limited jobs and educational opportunities for the lower classes in Boston. After all, had not the Yankees, when in political power, carried out the same discrimination against them? They won power by fighting for it.

Ensconced in power and protective of their privileges, they found themselves challenged once again. On this occasion suburban, middle- and upper-class Americans accused Boston's white ethnic lower classes of harboring the wrong attitudes, and of creating a segregated school system. The charges against Boston's white ethnic middle and lower classes were just. The rub was that segregation was the rule in the suburbs as well as in the city. A federal court order “encapsulated” the local political structure of Boston's ethnics by depriving them of control over their schools. One interpreter of this action commented, “The authoritarian outcome of this depoliticization of school management has been that many, in particular lower-income whites, have been excluded from the political arena.”

Exclusion from power that ethnics felt was justly theirs produced enormous hostility toward the imposition of a social reordering not of their making.

The parable goes like this: When the Yankees were in charge they supposedly worked for the public interest. When the ethnics took over, the Yankees accused them of working only for themselves. The ethnics did not buy the notion that they had done something wrong. They took care of their own as the Yankees had before them. Nonetheless, they became powerless once again. Many of Boston's lower orders could not stomach this impotence, particularly in the face of their marginal economic existence and the exclusion of the more prosperous suburbs from the desegregation order. Their lower-class status made them especially susceptible to manipulation by outsiders. A Harvard sociologist emphasized the importance of class in the Boston case: “The ultimate reality is the reality of class, having and not having, social and economic vulnerability versus social and economic power—that's where the issue is.” A perceived sense of gross injustice combined with feelings of powerlessness led to three years of widespread communal social violence.