

The “Desegregation” of  
the Washington, D.C.  
Public Schools in Context

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This piece sets out to evaluate the actions of the Washington, D.C. school authorities in response to the *Bolling* decision of May 1954. It assesses the steps taken towards desegregation and the motivations behind them, placing these into context by first reviewing the previous actions of both the Superintendent, the Board of Education, and their predecessors in the years building up to this decision under the legally imposed racially-segregated system. This is primarily achieved through the forensic cross-examination of contributions made by these actors in meetings, reports, and public statements across several years in the build-up to 'desegregation'.

Ultimately, several conclusions are drawn. Firstly, that authorities in Washington, D.C. behaved in a similar way to those in northern metropolises by not openly defying the Court order, but equally doing the bare minimum to comply and taking no measures to actively integrate its school system. Secondly, that the Superintendent of Schools and various white-majorities of the Board consistently and deliberately acted to place the comfort and superiority of white students above the educational needs of black students both before and after 'desegregation', and that these ideas were rooted in the same ideas of white supremacy's 'naturalness' as in the northern metropolises experiencing similar demographic shifts. Finally, that at least partly due to a lack of active integratory measures taken by the authorities, the Washington D.C. public schools were never integrated to any meaningful extent.

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## **I: Washington, D.C. and “The South”**

Little attention has been given to examining how the systems of administration in D.C. public education operated in the peculiar structural circumstances of the District. Those few that have examined such questions, such as Joseph Drew, have drawn their conclusions almost entirely from newspaper archives. Drew’s focus was also on the financial, and therefore on Congress and the District Commissioners.<sup>1</sup> Others, such as Steven J. Diner have done excellent work in pointing out how the dysfunction between nodes of authority in D.C. education is a “natural outgrowth” of their divided responsibilities and caused inherent structural issues in the school system, but have focussed more on the macro: the broad strokes of the structures themselves rather than the actors within them.<sup>2</sup> While enriching these existing strands with new primary source evidence, this piece also addresses the distinct lack of literature which seeks to analyse the specific role of the D.C. Board of Education and its Superintendent of Education, who were responsible for the actual manifest running of the schools on a day-to-day and term-by-term basis. This study seeks to begin to fill this gap, using Board of Education minutes and other private communications and internal administrative documents to explain how structural factors combined with the actions of potential agents of change such as the Board and Superintendents to shape the nature of the segregated school system in D.C., and subsequently the nature of its “desegregation”. This study also seeks to establish that though D.C.’s esotericism of course made its particular brand of “desegregation” unique, the broad characteristics of -and approach of the authorities to- “desegregation” in D.C. was similar to large northern cities, and that D.C. was “northern” in this sense due to its similar positioning as a recipient of significant in-migration from the Black South, resulting in drastic demographic shifts. The focus on the municipal actors- the Board and Superintendent- facilitates such inter-municipal comparatives. In this regard, this study attempts to place the D.C. school “desegregation” into the established literature of “northern” school desegregation, such as the works of Jeanne Theoharis and Davison M. Douglas, while disputing early conclusions such as those by June Shagaloff in 1963 that in such

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Drew, ‘Recurring Themes of Educational Finance in the History of Washington, D.C., 1804-1982’, *District of Columbia University, Studies in D.C. History, Policy Paper No. 3*, <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED218376.pdf>>, [accessed 13/05/2019], p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Steven J. Diner, ‘The Governance of Education in the District of Columbia: An Historical Analysis of Current Issues’, *Studies in D.C. History and Public Policy Paper No. 2* (1982), University of the District of Columbia, <<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED218375>> [accessed 20/01/2019], P. ii.

cities schooling was “obviously only segregated solely because of housing patterns”.<sup>3</sup> In D.C., as in elsewhere and in particular in northern metropolises, the maintenance of segregation and superior white education at the expense of black education was a choice: one consistently reinforced by the decisions of administrators.

It is not unreasonable in a geographic sense, given its location, to describe Washington, D.C. as “southern”. It is an enclave surrounded by two former Confederate states which held onto the institution of slavery with an iron-shackle grip until defeat in the Civil War forced them to no longer practice and profit from black enslavement. The capital district is just over the southern side of the Mason-Dixon line and thus It may also be tempting, as Brett Gadsden has pointed out, to describe border-adjacent localities such as DC’s as being “a world between” North and South.<sup>4</sup>

However, in any analysis of segregation and desegregation in the District of Columbia, a further question must be asked: whether Washington, D.C. can be considered “southern” -or indeed a “middle ground”- in its race relations and as part of that, whether there are race relations and patterns of discrimination which are uniquely and intractably “southern”. The complex reality is that as many historians have highlighted, that the South is a large and hugely internally-divergent region. Race relations are often peculiar to the hyperlocal and subregional units of analysis: cities and rural areas behave differently with regard to race, as do different cities and different towns, different states, counties, and even different neighbourhoods.

It is hence crucial in any understanding of the racial history of Washington, D.C., to analyse and evaluate the construction of the racial history of “The South”, and particularly to examine the notion of a uniquely southern racism, often termed “southern exceptionalism” into which Washington’s geographic location makes it likely to be assumed to neatly fit.

By the mid twentieth century it became clear among historians that there was no “solid south”, as V.O. Key proved as early as 1949; the South contained multitudes.<sup>5</sup> C. Vann Woodward’s

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<sup>3</sup> June Shagaloff, ‘A Review of Public School Desegregation in the North and West’, *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (Feb, 1963), pp. 292-296.

<sup>4</sup> Brett Gadsden, *Between North and South: Delaware, Desegregation, and the Myth of American Sectionalism*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 3.

demonstration in “*The Strange Career of Jim Crow*” of the “origins of legal segregation in the antebellum North” further muddied the narrative waters of the South’s relationship to the North.

<sup>6</sup>A new generation of historians began to even more firmly refute the idea of southern exceptionalism in the 1960s. The anthology “*The Southerner as American*” put forward a thesis which attacked the narrative of “national innocence” in relation to racism. Howard Zinn then argued succinctly and summatively in his “*The Southern Mystique*” in 1964 that racism was a national reality, rather than simply southern.<sup>7</sup>

Historians have since rebuilt a framework for understanding race relations and segregation in America to replace that of strict sectionalism which these most recent forebears had torn down. Many turned their attentions to localised studies outside the South, in order to illuminate the previously unexamined finer textures of segregation there and begin to work to fill in what Thomas Sugrue has labelled a “forgotten history”.<sup>8</sup> In doing this, historians have simultaneously deconstructed a myth of southern or northern essentialism: that a locality’s race relations and patterns of segregation are determined primarily by its geographical northernness or southernness. These localised studies have produced what Jeanne Theoharis has described as an “avalanche” of scholarship outside of the South in recent decades, and though it has yet to filter through to public consciousness or make as big a dent as is necessary in the wealth of simplified, southern-centric academic literature, the geographic complexities of American racism are now appreciated in the historiography of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>9</sup>

The popular narrative of Civil Rights post-*Brown* tends to be a saviour narrative rooted in the misinformed concept of southern exceptionalism. The lens through which the ‘classic’ period of Civil Rights (1954-65), into which the timeline of the desegregation of the DC school system neatly fits, is that of an enlightened, distinct, and superior North attempting to drag the regressive, racist ‘South’ kicking and screaming into sharing its supposedly egalitarian racial attitudes and practices. Much of the early analysis of the Civil Rights Movement was heavily

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<sup>6</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow (Third Edition)*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Howard Zinn, ‘The Southern Mystique’, *The American Scholar*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (1964), pp. 49-56.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, (New York: Random House, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018), p. 33.

orientated towards the South.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that much of the American popular memory of civil rights and segregation is also focussed on the South. The cause lies in the relationship between the founding 'American Dream' on which the nation's identity is built: that all are created equal and free to pursue their best life, which then leads to the modern "American Dilemma" as highlighted by Gunnar Myrdal in his 1944 study of American race relations. Myrdal underscored the incongruity of this founding myth with the reality of the restricted social, political, and economic existence of black people in America. These two irreconcilable truths thus required a cognitive dissonance in the popular mindset: The rest of the nation needed a lightning rod, through which they could conduct, and to which they could confine, the entirety of the nation's racial ills. The South, with its more brash, legally overt forms of segregation was the natural choice to become as Griffin and Doyle observed "a repository for America's problems".<sup>11</sup> This is of course not to say that the South is some kind of victim of framing, or that the South was not virulently and brutally racist. Simply that it was not the lone walled outpost of mid-Century American racism; it is "not to absolve the South but implicate the Nation".<sup>12</sup>

The national character of American racism has its roots long before segregation and in the institution of slavery. As Farrow, Lang, and Frank have deftly laid out, the North was just as "complicit" in slavery as the South, as though it managed to generally achieve the same cognitive dissonance which would be required later in order to cope with the mid-20th Century "American Dilemma".<sup>13</sup>

Dismantling of the idea of the South as a monolith- as the evil racist part of the otherwise racially harmonious USA- is not to say that the South and the North were or are the same in the way their racism manifests, but rather to decry regional moral relativism and assert that the best historical analyses of race relations should centre on the specific undulations of the locality, rather than the region, which tends to be "the most popular but also the most imprecise scale of

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (eds.), *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Larry J. Griffin and Don H. Doyle, eds., *The South as an American Problem*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, 'Introduction' in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 14

<sup>13</sup> Anne Farrow, Jenifer Frank, and Joel Lang, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profiteered from Slavery*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005).

analysis”.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately northern communities were not necessarily any less racist or less segregated than those in the south.

The presence of official policies of segregation have been well-established by historians as being present in schools throughout the entire country. In the West of the United States, only in 1947 did a Supreme Court decision in *Mendez v. Westminster* outlaw the century-old practice of segregating Mexican-American children into ‘remedial’ schools in California.<sup>15</sup> In the North, Davison M. Douglas has highlighted the prevalence of government-sponsored school segregation through the assignment of black children to separate schools or classrooms “persisted in open defiance of state law” well into the 1950s and “most northern states engaged in school segregation at some point”.<sup>16</sup> While the exact chronologies vary, with some states such as Iowa, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey ending their practices of separating black and white children into different schools well before the end of the nineteenth Century , many continued much later. Communities in Ohio, as well as others in New Jersey and elsewhere continued to openly, officially segregate their schools until as late as the mid-1950s.<sup>17</sup> Work done by Brett Gadsden has also accounted for similar patterns of legal school segregation in Delaware, an apparent ‘border’ state between North and South, where right up until 1954, the state maintained legally separate and manifestly unequal schools, such to the extent that it needed to be, as in the case of Washington, D.C., overturned one of the companion cases to *Brown* in 1954- *Gebhart v. Belton*.<sup>18</sup> These ideas of “de jure” and “de facto” made little difference to the parents of the small black child barred from attending a decent school, be it through overt policy or indirectly through processes such as redlining.<sup>19</sup> “De jure” and “de facto” were both equally deprivational, and equally racist. As a strong scholarly consensus has asserted, the broad, sweeping contrasts which are often made between the “de facto” state of

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<sup>14</sup> Lassiter and Crespino, ‘Introduction’ in “*Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*”, p.18.

<sup>15</sup> Francisco Macias, ‘Before Brown v. Board of Education There Was Mendez v. Westminster’, *Library of Congress Blogs*, <<https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2014/05/before-brown-v-board-of-education-there-was-mendez-v-westminster/?locl=bloglaw>>, [accessed 01/07/2019].

<sup>16</sup> Davison M. Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle of Northern School Desegregation, 1865-1954*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 237-273.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Gadsden, *Between North and South*.

<sup>19</sup> John Yinger, *Closed Doors, Opportunities Lost: The Continuing Costs of Housing Discrimination*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997). ; Jan Ondrich, Stephen Ross, and John Yinger, ‘Geography of Housing Discrimination’, *Journal of Housing Research*, Vol. 12, Issue 2 (2001).

segregation outside of the South and the actual segregation of the South are artificial and serve as “exculpatory language” for deliberate, continued racial imbalance in schooling.<sup>20</sup>

While scholars have extensively mapped and painstakingly explained the nature of supposed “de facto” housing segregation as being deliberate and malicious, “most urban and suburban historians” until relatively recently appeared to have “halted at the schoolhouse door”: a practice this piece hopes to help remedy.<sup>21</sup>

Any presentation of the South as a villainous bogeyman and the North as a paragon of racial harmony ignores the reality and ignores their intricacies.. Any assumption that D.C. is a part of a blanket South- or even a liminal space adjacent to a blanket South- would also be reductive and neglect other aspects of the city’s character which shaped its specific race relations: its status as an urban metropolitan centre, as a ward of the federal government, as a city experiencing significant black migration, and its location in the ‘Upper South’ and therefore a different geographic region to Alabama, Mississippi et al.- to name but a few. These factors combined to create by the mid-twentieth century a form of race relations uniquely shaped by “powerful but lowkey segregationists”.<sup>22</sup> Equally dangerous is viewing D.C. through an entirely national lens. Inviewing the black freedom struggle through an entirely national lens, there is the risk of “flattening” the local and regional character which of course helped shape individual episodes of that struggle, as Clarence Lang has underscored. Lang also points out the “complex heritage” of the border South, and stresses that “this varied in expression across individual cases”.<sup>23</sup> Any effective and rigorous analysis of school (de)segregation in Washington must therefore use the

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<sup>20</sup> For quote on “exculpatory language”, see: Matthew D. Lassiter, ‘De Jure/ De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth’ in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* by Lassiter and Crespino (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 29-47, p. 29.

Further examples of such scholarship include: Brian Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the County of Kings: The Congress of Racial Equality in Brooklyn* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2013). ; Andrew R. Highsmith and Ansley T. Erickson, ‘Segregation as Splitting, Segregation as Joining: Schools, Housing, and the Many Modes of Jim Crow’, *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 121, No. 4 (2015), 563-595. ; Ansley T. Erickson, *Making the Unequal Metropolis: School Desegregation and Its Limits*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). ; Matthew D. Lassiter, ‘Schools and Housing in Metropolitan History: An Introduction,’ *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 38, no. 2, (2012).

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). ; Jack Dougherty, ‘Shopping for Schools: How Public Education and Private Housing Shaped Suburban Connecticut’, *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 38, no. 2 (2012), p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation’s Capital*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), p. 290.

<sup>23</sup> Clarence Lang, ‘Locating the Civil Rights Movement: An Essay on the Deep South, Midwest, and Border South in Black Freedom Studies’, *Journal of Social History*, (Vol. 47, No.2, Winter 2013), pp. 371-400.

municipality as its primary unit of analysis, with comparisons and contrasts to be made to other municipal units.

## **II: The *Brown* decisions in practice: Obfuscation and Implementation across the Nation**

It is widely acknowledged (in the academic literature, though lamentably less so in the public discourse around race in the United States) that in the years and generations after the Supreme Court ruled segregated education unconstitutional in the *Brown* decisions of the mid-1950s, segregated schooling persisted. Only 10.8% of students in the seventeen states immediately affected by the decisions attended desegregated schools ten years on.<sup>24</sup> In the former Confederate states of the South, only 1.17% of black students attended school with white peers by 1964.<sup>25</sup> Though the legal evisceration of dual school systems represented a significant technical victory and armed activists across the nation with the useful stick of legal precedent with which to beat intransigent, racist school boards in future legal cases, the extent to which *Brown et al.* was a practical victory for black children and their education was extremely limited, something which Gerald Rosenberg has pointed out in describing the Court as “constrained” in its ability to affect widespread social change.<sup>26</sup> There is wide recognition of the widespread opposition to school integration in the South, particularly the Deep South, in both the academic record and public discourse, including recent analysis of the role of white femininity and motherhood in racial conservatism and maintaining racial segregation, and a localised analysis of the maintenance of segregation in Alabama.<sup>27</sup> It must be underscored that even in resisting *Brown*, the South was not monolithic- as Anders Walker has highlighted- state officials in places such as North Carolina, Mississippi, and Florida offered resistance less ‘massive’ and less sensationalist than elsewhere. This resistance was still clear in its attempts to preserve segregation, simply less vulgar.<sup>28</sup> Remarkably little attention has been given until recently to a more insidious but equally virulent resistance to desegregating public school systems outside of

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<sup>24</sup> Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting The Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald N. Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Harrell R. Rodgers, Jr. and Charles D. Bullock III, ‘School Desegregation: A Policy Analysis’, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (1972), pp. 410-411; Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, pp. 31-33. ; Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) ; Vivian G. Morris and Curtis L. Morris, *The Price They Paid: Desegregation in an African American Community*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Anders Walker, *The Ghost of Jim Crow: How Southern Moderates Used Brown v. Board of Education to Stall Civil Rights*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the 'othered' South. Though the concept of 'southern exceptionalism' was undeniably a myth, it was a powerful one. This myth shaped attitudes in the non-South so strongly that it became the defining factor in communities' and officials' analyses of their own school systems across the non-South: "this is not Birmingham" became the assuager of any guilt or doubts about the virtuousness of northern school systems: If racism was not in the form of pitchforks and burning crosses, it was not racism.<sup>29</sup> This attitude was near-universal outside the 'South', with the result that:

"by 1954, most urban and suburban school districts outside the southern states operated nominally 'colorblind' neighbourhood school systems, anchored in racially segregated housing patterns and gerrymandered attendance zones, often combined with "freedom of choice" transfer policies that allowed white students to escape majority-black or majority-latino facilities".<sup>30</sup>

Though this situation was extant in the northern school schools before 1954, as overt legal segregation was largely eradicated in the years before *Brown*, this same approach and rhetoric would be taken after the Washington, D.C., public school system was officially "desegregated" in 1954-56: an attitude of "colorblindness" and "neighbourhood" schooling which would continue segregation in every meaningful sense, as almost every mechanism in place to avoid school integration in other public school systems in the North at the start of the 1950s- and throughout- was present in D.C. after 1954. Washington was geographically southern, but then again so was Los Angeles (latitudinally, the latter is further South than the University of Mississippi: 'Ole Miss'). However, D.C. officials as in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago amongst others, were informed in their practices and attitudes towards school integration by their not being in the Deep South, and, crucially, their being in the "North" in terms of their not being in the constructed "South", as well as in the dynamics of the Great Migration.

The process of achieving meaningful integration- in which black and white children's schooling would be of universally-equal high quality and an allocation of resources removed from racial considerations- was a question of the active over the passive. As Matthew Lassiter has argued convincingly, the Court decisions in the *Brown* cases, along with the "artificial dichotomy"

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<sup>29</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement outside the South' in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, Ed. by Lassiter and Crespino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 48-68, (p. 50).

<sup>30</sup> Lassiter, 'De Facto/ De Jure', p. 30.

between de jure and de facto school segregation, facilitated and justified a passivity among local authorities, particularly notably so (and most relevant to the nature of the situation in Washington, D.C.) in metropolitan areas.<sup>31</sup> Derrick Bell has underscored this failure of the *Brown* decisions to take account of the wider causes of school segregation: implementing no plans or deadlines, and therefore failing to properly address it.<sup>32</sup> The wording of the *Brown* decisions, engineered to overturn the six-decade-old *Plessy* precedent, centered on the fact that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”<sup>33</sup> This narrow focus on state-mandated, supposed “de jure” segregation as opposed to any and all forms of substantive segregation reinforced the false and extreme perceptual binary of school systems: either they were dual systems, with separate facilities for whites and non-whites and therefore segregated, or they were not, and therefore were not segregated.

There was widespread denial in the rest of the country (the non-South) of the clear and widespread reality of “the government policies which shaped housing and school segregation in metropolitan regions throughout the United States”: these were not simply the result of local custom or interest group dynamics.<sup>34</sup> Specifically and somewhat ironically the New Deal, whose virtuous impunity in the eyes of liberal America was never brought into question. This was despite the fact that it deliberately and overtly implemented a system of ranking neighbourhoods on a grade scale in which racial composition was a crucial factor- sacrificing black Americans’ life chances at the altar of homeownership.<sup>35</sup>

It is also apparent that “significant popular support for meaningful levels of racial integration never existed (among whites) throughout the country. Local authorities outside of the South “seized on the de facto rationale” to limit their own intervention to the supposed ‘de jure’ and frame de facto segregation caused by housing patterns as “beyond their control”- the results of the private, personal decisions of American citizens exercising their free will to create an ‘organic’ situation of racial ghettoisation, as was the case in Washington, D.C.<sup>36</sup> The strength of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Derrick A. Bell, ‘Dissenting’, in *What Brown vs. Board of Education Should Have Said*, Edited by Jack M. Balkin, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 185-200.

<sup>33</sup> “Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)”, *Justia*, <<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/347/483/>> [accessed 05/04/2019]

<sup>34</sup> Lassiter, ‘De Facto/ De Jure’, p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant With Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn, 1636-1990*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 182.

<sup>36</sup> Lassiter, ‘De Facto/ De Jure’, p. 30.

this narrative and perverse incentives it created was such that, as Davison M Douglas has highlighted, many school officials after 1954 in the North outright denied that there had ever been legally mandated school segregation in their jurisdictions.<sup>37</sup> Housing segregation was most extreme in the northern metropolitan centers, whose racial populations were shifting significantly as an influx of black residents due to the Second Great Migration led to an exodus of the city's white population, commonly termed "white flight", of which this piece argues Washington D.C. was functionally a part.<sup>38</sup> This combination of white opposition towards active integration and entrenched housing segregation allowed segregation to effectively continue.

The response to the *Brown* decision itself in northern communities generally was one of detachment. Some school districts in the North were officially segregated and operated separate schools for the races right up until the early 1950s, but though the majority of northern communities had maintained officially-segregated systems in the first half of the twentieth century as a direct and racist reaction to the Great Migration of black citizens to these northern communities, most had made overt administrative assignment of children to separate schools according to race illegal before the *Brown* decisions. By 1949 all of the northern states had outlawed explicit segregated schooling, which made the technicalities of the *Brown* decisions largely redundant there and required little to no change of school boards in their administration of school systems.<sup>39</sup> Continued school segregation in the North despite these legal changes is of particular utility in framing the D.C. situation as a broadly similar pattern emerged there. Though the legal change in the capital happened later (1954) than generally in the North and through Supreme Court decision in *Bolling* rather than state or local legislation, the resulting changes in the administration of the school systems were remarkably similar: authorities tasked with making the changes and the communities involved made little outright attempt to defy the law or significantly obfuscate and delay its implementation. Rather, they implemented the changes the law required and officially desegregated, merging the administration of the two school systems rapidly while actually doing very little to actively integrate through combating the entrenched results of previous school segregation or countering the housing segregation which fed the continued reality of racially separate schools. The housing situation, and therefore the school situation, was particularly stark in the northern cities as in Washington, D.C. as racial

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<sup>37</sup> Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*.

<sup>38</sup> William H. Frey, 'Black In-Migration, White Flight, and the Changing Economic Base of the Central City', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 85, No. 6 (Spring 1980), pp. 1396-1417.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, pp. 219-220.

demographics shifted there to the greatest extent.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the best units of comparative analysis for the case of the D.C. school system are of large northern cities which were affected demographically to similar extents by black migration and the so-called “white flight” response to it, and whose school systems were hence most similar in character and in the circumstances and challenges they had to contend with.<sup>41</sup> These were cities whose black populations were increasing significantly, both numerically and in terms of the percentage of the overall population, while the white population was decreasing by both measures, as was the case in D.C. in terms of its positioning within the dynamics of the Second Great Migration, along with the liberalising pull of being the seat of federal government and its location being “not (in) the Deep South” in the nation’s imagined binary of race relations, meant that D.C. acted similarly to northern cities in its attitudes and policies around school desegregation.<sup>42</sup>

The responses of “border” states to *Brown* were varied. Virginia, to the immediate South of D.C. led the South’s “Massive Resistance” to school desegregation, with one county there even going as far as shutting down its public school system entirely rather than integrate.<sup>43</sup> Brett Gadsden has shown how Delaware officials were very sensitive to the politics of locality there due to a genuine mix of urban, industrial North and farm-based, conservative South. Though, as in D.C., the state Board of Education pledged to “carry out the Court’s mandate”, in Delaware they refused to elucidate any timescales and left plans entirely to local school boards. The Delaware State Board also accepted that certain areas of the state would need significant time to make changes, simply requiring local authorities to submit desegregation plans by that October- not to have integrated by then. The closest parallel to D.C. in Delaware was Wilmington, the state’s largest city, where a meeting of the Board was held a month after the initial *Brown* decision in 1954 and though it did not agree to any sweeping changes, it began processes of desegregation, and made sufficient steps by July of that year to have adopted a “freedom of choice”, and “open enrollment” desegregation plan to be implemented that September, which was strikingly similar to the course of events in D.C. that same Summer.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011) ; Author unknown, ‘The Great Migration, 1910 to 1970’, *United States Census Bureau*, <<https://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/020/>>, [accessed on 29/06/2019].

<sup>41</sup> Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, ‘Demographic Trends in the 20th Century’, *United States Census Bureau*, <<https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>>, [accessed 08/05/2019] , p. 33

<sup>42</sup> G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s*, (New York: Penguin Press, 1980).

<sup>43</sup> Jill O. Titus, *Brown’s Battleground: Students, Segregationists, and the Struggle for Justice in Prince Edward County, Virginia*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Gadsden, *Between North and South*, pp. 101-105.

In Maryland, a similar hands-off statewide approach was taken, whereby different counties adopted different policies. Though there was no statewide attempt to defy the initial *Brown* decision of May 1954, the counties in the state adopted a “wait and see” attitude, holding off on any action until the 1955 *Brown II* decision on implementation.<sup>45</sup> However, Baltimore- the state’s largest city and with significant measure of administrative autonomy- did take a similar approach to D.C. in its immediate response to *Brown*. Some teacher transfers were made immediately, and by September 1955 there were 4,000 black students attending formerly all-white schools- a similar number to the 3,000 initial pupil transfers in the first year of D.C.’s desegregation plan.<sup>46</sup> Thus, D.C. broadly shared little in common with “border” states in these aspects, beyond the fact that- as with almost all areas of the Upper South cede Virginia, authorities “accepted the validity of the Supreme Court decree” but “aimed to evade its consequences” by launching weak, superficial desegregation plans.<sup>47</sup>

New York, Los Angeles and Chicago provide the most informative northern parallels with D.C. All experienced considerable overall population increases in the period 1940 to 1960. Crucially, all these cities experienced significant shifts in their demographic makeup, as the white proportion of their populations decreased significantly despite often increasing numerically simply because the black population increases were so significant. Though D.C. was affected by these shifts to the greatest extent, lurching from more than two-thirds white in 1940 to becoming the first majority-black city in America by 1960, these cities offer the closest similarities. Part of the reason for D.C.’s apparently huge shifts also lies in the specifics of its delineation: in the context of the Great Migration, black citizens shifted not just from the rural South to the urban North, but white citizens did so reflexively too, from city to suburb as the proportion of the population in metropolitan areas living in the city proper reduced from 62.6% to 51.3%.<sup>48</sup> These cities were becoming more black, and less white.

Officials in these cities clung in the years after 1954 to philosophies of “neighbourhood schooling”, which dictated that children attend the school closest to them so as to disrupt neither

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<sup>45</sup> G. James Fleming, ‘Racial Integration in Education in Maryland’, *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 273-284, p. 277.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 274-275.

<sup>47</sup> J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954-1978*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 78-80.

<sup>48</sup> J.L. Rury, ‘Race, Space, and the Politics of Chicago’s Public Schools: Benjamin Willis and the Tragedy of Urban Education’, *History Quarterly*, (Vol 39, Issue 2: 1999), pp. 117-142, p. 121

the child's life nor the natural and desirable cohesion of local communities.<sup>49</sup> As David J. Armor has pointed out, the rubric of "neighbourhood schools" was one which has been historically employed almost everywhere in the United States "with the exception of the former dual school systems of the South", who had no need for its pretence.<sup>50</sup> While an entirely reasonable principle in theory, rooted in American national mythology of the small town as ideal and the closeness of local communities, in the practical context of heavily ghettoised cities and therefore largely monoracial neighbourhoods, this had the effect of schools continuing to be segregated by race.<sup>51</sup> As sociologist Henri Lefebvre has pointed out in his theory of the social production of space, space in urban environments is "sociologically produced, or that it is politically constructed, but that it assumes the appearance of a "naturally occurring arrangement" of society.<sup>52</sup> Attitudes which framed the "neighbourhood school" as the organic status quo (and thereby, school segregation as "de facto") and measures to alter that status quo to ensure parity for non-white children in ways such as "forced busing" as inorganic are symptomatic of this understanding of place, and informed the motives and actions of public officials in the northern cities and in D.C. These terms became racialised codes which facilitated outright opposition to methods of integration, by framing those methods as artificial interventions: overreach by authorities into the ostensibly free choices of Americans.

One prominent example is New York City. Such was the power of this ideal of neighbourhood schooling that, the authorities in one of the most liberal locales in America "refused to consider any steps" in the decade after *Brown* that "subverted the educational philosophy of neighbourhood schools", as Board members openly stated that they viewed housing segregation as the natural result of the idea that humans were inclined to "live with one's own".<sup>53</sup> Even relatively "modest" proposals in the largest city in the nation, with only limited reassignment of teachers and some redrawn attendance zones with optional transfers of students, were defeated by local opposition arguing under the neighbourhood principle. Such was this level of denial mixed with detachment among the school authorities that the Superintendent of Schools, William Jansen, instructed his staff not to use the term "segregated"

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<sup>49</sup> Luis Fuentes, 'The Neighbourhood School Concept: A Real History', *Equity & Excellence in Education*, Vol. 19, (1981), pp. 64-67.

<sup>50</sup> David J. Armor, *Forced Justice: School Desegregation and the Law*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Sheila Webb, 'A Pictorial Myth in the Pages of "Life": Small-Town America as the Ideal Place', *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2006), pp. 35-58.

<sup>52</sup> Rury, 'Race, Space, and the Politics', p. 118.

<sup>53</sup> Lassiter, 'De Facto/ De Jure', p. 31. ; Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, pp. 37-38.

to describe the state of the city's schools, urging them to use less emotive terms such as "racially imbalanced", in order to quell any sense of outrage or urgency, and shift the situation from one actively maintained to one passively tolerated.<sup>54</sup> Special committees were set up by the authorities not with mandates to solve problems, but rather to decide whether problems existed at all. This resulted in a situation in which, as no active measures whatsoever had been taken to integrate the school system, non-white children continued to attend worse schools and receive worse educations in New York City after 1954. As Adina Black has highlighted, the racial inequality in New York City's public schools was a clear issue that took up a "heightened urgency" in the 1950s as black parent activists' vigorous organised dissent throughout this period shows.<sup>55</sup> Around a third of the city's non-white children attended heavily non-white schools (categorised as >85% non-white students), with many more obviously attending schools segregated to a lesser extent. Though the per-pupil spend in these heavily black and hispanic schools was roughly similar to the majority white schools, the buildings were much older: the average majority-white Junior High in New York City was 15 years old while the average majority-minority Junior High was 35 years old. These schools with large majority non-white populations also had on average fewer permanent teachers, with resulting racial gaps in pupil to teacher ratios plugged by supply teachers.<sup>56</sup> Such was the clear lack of school integration in New York City that in 1964, fully ten years post-*Brown*, a one-day boycott in protest of this fact was held by 300,000 black and Hispanic students there.<sup>57</sup> These realities thoroughly support Jeanne Theoharis' conclusion that like so many other northern cities, "New York City never comprehensively desegregated its schools".<sup>58</sup>

Of further relevance to the process of school desegregation in Washington, D.C. are the paths of those same processes in Los Angeles. The black population in Los Angeles also roughly trebled, and was 13.5% of the city's population by 1960 and complemented by significant

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Adina Black, "Exposing the 'Whole Segregation Myth': The Harlem Nine and New York City's School Desegregation Battles" in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, ed. by Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 65-92.

<sup>56</sup> Nathan Glazer, 'Is 'Integration Possible in the New York Public Schools?', *Commentary Magazine*, Sept. 1960, <<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/is-integration-possible-in-the-new-york-schools/>>, [accessed 10/06/2019].

<sup>57</sup> Lassiter, 'De Facto/ De Jure', p. 36.

<sup>58</sup> Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, p. 33; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, 'Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States', *U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Working Paper 56*, 2002, < <https://census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>>, [accessed 10/01/2019], Table: "New York", p. 65.

hispanic influx as well.<sup>59</sup> Proportionately, though not numerically, these increases were even larger than that in D.C., where more than 200,000 migrants had doubled the black population in these two decades. Jeanne Theoharis has shown that school officials in Los Angeles utilised the fact that their city's school segregation did not precisely mirror that of the Deep South to refute segregation's very existence, shifting the burden of proving that the schools were in fact segregated onto civil rights activists and avoiding wholesale structural change through passivity.<sup>60</sup>

Similar administrative manoeuvres were made in Los Angeles as would later be made in D.C., such as the utilisation of "attendance boundaries, feeder patterns, transportation policies (and) teacher hiring practices" to ensure the retention of the segregated status quo.<sup>61</sup> In a particular similarity to Washington, D.C., this continued school segregation would later be ruled by federal courts to be deliberate and illegal, at least partly due to their policies of tracking non-white pupils into manual or vocational programs as opposed to college preparatory ones.<sup>62</sup> In a 1967 legal case, *Hobson v. Hansen*, the D.C. school track system-introduced just one year after the *Brown* decisions and the implementation of the Superintendent's integration plan- was ruled to have done the same. Both track systems can be considered what Reva Siegel has termed "preservation (of segregation) through transformation", and Anders Walker has expounded to be part of the non-defiant backlash to *Brown's* mandates, "transforming the legal criteria for segregating students from overt racial classifications to facially neutral, standards-based criteria".<sup>63</sup>

Data on disparities in Los Angeles presented by Josh Sides show pattern of housing segregation there throughout the 1940s and '50s led by white homeowners and "buttressed by the policies" of local, state, and federal institutions, as what had previously been multiracial neighbourhoods became monoracial.<sup>64</sup> However, even during these earlier times of relatively-integrated housing, schooling had remained segregated by the authorities, through the drawing of irregularly-shaped blatantly-gerrymandered attendance zones, and in drawing the most

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, Table: 'California'.

<sup>60</sup> Theoharis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight', p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 52-53.

<sup>63</sup> Reva Siegel, 'Why Equal Protection No Longer Protects', *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 49, No. 5 (1997). ; Anders Walker, *The Ghost of Jim Crow*, p.7.

<sup>64</sup> Josh Sides, *LA City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 96.

monoracial borders possible between these attendance zones, even where simple slight adjustments could have been drawn to integrate the schools in many areas.<sup>65</sup> An increase in segregation in housing post- World War II in Los Angeles mirrored that in D.C., and meant “school segregation worsened in Los Angeles after the *Brown* decision”, as these racial gerrymanders and racist school assignment practices became easier to justify and obfuscate with the rhetoric of “color-blindness” and neighbourhood schools. In fact, school officials continually redrew school assignment boundaries as just one of many “systematic methods” of maintaining segregated schools in LA during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>66</sup>

A “culturalist” discourse further emerged in these cities, whereby black underachievement was attributed to cultural deprivation rather than inferior, segregated education.<sup>67</sup> This was despite the fact that the roots of black underachievement were clear for anyone who bothered to look. As the 1965 report “The Negro Family: The Case For National Action” by then- Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Moynihan made abundantly clear, the deprivational aspects of the black ghettos were not individual or interpersonal but structural, and a clear trajectory could be traced from the injustices of slavery and Reconstruction right through to the contemporary issues in black ghettos.<sup>68</sup>

The idea that black communities were collectively and culturally responsible for their own children’s educational shortcomings was something which legitimised white opposition to integration as one of purely educational concerns over their children’s progress being hampered by slower classmates rather than a social one of simply not wanting their children to mix with black children. Equally, this focus on the power of the individual student and their immediate family and community units to improve their education led the conversation away from broader questions of racial and structural inequality and the inevitability of black underachievement in the context of underfunded black education.<sup>69</sup> This rhetoric would also be used in Washington, D.C. after *Bolling* to the same ends. Ultimately, these justifications fed directly into the “freedom

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<sup>65</sup> Theoharis, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight’, pp.53; 57-58.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel P. Moynihan et al., ‘The Negro Family: The Case For National Action’, *Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labour*, March 1965, <<https://web.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Moynihan's%20The%20Negro%20Family.pdf>>, [accessed 17/07/2019].

<sup>69</sup> Roderick L. Carey, ‘A Cultural Analysis of the Achievement Gap Discourse: Challenging the Language and Labels Used in the Work of School Reform’, *Urban Education*, Vol. 49, Issue 4 (2014), pp. 440-468.

of choice” plans implemented in these cities, which ostensibly provided its citizens with the ultimate colourblind American value of personal choice, but financial provisions to support those wishing to transfer were consistently and deliberately absent from such programs.<sup>70</sup> The obvious result was that wealthier white students could afford to self-select, and essentially opt out of integration by transferring to further-away white schools while their generally poorer black peers, unable to afford transport and without any public provision of funds for busing, were restricted to their local ghetto school.<sup>71</sup> By the early-1970s, the worsening results of these policies were stark and obvious, as 87% of black students in Los Angeles attended schools which were at least 80% non-white, and 8% attended schools which were 100% non-white.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps the most relevant case study to that of the school segregation in Washington, D.C. is that of Chicago. Though no major city matched D.C.’s rapid and dramatic increase in black population as it became the nation’s first majority-black major city by the end of the 1950s, Chicago perhaps comes closest. Between 1940 and 1960, both cities experienced significant growth in their already-substantial black populations as Chicago’s black population almost trebled from 277,731 (8.2% of the total population) to 812,637 (22.9% of the total population), while in D.C. the black contingent of the population increased from 187,266 (28.2% of the total population) to 411,737 (53.9% of the total population”. Both cities also experienced significant decreases in their white populations over this period, as around 400,000 whites left Chicago (c. 13% on the 1940 total white population), and almost 130,000 whites left the District of Columbia (c. 27% decrease on the 1940 total white population).<sup>73</sup>

Similarities in the attitudes to school desegregation and official policy approaches to integrating the public school systems in these two cities reflect these similarities in racial demographic shifts. Particularly remarkable were the similarities in tenure and outlook of the respective School Superintendents: Benjamin Coppage Willis who arrived in Chicago to lead the public schools in 1953, Hobart Corning, who was in charge of the D.C. schools before, during, and immediately after “desegregation”, and Carl Hansen who became Superintendent of the D.C. school system in 1958 having previously held positions as Associate and then Assistant

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<sup>70</sup> Lassiter, ‘De Jure/ De Facto Segregation’ in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, eds. Lassiter and Crespino, p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Theoharis, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight’, p. 54.

<sup>72</sup> Sides, *LA City Limits*, p. 195.

<sup>73</sup> Gibson and Jung, ‘Historical Census Statistics’, Tables: ‘District of Columbia’ p. 41, ‘Illinois’ p. 46.

Superintendent there since 1947 under his predecessor as Superintendent, Hobart Corning.<sup>74</sup> Hansen introduced a four-track system into the D.C. system which separated students ostensibly according to academic ability as measured by test scores and at the time was seen as at the vanguard of the future of education.<sup>75</sup> Willis improved various aspects of the Chicago schools during his tenure, including swathes of construction to improve physical school facilities totalling over \$250million, decreased average class sizes, and increased average teachers' salaries.<sup>76</sup>

Like many other school officials in the northern cities, Corning and Hansen were wedded to the ideal of neighbourhood schooling, and Willis similarly resisted any attempts to make schools arenas or laboratories for social change, and because *Brown* had in Chicago as across the nation "implied more than it immediately resolved", it was left for local officials such as these to interpret through their own socially-constructed biases.<sup>77</sup> Just as Willis, when pressed, insisted that he was unaware of the racial demographics of his school system as it was irrelevant to his "colorblind" approach, Hansen- along with his Board of Education- made a request to the D.C. commissioners in 1960 to end the practice of monitoring the racial composition of the school system which had been required by an Act of Congress since 1925, arguing that it "no longer served a useful purpose".<sup>78</sup> These "colorblind" approaches, as elsewhere in the nation, refused to take any responsibility for real, active integration in the schools. Both resigned in the mid 1960s as a result of backlash to their "colorblind" policies which had essentially been deemed little short of continued segregation. Hansen resigned in 1967 after the Board of Education refused to allow him to appeal a legal decision which deemed his track system to be segregatory, and Willis agreed to retire in 1966 following large-scale protests in which classrooms were boycotted and his own home was picketed.<sup>79</sup>

As early as 1957, Willis had been made aware of the plight of his system's black students who attended schools with an average enrollment of 1,200 students while their white peers attended

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<sup>74</sup> For Willis, see: Rury, 'Race, Space, and the Politics', pp. 124-126. ; For Hansen and Corning, see: Frederick Ohles, Shirley M. Ohles, and John G. Ramsay, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern American Educators*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 146-147.

<sup>75</sup> J.Y. Smith, 'Dr. Carl Hansen, Former D.C. School Chief, Dies', *The Washington Post*, August 23, 1983.

<sup>76</sup> Rury, 'Race, Space, and the Politics', pp. 124-126.

<sup>77</sup> Anderson and Pickering, *Confronting The Color Line*, p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> Author Unknown, 'End Urged for Racial Pupil Count', *The Washington Post*, 15th January 1960.

<sup>79</sup> For Hansen's refusal to appeal, see: Smith, 'Dr Carl Hansen..Dies', *Washington Post*; for Willis' retirement, see: Ohles et al., *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 333

schools averaging 700. By 1962, as Willis remained committed to “neighbourhood schools”, the problem was even worse, as 80% of the city’s black children attended virtually all-black schools and of the 20,000 pupils on double-shifts due to overcrowding, well over three-quarters were black. In 1958, the school board reaffirmed its neighbourhood policy and tightened the requirements for transfers.<sup>80</sup> The ever-dogmatic Willis consistently continued to refuse to countenance any proposals to transfer students from overcrowded black schools to empty white classrooms elsewhere in the city on any large scale. The few small-scale, narrow transfer programs initiated were ineffective due to their over-specificity, as a policy of allowing children from schools with over 40 pupils per classroom to attend those with fewer than 30 pupils per classroom affected the transfers of only two hundred children.<sup>81</sup>

Dionne Danna has exhaustively made clear the fact that institutional racism in the Chicago Public Schools and the intransigent opposition of Supt. Willis to anything which might disrupt the ‘natural’ order of neighbourhood schooling caused the local approach to school desegregation “to stall”, in spite of the work of committed local activists, including the compilation of forensically detailed reports which laid bare the stark inequality between black and white schooling after the *Brown* decisions. As such, any progress which was made (mostly after the mid-1960s) was due to the federal influence of the 1964 Civil Rights Act rather than any progressively-inclined municipal authorities.<sup>82</sup> True integration necessitated the political. The Constitution, as fundamentally interpreted in the *Brown* cases, does not dictate that school populations be “demographically identical”, simply that they not be “intentionally segregated on the basis of race”, a truly integrationist policy required political action rather than just the superficial desegregation required by a close reading of the law.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, in Chicago, as in D.C. and the other cities discussed here, local authorities adhered to only this bare minimum legal standard, and allowed the public school systems to effectively remain segregated in the decade after *Brown*.

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<sup>80</sup> Anderson and Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line*, p. 77.

<sup>81</sup> Rury, ‘Race, Space, and the Politics’, pp. 129-131.

<sup>82</sup> Dionne Danna, ‘Policy Implications for School Desegregation and School Choice in Chicago’, *The Urban Review*, Vol. 50, Issue 4 (2018), pp. 584-603.

<sup>83</sup> John H. Ely, ‘Concurring in the judgement (except as to remedy)’, in *What Brown vs. Board of Education Should Have Said*, Edited by Jack M. Balkin, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 135-142.

### **III: Structures of Governance Erected, Structures of Schoolhouses Neglected: The Origins and Impacts Washington D.C.'s Peculiar Public School Management**

The D.C. Public School system was chronically underfunded throughout the entire period being analysed here. This was the direct result of the complex system of several different bodies at different levels- the federal and municipal- with different inputs, incentives, and political feedback loops, being variously and separately responsible for the administration, regulation, and financing of the D.C. school system. This created inherent incongruity and conflicting incentives. At the same time, structural changes to the administration of the schools, particularly to the Board of Education at the start of the twentieth century, cemented white supremacy as the unimpeachable, ostensibly apolitical status quo. Historians such as Steven J. Diner have written about the unique limiting structures surrounding education in the District in the twentieth Century, particularly relating to school finance, and this piece seeks to explore how the administrators of the system operated within the confines these structures.

The Public School System in Washington is one of the oldest in the United States- much older even than the D.C government.<sup>84</sup> The first public schools were formed in the then-separate cities of Washington and Georgetown in 1805 and 1810 respectively, barely a generation after the founding of the United States itself.<sup>85</sup> Though these schools were only free of charge for the very poorest and offered only a narrow two-year period of schooling in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as being funded by specific taxes levied on certain less desirable businesses and activities rather than general taxation, they can be reasonably characterised as a part of the proto-Common School Movement which was emerging in the Northeastern United States in the early nineteenth century. This was a nascent campaign particularly in the rapidly-growing urban North in this period with the aim of combining the patchwork of “free schools”, often funded by charity or religious philanthropy, into more class-inclusive systems of “common schools” funded by tax revenues.<sup>86</sup> Black children could not attend these early D.C. schools, nor indeed could

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<sup>84</sup> Though the federal district's origins are as far back as 1790, the District's unified municipal government as currently and permanently constituted was created by the District of Columbia Organic Act of 1871.

<sup>85</sup> J. Ormond Wilson, 'Eighty Years of the Public Schools of Washington: 1805 to 1885', *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.*, Vol. 1 (1897), pp. 119-170 ( pp. 120-125).

<sup>86</sup> William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to 'No Child Left Behind'*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 10-13.

many at all: by 1840 only 989 of the capital's 4,401 school-aged children attended school, and of these only 213 attended the public schools.<sup>87</sup>

This system remained largely unchanged until circumbellum winds of social and political change blew it towards progress in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1845, as the Common School Movement snowballed, a reorganisation of the school system was undertaken, led by prominent members of local elite white society, including then-Mayor William Seaton.<sup>88</sup> These were again shaped by northern influences, as the "New England plan" of increasing school funds through property taxes in order to fund universal schooling (for white children) was adopted, though even by 1857 only slightly more than half of children attended school, and of these, more attended private than public facilities. Piecemeal congressional appropriations were made to Washington's public schools in the 1850s, and by 1878, half of the funding for District government, and therefore the schools, began to be appropriated directly from Congress, including money to build the District's first High School, Central High, in 1881.<sup>89</sup> The new generation of educators in these schools came primarily from the Northeast- Boston, New Jersey and elsewhere.<sup>90</sup>

In 1864, in the midst of the recent outlawing of slavery in the capital district and the ongoing Civil War over slavery, a parallel "colored" public school system was established by Congress.<sup>91</sup> Initially under the direct control of the U.S. Department of Interior, the consolidation of District municipal government in the early 1870s led to the existing board of trustees of the white schools taking responsibility for the black schools as well. A "common board of education composed of white and coloured membership" was formed, which initially retained the black schools' superintendent alongside the white Superintendent. The dual-school system, with separate schools for whites and non-whites, under a single administrative hierarchy was firmly entrenched as the number of pupils in the public schools- particularly the High Schools and

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<sup>87</sup> Wilson, 'Eighty Years of the Public Schools of Washington', p.131.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Robert L. Haycock, 'Sixty Years of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia: 1885 to 1945', *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.*, Vol. 48/49, (1946/47), pp. 29-92, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> Wilson, 'Eighty Years of the Public Schools of Washington', p. 148.

<sup>91</sup> Joseph S. Drew, 'Recurring Themes of Educational Finance in the History of Washington, D.C., 1804-1982', *District of Columbia University, Studies in D.C. History, Policy Paper No. 3*, <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED218376.pdf>>, [accessed 13/05/2019], p.3.

kindergartens- proliferated rapidly into the twentieth century and transformed the D.C. public schools into a large-scale urban school system.<sup>92</sup>

By 1906, these regularly-reconstituted structures had crystallised into the ones which would shape the nature of the administration of the public schools- both black and white. The Organic Law of that year set out the complex cogs of the District's school governance, and the various dimensions through which these cogs would machinate. These structures which governed the public schools of the District for the following two-thirds of a century or so can be broadly separated into administrative and financial aspects, into neither of which the citizens of the District had any input. These systems were inert and unresponsive: overlapping and abutting where they should not have been, and discordant where communication and cooperation were essential for the proper running of the schools. The rigidity of these separate structures and their lack of symbiosis led to an underfunded, failing public school system throughout this period.

The administrative battlelines were set in 1906. The structure of the Board of Education, which would oversee the system at its monthly meetings was crystallised: nine members, three of which were mandated to be three women.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, three members were to be "colored" but rather than by statute, this provision was merely tradition. The previous act creating the Board of Trustees for the schools in 1882 had established this as a legal requirement, and though this requirement was technically overturned by the 1906 law, the practice of appointing three black members was retained.<sup>94</sup> This Board in turn appointed a Superintendent of Schools who was to be an educational expert, in charge of the day-to-day administration of the system as well as being its lead pedagogical policymaker.<sup>95</sup>

Crucially, the process of appointing the Board changed. In an attempt to "depoliticise" the Board of Education, the 1906 restructuring shifted the responsibility of appointing the Board members from the District Commissioners to federal judges of the District of Columbia Circuit Courts.<sup>96</sup> While this made little difference in terms of their mandate- the Board was still appointed indirectly by the President of the United States as both federal judges and the District

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<sup>92</sup> Haycock, 'Sixty Years', pp. 37-40.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>95</sup> Haycock, Robert L. 'Sixty Years', pp. 45-49.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

Commissioners were direct presidential appointees- it did attempt to move the Board above the political fray. This was of course fantastical, as any school board's role in the distribution and management of educational resources is fundamentally political as they attempt to balance the interests of different groups: making value judgements on the best uses for resources, and particularly so in D.C. where the resources were limited by the structural issues around school funding. The legacy of this veneer of apoliticalness was one one which, while the Board in its role had to continue to make what were clearly political decisions and upheld the racial status quo on the schools, it could present the optics of the situation as simply following the law. It could uphold white supremacy while dispensing of all responsibility for doing so.

An early example of this "depoliticised" nature of the Board was in the assignment of a young mixed-race girl, Isabel Wall, to a school in 1910. In response to a Court decision which had ruled that the assignment of pupils whose race was uncertain or contested was entirely at the discretion of the Board of Education, a special Board meeting was called in order to adjudicate as to which of the Divisions the child should be taught in. Wall had initially been accepted by a white school in her neighbourhood as she appeared to be white. As the court case teased out, she was either one-eighth or one-sixteenth black, and the trial judge himself stated there was "no physical characteristic of the child which afforded ocular evidence of aught but the caucasian".<sup>97</sup> However, once the principal found out about the child's mixed ancestry, she was excluded from the school. The judge ruled that the school was within its rights to do so, that it was not unreasonable to describe the child as "colored" in "the common meaning" of the term, and that it was the responsibility of the Board of Education to make such racial distinctions in liminal cases as the laws governing the D.C. schools contained no explicit definition of the terms "white" or colored".<sup>98</sup> Indeed, this ostensibly allowed those officials making such distinctions of race relative freedom in their pronouncements, rather than the rigid definitions of race the white members of the Board indicated they were bound by in the Wall case.

At the Board of Education's meeting in May 1910, it attempted to resolve Wall's situation, with the child and her family present and observing. Several members of the Board made their own pontificating enquiries as to what defined a "colored" child, with one stating that the child

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<sup>97</sup> Legal Syllabus outlining the legal case *Wall vs. Oyster*, Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education, Vertical Files, Folder "Wall vs. Oyster (1910)", Charles Sumner School Museum, Washington D.C., p . 31.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33

appeared white.<sup>99</sup> One white member made the suggestion that a proper process and standard should be established for determining such questions, but in a move telling of the Board's reluctance to make more general pronouncements on such value judgements than were absolutely necessary for preserving the status quo (and could be used to hold them to account in future cases), this idea gained no traction.<sup>100</sup> The Board acknowledged the presence of the Wall family, and then at 5pm took a recess, to return a full four hours later at 9pm to continue deliberations. Such a lengthy delay was not usual Board practice, and in and of itself appears deliberately engineered such that the Wall parents and their young child- or any similarly stakeholding families- would not be able to attend. The 9pm resumption of the meeting was even more bizarre and telling of the Board's desire to avoid public controversy or political disagreement: a half-hour debate about whether or not further witnesses to the matter should be placed under oath was resolved after a ten-minute recess which clearly involved behind-closed-doors compromise among Board members, as the Board had apparently decided unanimously and in a complete volte-face that "no other testimony is necessary".<sup>101</sup>

In fact, the only public disagreement amongst Board members at this meeting was procedural, over whether new testimony which had not been presented in the legal case should be heard at all. When one member suggested adopting a visual standard for determining a child's race as opposed to a so-called "one-drop-of-blood rule", the Board adjourned for discussion totalling a further two hours. Shortly before midnight, following these lengthy discussions out of the public view and off the public record, it was clear that the Board was unable or more likely unwilling to agree on such a standard- they returned with the simple, narrow motion that "Isabel Wall, for the purposes of school classification, is a colored child".<sup>102</sup> This motion was passed by eight votes to one, with the sole objector- the first black woman Board of Education member in the country Mary Church Terrell - doing so on the grounds that she disagreed with the verdict, as the child "appeared white" to her.<sup>103</sup> This dissent by Mrs. Terrell is important in highlighting that some measure of dissent did happen amongst the Board regarding issues of race, but such open dissent was often limited to only one or two members as indeed Mrs Terrell herself stated that

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<sup>99</sup> Report of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia, May 26th 1910, Folder "Wall V. Oyster (1910)", Vertical Files, Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education, pp. 4-5.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, pp. 8-9.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 12

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 14 for Terrell's comments on the child's appearance ; for Terrell's appointment being that of the first black woman, see: Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, (District of Columbia: Ransdell Inc. Printers and Publishers, 1940), p. 129.

“several times she stood alone” in opposing such matters, as discord was hidden as much as possible behind procedural closed doors by the Chairmen of the Board.<sup>104</sup>

The Board was not monolithic, and any depiction of it as such would be crude and injudicious. However, the Board did, through its dominant majority, act within the structural confines of the 1906 law to try and appear apolitical while furthering the interests of whites.

It is important here to place the lack of open support for Mrs. Terrell’s vigorous dissent in this instance from the other two black members of the Board into historical context, as well as the unwavering support for the segregated system by the Assistant Superintendent for the black schools, Garnett Wilkinson, throughout his fifty-year career. This incident occurred during a period of rigorous debate in black intellectual circles about how best to “uplift the race” within a racist, segregated society. While Mrs. Terrell seems to have taken a similarly fiery, direct, and radical approach towards confronting white supremacy and eschewing cooperation with oppressive systems in the mold of W.E.B. Dubois as expressed in his 1903 work *The Souls of Black Folk*. By contrast, the other members of the Board and Mr. Wilkinson appear to have taken a more “accommodationist” approach and working constructively within the system to improve it, as advocated by Du Bois’ intellectual rival Booker T. Washington.<sup>105</sup> These other black members were reluctant to send the young Ms. Wall to a white school as to do so would have been to admit “that there is degradation or humiliation attached to attending a white school”, and undermine black education conceptually.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, Garnet Wilkinson’s view was that separate black schools allowed for the building of black community and intellectual identity, and as such focussed his efforts on ensuring ‘equal’ aspect of the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine.<sup>107</sup> All of this is to say that the lack of open opposition to such decisions does not necessarily display a lack of understanding of, or anger at, the disparity between the black and white schools, but perhaps rather a different interpretation of how best to approach such disparities.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>105</sup> Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 2003), pp. 61-89.

<sup>106</sup> Author Unknown, ‘Classed as Negro’, *The Washington Evening Star*, May 27th, 1910.

<sup>107</sup> Tikia K. Hamilton, ‘The Cost of Integration: The Contentious Career of Garnet C. Wilkinson’, *Washington History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (Spring 2018), pp. 50-60.

The Wall episode of displays in microcosm the white majority of the Board's utilisation of its "apolitical" status to further the established paradigm of white supremacy by making political decisions, such as subjectively deciding the race of a small child by choosing to apply the 'one drop of blood rule' so often used as a method of determining "purity or contamination" by the American legal system to uphold racist laws and systems, and framing them as objective.<sup>108</sup>

The leadership of the Board's clear attempts to remove potentially impassioned observers from the process by shifting the time of the meeting, to keep its disagreements and discussions on controversial matters relating to racial policy in private before presenting as united-a-front as possible, and avoidance of any answering any broader political questions other than the very narrow one in front of them are testament to how its "depoliticised" status ostensibly limited its decision-making while facilitating continued white supremacy. A note in nuance is important here. None of this is to say that the Board was a united body acting in perfect concert throughout this period. In fact, as Steven Diner has pointed out, quite the opposite: the Board was extremely factional throughout much of its existence.<sup>109</sup> This factionalism and resultant disagreement, however, was largely related to issues of the meta-political.

The open disagreements between Board members were almost entirely to do with personal ego and power dynamics- a further negative externality of appointing elites to the Board who had multitudinous, and often competing, political or economic interests. As Diner highlights further, this often manifested itself as "pettifogging": arguing over minor, unimportant details in attempts at one-upsmanship, and the origins of disagreements were almost entirely rooted in the dysfunction of the Board as part of the wider systematic dysfunctions and perverse incentives of the system. Key examples of this were Board members disagreeing as to the role and level of influence of the Superintendent, and the anger which resulted from Board members trying to have District Commissioners removed from their roles or advancing their personal business interests through Board policy.<sup>110</sup>

The Board was as dysfunctional in many ways as the wider system of which it was part, in terms of process. It was often an arena for personal advancement or political games of power and

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<sup>108</sup> Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, (New York University Press: New York, 1997), p. 27.

<sup>109</sup> Diner, 'The Governance of Education in the District of Columbia'.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28-30.

clashes of ego. Mrs Terrell's own experiences on the Board support these conclusions; she pointed out, for example, that one member's opinion was "extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change once it had been formed and forcibly, publicly expressed".<sup>111</sup> Essentially, some members were more concerned about potentially losing face politically and personally than they were about the merits of the policies themselves.

As the Wall episode demonstrates, however, these clashes were not seen in substantive policy issues relating to race. In matters of race, where the white majority of the Board's interests aligned, there was much less contentiousness, though clearly some dissent from its black membership. Indeed, there was little incentive for the white majority on the Board to wade too deep into the mire of race policy when it could hide its white-supremacist incentives behind screens of "apoliticalness" and rigid adherence to established policy of separate schools.

This point is further undergirded by the Board's willingness to make exceptions in similar liminal cases as was politically expedient, for example the treatment of students East-Asian heritage, a group of children whose racial status -like that of Isabel Wall and indeed race generally- was "flexible, inconsistent, and subject to debate and revision".<sup>112</sup> As Antoinette Lee has pointed out, the Board and its officials consistently allowed Asian children (who could have fallen into the "colored" category of the school system as this was defined in the negative: i.e "colored" children were designated so not because of what they were, but what they weren't: white) to attend white schools. Because many of the children of Asian descent were the children of powerful diplomatic families in D.C., these children, in their admittedly small numbers, were allowed to attend the white schools. This continued even after the Board were explicitly permitted to send them to "colored" schools by the Supreme Court in *Lum v. Rice* (1927), though it of course made no such compromises for Isabel Wall when a Court had similarly given it free rein to do so.<sup>113</sup> The majority of the Board clearly acted politically and made concessions to the dual school system when necessary in serving its own political interests, but refused to do so and hid behind its "apolitical" status when refusing to consider nuance in the case of mixed-race black children.

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<sup>111</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, p. 136.

<sup>112</sup> Antoinette J. Lee, 'Asian and Asian American Students in Washington, D.C., Public Schools during the Segregation Era', *Washington History*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 34-47, p. 36.

<sup>113</sup> Lee, 'Asian and Asian American Students'.

One further aspect of the 1906 administrative change was that the black schools lost their Superintendent. Division I (white) and Division II (black) schools were merged completely in their leadership, and the black schools effectively relegated to junior partner in the theoretical administration of the schools as well as in the preexisting financial and physical realities. The black schools were to be managed by the Assistant Superintendent for black schools, subordinate to the (white) Superintendent. The theoretical benefits to the black schools of this tradeoff were precisely and singularly that- theoretical. The 1906 law included a provision that black teachers be paid equally to white teachers, and that construction funding for the two school divisions be equalised. However, the law and the reality were dissonant. Laws which had mandated equal funding for black and white schooling had been on the books in D.C. since the early 1870s.<sup>114</sup>

The District of Columbia was not forced to operate a “separate but equal” system under any legal precedent of *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* but in fact nominally operated such a policy as generated through its own, specific legislation decades earlier. Yet, the reality was still one of stark inequalities, and remained so well into the early twentieth century and beyond: between 1923 and 1937, school per-pupil funding allocations between the Divisions were disproportionately favourable to whites despite the presence of such laws.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, this is part of a pattern of dissonance between the stated policy- usually of racial equity- of District education officials and their actions and decisions in reality- usually upholding white supremacy- that would further be demonstrated later, in the sizeable gap between the rhetoric and the reality of the Board of Education regarding school desegregation.

Even though the Board’s role was clearly political, and it advanced the interests of whites at the expense of blacks, the so-called “depoliticisation” was quite effective. In the 1930s, black discontentment with unequal spending was generally addressed “not to the Board of Education but to the Commissioners, officials at the Bureau of the Budget, and House Subcommittees”, though the Board was doing little to balance spending between the two Divisions.<sup>116</sup> A further assessment, by a white observer in 1945, was that the Board had shown itself to be “free of any

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<sup>114</sup> Drew, ‘Recurring Themes’, pp. 4-5.

<sup>115</sup> Haycock, ‘Sixty Years’, p.5.

<sup>116</sup> Drew, ‘Recurring Themes’, pp. 5-6.

evidences of politics, of personal bias, and of self-seeking motives”, despite continued failure to address black and white inequality to the benefit of their own majority interest group.<sup>117</sup>

The dynamics of the racial-interest groups of the Board were also tied up in overlapping class interests. Crucially, the switch in 1906 from a remunerated Board to one which was unpaid meant that only those who could afford to give up their time for free, often in the evenings or afternoons for bimonthly Board meetings (i.e. likely not working-class parents), could be members.<sup>118</sup> This economic reality combined with the selection of the Board by members of the Washington judicial elite clearly cemented the Board’s membership into one dominated by white interests, and upper-middle class interests. This is neatly illustrated by the professions of the Chairmen of the Board of Education from 1906 through to 1937, which consists almost entirely of military officers, lawyers, and businessmen, peppered with the odd clergyman and educator.<sup>119</sup> Of the sixty-one Board members from 1906 to 1937, all but nine housewives had middle-class white collar jobs. Even these housewives were members of elite families.<sup>120</sup> The limitations on the ability of working-class blacks (or indeed whites)- those most harshly affected by the poor quality of public schools- to become members of the Board were crystallised by these structures.

To compound the limitations this new administrative structure placed on black educational progress, the attempts to depoliticise the Board of Education also damaged black schools in other ways. Previously, the District Commissioners had the authority to overrule the Board of Education. In one such instance in 1882, the District Comptroller ruled that the black schools were owed \$19,000 as the Board had underfunded Division II in several of the previous years. The all-white Board (then the Board of Trustees) ruled that the black schools did not need this \$19,000, despite them being significantly worse-equipped than the white schools. This theft of black school funding, was only reversed and reprimanded when the District Commissioners- then the final arbiters of D.C. public education- intervened.<sup>121</sup> The 1906 law removed the

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<sup>117</sup> Haycock, ‘Sixty Years’, p. 51.

<sup>118</sup> This previous level of remuneration was not insignificant either: A fee of \$10 per session, at a time when a loaf of bread cost in the region of 5 cents. Author Unknown, “Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor”, *United States Department of Commerce And Labour*, No. 77, July 1908, <[https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/3943/item/477642/toc/504506?start\\_page=220](https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/3943/item/477642/toc/504506?start_page=220)> [accessed 30/07/2019], p. 214. ; Haycock, ‘Sixty Years’, p. 45; 50.

<sup>119</sup> Haycock, “Sixty Years”, p. 90.

<sup>120</sup> Diner, ‘The Governance of Education’, p. 90.

<sup>121</sup> Haycock, ‘Sixty Years’ p. 4

Commissioners' ability to interfere in such matters, and appointed the Board as the supreme administrative organ for D.C. education, as the Commissioners were overtly political appointees and the Board was not. Any further injustices to black students in order to benefit white students could henceforth only be contested in the court of public opinion- though there was no democratic mechanism through which to filter this opinion into actual change- or be disputed before the very same Board which had inflicted these injustices by remonstrating at one of the Board's monthly meetings. The members of the Board also could not reasonably be removed from office as their appointers were judges without the political capital to do so; in reality membership could only be changed through replacing members at the end of their staggered three-year terms.

Further, the development of an unwritten but continuing tradition of the selection of three black Board of Education members was at the time of the law's promulgation a reasonable stab at ensuring roughly proportionate black representation on the Board.<sup>122</sup> However, as the population demographics shifted- and D.C.'s black population began to outnumber the white population at mid-century, this one-third black Board membership criteria remained. What had at its inception been a progressive move which ensured black voices be heard at the volume of their population became, due to the rigidity of the system, essentially an upper limit on black Board membership which held it well below a representative number of Board members. The Board effectively remained majority-white by tradition, and therefore likely to prioritise white interests as previously all-white Boards had done.

Separately from the administration and oversight of the schools, the labyrinthian corridors through which the financial aspects of the District schools were run and, in particular, the circuitousness of its budgeting process- contributed to chronic structural deficiencies in the school system by essentially guaranteeing underfunding in two key ways: its total budgetary amounts being inevitably bargained down through multiple stages of negotiation; and political changeability making long-term improvement projects impossible.

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<sup>122</sup> In the year 1900, the most recent census data available at that time, 86,702 of the District's 191,532 residents were black (c. 31%), compiled using data from: Author Unknown, 'District of Columbia: Race and Hispanic Origin: 1800 to 1990', *United States Census Bureau*, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20080726045433/http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab23.pdf>>, [accessed 24/07/2019].

The D.C. school budget had to “traverse a uniquely long and sinuous path “from planning to funding to spending.<sup>123</sup> By 1928, the law had made the D.C. school budgeting process so complex and “so intricate that only the District Auditor understood them.”<sup>124</sup> The process began with the Board of Education, which invited interested parties to contribute. The budget was then filtered through the scrutinising eyes of the District Commissioners, the Bureau of the Budget, and submitted to Congress by the President as part of the federal budget to be further dismembered by various congressional committees and subcommittees. Every individual expense had to be justified elaborately- an administrative absurdity in a system which by 1945 was responsible for 90,000 students and 4,000 staff in 178 buildings.<sup>125</sup> This process naturally led to budgetary erosion, and the initial funding proposed by the Board as necessary for its functions was invariably cut, though admittedly to varying extents: some budgets were generous enough to be almost bare bones while others were simply woefully inadequate.

This was perhaps best demonstrated in the budget following the 1949 Strayer Report, which had submitted to Congress a damning assessment of the situation of the school situation in D.C. and set out minimum funding needs. These funding needs were assessed at three graduated levels: “minimum-efficiency” would require \$28.325million, “acceptable” required \$28.970million, and “defensible” required \$29.655million. The budget requested by the Commissioners and allocated by Congress was \$23.323million- not only significantly below the minimum-required level, but also \$1.7million below the previous year’s allocation in a city rapidly expanding.<sup>126</sup> The results of this budgetary erosion were felt hardest by black students. As a letter from the local NAACP pointed out that in 1947 the budgetary shortcomings meant that, among other things “at all levels the schools attended by Negroes are understaffed”: the burden of double-sessions was being felt almost entirely by black students. At High school level specifically, “Negro children receive sub-standard vocational and educational guidance services due to the fact that persons appointed as counsellors must undertake classroom work”.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Drew, ‘Recurring Themes’, p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> Constance Green, *Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 427,

<sup>125</sup> Haycock, ‘Sixty Years’, p. 82.

<sup>126</sup> Drew, ‘Recurring Themes’, p. 22

<sup>127</sup> Statement of William A. Hill, Executive Secretary of the District of Columbia Branch of the NAACP before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Appropriations, April 21st 1947, Box 78-44, Records of the Washington D.C. Branch of the NAACP, Moorland-Spingarn Research Centre, Howard University, Washington D.C., pp.5- 6.

This budgetary erosion also affected the construction of new buildings- usually allocated separately from the main budget. As well as being underfunded- in 1947, for example, the Board requested \$10million for construction which was watered down by the end of the process to \$3.2 million. The buildings were therefore underfunded but this underfunding also interacted with the inflexibility and difficulties in long-term planning of the system to make the facilities situation even more perilous.

Perhaps, therefore, the best way to examine the effect of these financial structures on the ability to maintain- let alone improve- the school system in the medium- to long-term at the time is to examine the physical structures of the school buildings themselves. The physical infrastructure of the school system required significant, consistent capital outlays separate from the annual school budget, which was to cover annual operating costs rather than capital investment. It was this basic, yet fundamental infrastructure which suffered most from an inability to plan more than a year in advance, as congressional appropriations were only certain once finalised in any given year's federal budget, regardless of any previous promises or allocations. A five-year school-building plan proposed in 1925, for example, was cut drastically short before its full allocation of \$20million had been distributed as the Congress cut funding in the late 1920s as part of wider budgetary trimming due to the Great Depression. Those schools which were built or improved through this program did little more than replace existing schools unfit for purpose: the school infrastructure was treading water rather than making strides. Even securing funding for basics such as electric lighting and modern heating systems was an arduous administrative ordeal.<sup>128</sup> In 1939, an act providing \$8million for new schoolhouses which ostensibly improved the situation actually similarly replaced old buildings, rather than building new ones for a school system whose enrollment had shot up by 25% in the previous decade.<sup>129</sup> Horace Mann Elementary, for example, was a white school constructed in 1931 to replace frame-built school structures from the Civil War almost seventy years previous.<sup>130</sup>

Further, as with the annual school budget, capital expenditures had to be justified and itemised in advance- multi-year school building programs required the use of existing trends and demographics to predict the future need for school facilities. This budgetary rigidity in a city as

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<sup>128</sup> Haycock, 'Sixty Years', pp. 71-73.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, pp. 79-81.

<sup>130</sup> Horace Mann Elementary School, D.C. Public School Survey, Box 5, Folder 2, D.C. Public School Survey: Phase II Oral History Project, Washington D.C. Historical Society, Kiplinger Library, Washington, D.C. Pp. 75-76.

demographically fluid as D.C. was a recipe for inaccurate predictions and misallocated resources in such long-term plans, with the predictable effect of weakening the case for any similar future investment, in a vicious cycle of limiting investment in the D.C. schools.

An analysis of the school construction programmes in the fifteen years preceding the Second World War demonstrates the severity of this situation. Many of the schools being built were intended to relieve overcrowding elsewhere, but by the time they had been constructed were themselves overcrowded due to population shifts in the lengthy intervening time periods between proposal and construction. Lafayette Elementary, a white school, opened its doors in 1931 to 400 pupils in a brand-new building designed to hold 320. Similarly, twelve years later, the (white) Kramer Junior High opened in 1943 with an initial enrollment of 1,240- almost a full 25% above its planned maximum capacity of 1,000 pupils.<sup>131</sup> This was an ongoing, ever-morphing problem to which D.C.'s clunky, bloated system could not respond nearly quick enough, even if it had been inclined to do so.

It is important to emphasise the racist nature of these school constructions and improvements as well. While many of the white schools were overcrowded and not enough was being done for them, the black schools were significantly more neglected, as was the case throughout the history of the D.C. Schools. From 1930 to 1945, four major construction efforts were undertaken to improve District's Senior High Schools. Every one of these projects was to improve the white Senior Highs; a total of \$4.35million dollars was spent on new facilities for white Senior High students while their black peers received not a single penny in such funding, as white needs were prioritised by public financiers at these times of fiscal difficulty.<sup>132</sup> Local activists, such as the D.C. branch of the NAACP had been objecting to the unfair balance of these building shortcomings as early as 1922, as the various levels of the budgetary process had shifted the balance of construction funds allocated that year from an initial 70-30 white-black split to a 90-10 split far disproportionate to the population.<sup>133</sup> The imperviousness of the budgetary process meant that little could be changed over the long-term, and such piecemeal battles were all which could be fought.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, for Lafayette: p. 63, for Kramer: p. 60.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, for spending on white schools: Anacostia: p. 7, for Coolidge: p. 28, for Roosevelt: p.88, for Wilson: p. 102; this document lists all major building works, including annexes to existing buildings, from 1930-1945 and none of the black Senior Highs is listed.

<sup>133</sup> Letter to the Board of Education from D.C. Branch of the NAACP concerning items eliminated from an appropriations bill, May 17th, 1922, Folder 865: "1922-23 Board of Education Appropriations", Records of the Washington D.C. Branch of the NAACP, p. 3.

D.C. residents were completely powerless because they were cut out of the political feedback loops which could force any real change. They were not able to influence the makeup of the Congress which controlled their finances, nor their local educational officials even infinitesimally until the Twenty-third Amendment was adopted in 1961 which allowed them to vote for the President who appointed the judges who appointed the Board of Education who appointed the Superintendent who appointed their children's teachers. One exasperated resident summed the situation up neatly in 1935, stating that "we have as much control (over school governance)... as we do over the cost of igloos in Iceland".<sup>134</sup> The inefficiencies of this system were clear: between 1934 and 1940, Congress undertook thirty separate investigations into D.C.'s municipal problems, to little avail.<sup>135</sup> This caused a situation in which rather than how to address its actual on-the-ground problems, much of the District's local political bandwidth was taken up with questions of how to deal with the ineffective structures and democratic deficits which were exacerbating them.

Not only were the financial, legislative, and administrative frameworks of managing public education in D.C. each individually lumbering and ineffective, but the fact that they were so uniquely separate exacerbated this. Where in other major American cities, school systems were run by a Board of Education which had "full authority over school taxes, administering school funds, and practically independent control of the schools", these functions were distributed throughout the political system in D.C. Though rigid, inherent difficulties in each area made a poorly-administered school system inevitable, the separation- amounting to an administrative firewall- between these functions exacerbated poor administration. This uniquely Washingtonian structure was one in which all three branches of the federal government were somehow- sometimes in multiple ways- directly involved in the governance of the schools. These various nodes of power did not ever communicate in any genuine attempt to re-set the school system's multiple dislocated joints, interacting only when absolutely necessary to fulfil mandated duties such as setting the budget. Even then, interactions were often simply internecine squabbles, where one branch of government attempted to assert dominance over others in what Diner has

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<sup>134</sup> Drew, 'Recurring Themes', p. 11.

<sup>135</sup> Diner, Steven J., 'Democracy, Federalism and the Governance of the Nation's Capital, 1790-1974', *Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy*, University of the District of Columbia, 1987, <[https://www.dcvote.org/sites/default/files/documents/articles/diner\\_democracy\\_and\\_federalism\\_nations\\_capital\\_0.pdf](https://www.dcvote.org/sites/default/files/documents/articles/diner_democracy_and_federalism_nations_capital_0.pdf)>, [accessed 28/07/2019], pp. 38-42.

labelled “continuous and often virulent” struggles.<sup>136</sup> This meant that the education of the children of the nation’s capital was often merely a pawn in institutional power battles.

That very little of this ineffectual structure of governance would change until the first iteration of D.C. Home Rule in the early 1970s- two-thirds of a century later- is telling of a system which was in almost every way unresponsive and unfit for its purpose. Nothing could be changed without a change in federal law- something to which vested interests consistently put paid, and D.C. lacked any federal representation with the political mandate or incentive to agitate for such change. This administrative complexity, inflexibility and chronic underfunding, when confronted with the huge demographic shifts and political issues of the mid-twentieth century, was a cocktail fatal to any hope of a decent public education system in D.C., for black children in particular. Amid all of this, an “apolitical”, white-majority Board of Education made for an institution ostensibly politically incapable of making any decisions to improve the situation of black pupils, while in any case being disinclined to do so at the expense of white convenience. This veneer of “objectivity” left little recourse for black citizens to enact change or improve their schools, as the Board hid its white-supremacist policies behind the supposedly value-neutral status quo.

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<sup>136</sup> Diner, ‘The Governance of Education’, p. 9.

#### **IV: 1947-1954, Actors and Administration: Decision-Making and Maintaining Rigid Segregation in a Fluid City**

The origins of the D.C. Board of Education are prestigious. The first president of the original 13-member Board of Trustees which oversaw the Washington city public schools at their outset in 1805 was no less than the then President of the United States himself, Thomas Jefferson. Other members included future Supreme Court Justice Gabriel Duvall, several wealthy local plantation owners from Maryland and Virginia, and war hero Thomas Tingley. The Supreme Court room at the United States Capitol was the esteemed venue for the committee's inaugural meeting.<sup>137</sup> By 1906, the Board had developed through various iterations into one which was theoretically immensely powerful with total oversight responsibility for both the black and white school systems, and could not be overruled in administrative matters of public education by anyone. However, as established previously, in reality it was fairly meek in its decision making and simply followed the inherited status quo paradigm of racial separation and the white supremacy inherent therein, which aligned with its own majority interests.

The role of Superintendent of public schools was first provided for in 1869 by the City Council, a crucial factor in the modern development of the school system. In 1897, J. Ormond Wilson- himself a former Superintendent- described the role of the D.C. School Superintendent as to often be “chart, compass, captain, pilot, and man of all work, and will find himself in stormy weather sailing between Scylla and Charybdis”.<sup>138</sup> It is clear then, that from its inception, the position of D.C. Superintendent was never that simply of a figurehead. Though its expected duties shifted through various periods of national pedagogical progress- broadly from Chief Education Officer of schools to Chief Executive Officer- throughout the entirety of the twentieth century the Superintendent possessed significant power and responsibility within the decision-making apparatus of the D.C. public schools.<sup>139</sup> Similar to the Board, Superintendents of Education had a tendency to view their role as apolitical. As earlier elucidated, these actors were operating within the constraints of a rigid and convoluted system. However, at no point did either the Superintendents or the Boards of Education as a unit make any attempt at genuine equalisation of black and white education within this paradigm. By the mid-20th Century, the

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<sup>137</sup> Wilson, 'Eighty Years', p.122.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p.149.

<sup>139</sup> Theodore J. Kowalski and Lars G. Bjork, 'Role expectations of the District Superintendent: Implications for Deregulating Preparation and Licensing', *Educational Leadership Faculty Publications*, Paper 45, (2005), pp. 76- 79.

role of Hobart Corning as Superintendent had become that of CEO of the schools in every meaningful sense, with the Board of Education acting as a Board of Directors offering oversight and approving (often rubber-stamping) his administrative decisions, as the educational expert.

While it is indisputable that these actors did their best to combat some of the overarching, universal problems which faced their school system such as overall, systemic underfunding- including protesting to Congress about low school budget allocations- when faced with the difficult circumstances which these structural outputs beyond their control created, the Boards of Education and Superintendents consistently took a white supremacist approach to education and the distribution of limited resources. These authorities prioritised white education, sacrificing the education of the District's black children rather than spread the burden of the lack of resources evenly without regard to race. Without some element of Home Rule and concomitant democracy in school funding, Washington D.C.'s black children would never have a good education, as D.C. never had the resources apportioned consistently by fiscally-conservative Congresses which were necessary to provide one, but they could at least have had a better education- and one equal to that of their white peers- had these municipal administrators wished it so. The Board had the power to transfer resources as necessary between the black and white school divisions, but did so sparingly and inequitably. While D.C.'s structural problems in education were unique and esoteric, this approach by those administering the system was consistent with that of other northern cities: these actors did not do what was within their power to improve black schooling in the city, even though they espoused ostensibly liberal views and policies with regard to racial equality. This pattern of decision-making was evident in the years between the end of the Second World War and the 1954 integration decision, and analysis of this period is crucial to our understanding of how the Board and Superintendent acted to maintain a rigidly segregated school system in a period of remarkable fluidity. An understanding of this period also feeds, crucially, into interpreting the Board and Superintendent's later response to the Supreme Court mandating school desegregation.

The post-war populous in Washington D.C. was one in flux, at a level unmatched by anywhere else in the country, even in the midst of a comprehensive national "Great Migration" from the rural South to the urban North. Indeed, the most significant trend of Washington D.C. was that of its demographics: shifting rapidly in manifold ways. The population overall was increasing at pace, but the black population was increasing with remarkable rapidity. The 1945 enrollment in the D.C. schools totalled 90,575 pupils. Of these, 38,304 (42.3%) were black, and 52,271

(57.7%) white. By 1954- the year of the integration court decision- the systemwide total enrollment was up to approximately 100,000 and had undergone a complete racial inversion: the school population was approximately 43% white and 57% black. Numerically, white enrollment had decreased by almost 20% but black enrollment had shot up by almost 50% and led to both an increase in the overall system's enrollment and a transformation in its racial weighting, as the D.C. school population presaged that of the city itself and became majority-black in the early 1950s.<sup>140</sup> A natural- and, crucially, predictable- outcome was a significant strain on the dual school system as it was then constituted. Such a rigid and unresponsive system which already had insufficient resources and concentrated the weight of these shortfalls on young black shoulders was unable to cope with such fluidity. However, a crucial aspect of the historical interrogation of these events and the actors and structures involved is whether this rigidity was inherent and structural, or conveniently and continuously constructed racist artifice.

Throughout this period, various measures point to significant and indisputable disparities and inequities between the two racial systems. It is important to enumerate these facts in the first instance. Per pupil spending, perhaps the clearest and most fundamental metric for the school authorities' attitudes to educating the different races, was \$1.07 per day for white pupils in the 1946-47 school year, where only 84 cents was spent on educating their black peers.<sup>141</sup> As things stood- or in many cases crumbled- in 1946, only 36% of the black school buildings had been constructed after the turn of the Century. The equivalent number of non-ancient school-buildings for whites was still low, but meaningful higher at 57%. The black schools as a whole division were 8% over capacity and rising, while the white division was 27% under capacity and falling.<sup>142</sup> Crumbling black buildings were bursting at the seams, while their generally newer white equivalents sat more than a quarter empty. The 1949 Strayer report further illustrated in granular detail the discrepancies between facilities in the two divisions. The Senior High schools, the final and arguably definitive in pupils' development through the education system, were grossly unequally housed. The three black Senior High Schools all scored lower in the Report's numerical "Educational Adequacy Score" than every single one of the eight white

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<sup>140</sup> Diner, 'The Governance of Education in the District of Columbia: An Historical Analysis of Current Issues', Studies in D.C. History and Public Policy Paper No. 2 (1982), University of the District of Columbia, <<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED218375>> [accessed 20/01/2019].

<sup>141</sup> Report by Paul Cooke: 'D.C. Integration: A Community Faces Up', 1956, Folder "Evaluations of Desegregation, 1950s", Vertical Files, Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education, p. 5.

<sup>142</sup> 'A synopsis of the current school fight by the Browne Parent Group for Equality of Educational Opportunity', Box 78-44, Folder 873 "School Transfers", Records of the District of Columbia Branch of the NAACP, pp. 2-3.

Senior Highs. These three black schools- Dunbar, Cardozo, and Armstrong- all fell within the category of requiring “major improvements” to become even satisfactory facilities, while all but two of the eight white Senior High schools were deemed “very satisfactory”; the two outliers required only “minor improvements”.<sup>143</sup> In the 1950-51 school year, pupil to teacher ratios were imbalanced between the divisions- and favourably so towards whites- at every level. System-wide, the ratio was 23.3 pupils to every teacher in the black divisions compared to 17.2 in the white divisions. The ratios at the junior high level were most egregious, where 28.4 black pupils shared a teacher while only 22.8 of their white counterparts did so.<sup>144</sup> These ratios did not particularly improve: three years later the pupil to teacher ratios at junior high level remained disparate between the races. In 1953, it was 28.2 for blacks at that level and 22.7 for whites.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, disparities between the black and white divisions continued right up to 1954, as an excess of 188 teachers existed in the white system while the black system had a shortage of 69 educators, the white schools had a combined 12,051 spare seats where the black schools had a shortage of 6,405 seats. Almost half of the fifty black kindergartens were running part-time schedules due to overcrowding and underfunding while all fifty-nine white ones ran as normal. Black students were receiving an inferior education in an inferior system throughout these years.<sup>146</sup>

However, these facts alone, while proving the inequalities between the systems, do little to inform as to their causes or facilitators; it would be remiss not to state that the authorities clearly had a difficult job in managing a dynamic system under heavy pecuniary restrictions. It is crucial to evaluate therefore: whether these merely unfortunate outcomes of the system’s rigidity failing to account for disproportionately high black population increases and as putting much of the strain of this population increase on the black system, or the result of deliberate decisions taken by school officials?

Throughout this period, the authorities- particularly the Superintendent of Schools in his executive capacity- did little to either challenge the dual school system or work within its

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<sup>143</sup> ‘Proposed Scope of Examination of Dr. Hobart M. Corning on Taking His Deposition Under Rule 26(a) on Oral Interrogation’, 1949, Box 1, Folder 1, The Papers of George E.C. Hayes, District of Columbia Historical Society, Kiplinger Library, Washington, D.C., p. 22.

<sup>144</sup> Letter from Consolidated Parent Group Inc. to the Board and Superintendent of Education, September 16th, 1951, Box 1, Folder 2, Papers of George E.C. Hayes, p. 4

<sup>145</sup> Mary Anliot, ‘A Study of the Dual Education System in the District of Columbia’, June 1954, Box 19-2, Folder F59, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, P. 53.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, pp. 49-52.

restrictions order to provide black children a better, equal education. Tellingly, one local black parent activist group denounced the Superintendent, and encouraged the Board not to reappoint him to his position in 1951. The group scolded that “his recommendations concerning Board policy in relation to the students have, without exception, been directed at maintaining or strengthening the separation of the races”.<sup>147</sup> An analysis of this period holds this assertion to be true: the Superintendent’s administrative decisions consistently and deliberately placed the needs of white supremacy- beyond the minimum separation ostensibly required by law- above the needs of black students whose education was in crisis. This theme is perhaps best illustrated in officials’ approaches to two school overcrowding crises during this period, which together demonstrate a pattern of refusal to consider disruptions to the white schools and their superiority as a necessary compromise in order to resolve serious issues in the black schools. Of course, these intentions were hidden behind cleverly-coded rhetoric of ‘following established policy’ and ‘educational soundness’. The first such episode was the situation at Browne Junior High School in 1947.

Browne was the manifestation of the worst excesses of racist school governance. It was the most overcrowded of the overcrowded black schools at almost double its intended capacity; 1,721 students sat, and tried to learn, in a building intended for 875.<sup>148</sup> This level of overcrowding was so egregious that it drove the local community into action, and a community group of frustrated and highly motivated Browne parents was born: the Consolidated Parent Group. This group organised at the grassroots level, picketing the school, petitioning the Board, and engineering a school strike that peaked in December 1947 with around half of Browne students absent from class. These activities forced the authorities to take them, and the severity of the situation at Browne, seriously.<sup>149</sup> The Superintendent, when confronted by the Consolidated Parent Group, blamed the overcrowding, and consequent double-shifts at the school- on “unpredictable growth of population” in the black school division. This growth was, however, not an “unpredictable” increase in enrollment in the slightest. In fact, the *Washington Post* ran a series of articles in 1945 which predicted significant increases in future enrollment, which chimed neatly with the pure demographic fact that both the black population of the city

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<sup>147</sup> Letter from Consolidated Parent Group Inc. to the Board of Education, September 16th 1951, Box 1, Folder 2, Papers of George E.C. Hayes, p. 6.

<sup>148</sup> Alison Stewart, *First Class: The Legacy of Dunbar, America’s First Black Public High School*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), pp. 163-164.

<sup>149</sup> Genna Rae McNeil, ‘Community Initiative in the Desegregation of District of Columbia Schools, 1947-1954: A Brief Overview of Consolidated Parent Group, Inc. Activities from *Bishop to Bolling*’, *Howard Law Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (1980), pp. 25-41, p. 34.

and black school enrollment had been steadily and significantly increasing each year since at least 1940, according to the Board of Education's own records.<sup>150</sup> That a newspaper could predict such obvious trends in enrollment where the education experts could not seems highly improbable. Corning himself contradicted this two years later when discussing the situation at Cardozo Senior High, stating that "the Board of Education has long foreseen the need for new high schools for Divisions 10-13 (black divisions)".<sup>151</sup> Not a single member of the Board of Education- not even the three black members- lived in Northeast Washington where Browne was located. To them, and the Superintendent, the issue was one far removed: a problem in theory- numbers not matching estimates in a community in which they had no personal stake. Telling of this detachment and underlying views on racial hierarchy was the Superintendent's statement that "absolute equality of educational opportunity is impossible... and may not reasonably be expected of any Board of Education" in response to the gaping chasm between the education provided white and black pupils, thereby actively contradicting the less convenient aspect of equality demanded by the "separate but equal" mandate, in order to uphold the racial superiority aspect. To prioritise separation over equality was a value judgement made by the authorities.<sup>152</sup>

The Superintendent's handling of the crisis at Browne, namely the priorities clearly underpinning his suggested solutions and his rejection of those offered by affected parties, are illustrative of an unwillingness to compromise the superior treatment of whites in the school system to any extent whatsoever to alleviate serious issues in the black schools. Supt. Corning's proposed solution to the crisis of overcrowding at Browne was to offer up use of Blow and Webb as annexes in which to teach the overflow of students from Browne. Blow and Webb were both eight-room elementary schools, lacking in key facilities necessary for delivering junior high education. They lacked cafeterias, libraries, and in an encapsulation of the raft of indignities inflicted upon black students by the D.C. education authorities, the lavatory facilities there were built for small children and completely unsuitable for use by junior high-aged children. Blow and

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<sup>150</sup> For the Washington Post articles, see Steven J. Diner, 'Crisis of Confidence', *Urban Education*, Vol. 25, Issue 2., (July 1990), pp. 112-137, p. 116.; Charles N. Glaab, 'Washington, The Black Majority: Race and Politics in the Nation's Capital' in *Snowbelt Cities: Metropolitan Politics in the Northeast and Midwest since World War II*, Ed. Richard M. Bernard, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 247-265, p. 249 for the general trend; see Board of Education Annual Reports 1940-1950 at Charles Sumner Museum and Archive for raw data on increasing enrollment.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, November 2nd, 1949. Box 19-1, Folder 13, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, May 21st, 1947, Box 19-2, Folder 61, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 8.

Webb were also both located a considerable distance from the main Browne building, which a group of education experts eviscerated in an analysis of the transfer plans. These academics pointed out to the Board and Superintendent that this would cause “insurmountable difficulties in scheduling”; pupils attending these annexes would inexorably not receive a full day’s education due to the significant amounts of time travelling between these distant facilities. Further, these children would be at the mercy of inclement weather and vulnerable to traffic accidents or other urban dangers.<sup>153</sup> These buildings were clearly not a functionally-appropriate solution to Browne’s issues.

Both buildings were also nearing the end of their usable life: Blow was forty-one years old and Webb forty-seven. Webb and Blow were to be transferred as part of a broader plan to relieve overcrowding in the black divisions by re-allocating white buildings for black use. While superficially an example of the Board and Superintendent attempting to achieve some balance in the allocation of resources between the black and white divisions, they were in fact characteristic of an institutional view of the black system as inferior to the white. The average age of the five buildings to be transferred, including Blow and Webb, was forty-nine years old; the oldest of the buildings was built in the 1880s.<sup>154</sup> This was no accident of circumstance: the Superintendent in fact himself stated, when discussing his approach to building transfers was to wait for buildings to become available through the “natural process of shifting and increasing population”, and admitted that such “natural” availability only occurred “on occasion”. This was effectively an admission of two things. Firstly, that the building transfers did not occur on any basis of equal provision, but rather in a ‘hand-me-down’ fashion. The white schools would only be transferred to black use as a matter of course when they had been wrung of their maximum utility in white education and were some combination of empty, ancient, and redundant. They would only be transferred when no longer needed by whites, and the opportunity cost of such a transfer to white interests was effectively zero. Secondly, this policy was a tacit admission of authorities’ commitment to allowing supposed ‘natural’ forces to dictate policy. This reluctance to be active in addressing the pressing needs of its black students was similar to that of other suburban authorities’ later approaches to school desegregation which prioritised the ‘natural’

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<sup>153</sup> Walter Daniel, Ellis Knox, and Martin Jenkins, ‘A statement concerning the proposal of the Superintendent of Schools to transfer certain buildings from Divisions 1-9 to Divisions 10-13 in order to relieve overcrowded conditions in the colored schools’, November 10th, 1947, Box 78-44, Folder 873, Records of the District of Columbia Branch of the NAACP, p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> ‘Survey data on proposed building transfers’, Box 78-44, Folder 873, Records of the District of Columbia Branch of the NAACP,

order of 'neighbourhood schools' and racially homogenous neighbourhoods over active racial integration. Of course, these population shifts and dynamics which in the D.C. case created 'available' white schools were anything but natural and can in fact be attributed to racist white attitudes. As in the northern metropolises experiencing the engorging effects of The Great Migration, whites were fleeing both to white-enclave corners of D.C. itself and into its suburbs in a direct response to black in-migration.<sup>155</sup> Further, this approach is indicative of a belief by the Superintendent that a racially-segregated, racially-hierarchical school system was itself the 'natural' way, given the obvious logical flaw in stating that natural shifts would resolve problems in an artificially-constructed system. 'Naturalness' was in D.C., as elsewhere, subtle code for white supremacy.<sup>156</sup>

In addition, the Superintendent in his various reports and responses to criticisms of his Browne relief proposals was deliberately misleading, disingenuous, and biased in favour of sustaining the racially-hierarchical status quo. As well as the previously discussed falsehood that the overcrowding crisis in the black schools was "unpredictable", Supt. Corning made false equivalencies between the overcrowding at Browne and decades-earlier overcrowding and consequent double-shifts at white schools in order to 'prove' that such occurrences were "unfortunate" but supposedly 'colorblind' outcomes. Corning cited examples of overcrowding at five white Senior High Schools. All of these instances were long-resolved: two more than two decades previous, two a decade previous, and one four years previous.<sup>157</sup> As well as being outdated, these examples were also not analogous to the situation at Browne. These white double-shifts all lasted less than five years- most considerably less- whereas Browne had been running double-shifts for seven years, with no sign of relief. Additionally, these earlier double-shifts were not systematic. That is to say, they were due to the genuine demographic microclimate in their area and did not occur at times when the white system as a whole was overcrowded, whereas the Browne situation was symptomatic of broader overcrowding in the black schools. Indeed, while these white double-shifts occurred at times when significant

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<sup>155</sup> Steven J. Diner, 'From Jim Crow to Home Rule: Washington, D.C., 1945-1974', *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (January 1989), pp. 90-101, pp. 93-95. ; Glaab, 'Washington, The Black Majority', p. 249.

<sup>156</sup> See Chapter V for more detail on 'naturalness' and white supremacy; For the relationship between 'naturalness' and white supremacy as recognised at the time, see: J.W. Van der Velden, 'The Ideology of White Supremacy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jun-Sep 1959), pp. 385.

<sup>157</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, May 21st 1947, Box 19-2, Folder 61, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, pp. 3-7.

numbers of black pupils also experienced them.<sup>158</sup> In 1947, this was not the case: almost the entirety of the burden was on black children. At elementary level, for example, only 418 of the 6,743 elementary and junior-high schoolers on double-shifts were white.<sup>159</sup> Double shifts at Browne resulted in students there receiving a reduced education of four-and-a-half hours per day, rather than the standard six.<sup>160</sup>

The Superintendent further attempted to abdicate responsibility for the situation and point towards the financial and budgetary structures as constraints on his and the Board's ability to provide equal schooling. While this was clearly and undeniably an issue, as their 1948 proposed budget which had included \$8.59million for capital expenditures- 56.3% of which were on the black divisions- was eroded to less than a quarter of that requested in the final congressional budget allocated.<sup>161</sup> Attempting to secure improvements to the black system in this way were symptomatic of the authorities' whites-first approach in that such extra appropriations for funds need not have necessarily taken away from the white schools, where building transfers theoretically did. They were, however, totally unrealistic given the consistent, well-known tendency for these budget requests to be cut to ribbons through the gauntlet of the budgetary process. In making this argument, Corning also manipulated the figures in order to make the budgetary figures seem more generous to the black division than was actually the case. He used the 1940 census figures to calculate the relative expenditure per capita for each race, rather than the up-to-date 1947 enrollment figures which of course showed a much larger black population and to which he clearly would have had access. This had the result of artificially inflating the black spending per capita requested in the budget and make it seem overly generous.<sup>162</sup>

As securing extra capital appropriations failed, the only solution to improve the black schools and relieve overcrowding lay in transfers from the white division beyond that of simply

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<sup>158</sup> Donald Rae, 'The Dual School System in the District of Columbia', 1862-1954: Origins, Problems, Protests', *Washington History*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (Fall/Winter 2004/5), pp. 26-43, p. 32 for systematic nature of overcrowding in the black system.

<sup>159</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, May 21st, 1947, Box 19-2, Folder 61, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 2.

<sup>160</sup> Memo from Leon A. Ransom to Martin Jenkins, re: "Deficiencies in the Progress of Browne Junior High School, Washington, D.C.", Box 78-44, Folder 867, Records of the District of Columbia Branch of the NAACP, p. 5.

<sup>161</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, May 21st, 1947, Box 19-2, Folder 61, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 8.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12

redundant old buildings. However, the Superintendent, in various reports to the Board and statements to the public refused to consider any alternative to his proposed Blow and Webb building transfers, and actively misrepresented circumstances to justify not transferring a more modern or useful white building. The alternative to Corning's proposed transfer was that of Eliot Junior High being transferred instead. This option was favoured by the parents and students at Browne as it was close to Browne, was under-attended, and an existing junior high school with the correct facilities. It was also however much newer than Blow and Webb- built in 1932- and therefore much more of an asset of value within the white system.<sup>163</sup> When pressed by parents and black activist groups, the Superintendent persisted with his insistence that transferring Eliot to black use was not "desirable or practical". He used the impossible to disprove strawman argument that such a transfer could lead to "racial antagonism"- a convenient, universally applicable argument against essentially any building transfer which gave the Superintendent cover for his racist intent, as he could essentially argue that while he himself was not racist, white communities were and therefore compromising white interests was not possible. He essentially stated this, in saying that "(if Eliot were transferred,) the Board of Education would then be faced with the opposition of two racial elements instead of one"; blacks alone being antagonised was acceptable, but whites were a different matter.

A further barrage of half-baked justifications was given for not transferring Eliot specifically. One was that it would "not be possible to disperse the Eliot Senior High School population" to other schools, without stating any practical justification as to why. Corning further argued that a proposal to transfer all the existing Eliot pupils to the white Eastern Junior High to be taught in empty classrooms there and appropriating Eliot's buildings to the black excess from Browne was impossible, as there was not enough room for the Eliot pupils there. This assertion assumed that existing classes at Eastern, where the average class size was an incredibly low 18, could not be merged.<sup>164</sup> Hypocritically and perhaps most tellingly, Corning further argued that "the required kinds of rooms for a junior high school are not available" at Eastern for the theoretical transferred Eliot pupils, though similar logic of course did not prevent his suggestion of the Browne Junior High excess being educated in elementary facilities at Blow and Webb, as different standards were clearly applied to the quality of black and white facility provision. Finally, Corning used the circular logic that the permanent transfer of any buildings such as Eliot

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<sup>163</sup> 'Eliot Junior High', Box 5, Folder 2, D.C. Public School Survey: Phase II Oral History Project, Washington D.C. Historical Society.

<sup>164</sup> Rae, 'The Dual School System', p. 32.

would essentially relieve the Browne situation a little too well, and would damage attempts in the long-term to secure more funding for black schools; essentially that overcrowding the situation at Browne and elsewhere was actually in black interests as it strengthened the case for new black buildings in the budget, completely ignoring the clear reality of budgetary unpredictability and as well as irreparable damage of such overcrowding to an entire generation's education in the medium-term.<sup>165</sup> All in all, what Donald Rae has described as “a clumsy attempt to maintain the status quo” by Corning and the Board was somewhat more sinister- a calculated attempt to insulate the white system from the problems of the black system- and refusal to make any concessions to black interests whatsoever which might have inconvenienced whites or provided an equal education. It was only when threatened with a lawsuit which they feared might set a precedent for racial integration (*Carr v Corning*) that the Board and Superintendent suddenly managed to find a more acceptable solution in the form of an empty existing building near Browne.<sup>166</sup> Two years later, the situation of overcrowding at Browne remained “critical”.<sup>167</sup>

Events two years after Browne demonstrated that the approach to overcrowding in black schools which refused to compromise superior white education was a pattern of the authorities' whites-first attitude towards school transfers in the context of black school overcrowding, rather than a one-off. The situation at Cardozo Senior High School in 1950 was similar in many ways.

While the other two black Senior High schools were also overcrowded- Dunbar by 78 pupils (5% of capacity) and Armstrong by 170 (16% of capacity)- Cardozo was so severely overcrowded as to be operating triple shifts. It had 1,796 pupils enrolled in a building intended for 1,040 as of September 1949. It was a staggering 73% over capacity.<sup>168</sup> A student who attended the school at the peak of its overcrowding described the scenes at Cardozo as “kids hanging out the doors and out the windows, sitting on windowsills... there weren't enough seats and it was so small.”<sup>169</sup> Indeed, though Corning conceded in one of several reports over a prolonged battle with parent groups over the situation at Cardozo that it was “crowded”, he still insisted that through excellent management of the situation by the school's staff, “individual groups still

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<sup>165</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, January 7th 1948, Box 78-58, Folder 1308, Records of the District of Columbia Branch of the NAACP, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> Rae, 'The Dual School System', p. 34.

<sup>167</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, November 2nd 1949, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 2.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Barbara Brooks, Folder 24, D.C. Public School Survey: Phase II Oral History Project, p.3.

receive a full school day of six hours".<sup>170</sup> Quantitatively this may have been true, but it is fairly clear to any observer- never mind an educational expert- that such extreme overcrowding made for a significantly worse education qualitatively than elsewhere in the system.

Again, as with Browne, Corning points to issues at the white elementary school level in an attempt to portray this as a 'colorblind' issue resulting directly from the fact that "school construction has not kept pace with population trends", and contends that this has led to a "backlog of needs for school buildings in both the white and colored divisions". Corning's proffering of the roughly equal burden of the double shifts caused by overcrowding at the elementary level- as 2,123 white and 1,954 black elementary students were on double-shifts at that time was a sleight of hand. Once again, he pointed to a single exception to the pattern of white school underpopulation and black school overpopulation and attempted to use it to negate the clear systematic issues at play. While it must again be stated that the white system also had significant issues and deficiencies due to the structural problems with school administration, the fact that every single black Senior High School was overcrowded was clearly the greater issue at play. Further, the Superintendent deliberately failed here to account for the momentum of these population shifts: just three years later- and decidedly predictable from the trajectory of the racial dynamics of the city and education system- the white school system at every level including elementary was underpopulated, and the black system overcrowded. In 1953, the white system had over 12,000 empty seats while the black system had a shortage of 6,405.<sup>171</sup>

In fact, it is no coincidence that the Superintendent's focus was solely on the then-existing situation in his decision making, rather than reacting to the obvious fact that medium- and long-term trends indicated a need for white buildings to be transferred for black use. Ostensibly, it might have been simple incompetence that led to this approach of assessing the merits of school transfers strictly on the situation as it stood at that time rather than anticipating future needs, and pure coincidence that this benefited the white at the expense of the black system. This approach delayed white-to-black school transfers until they were immediately and absolutely necessary (and almost always too late). However, Corning's manipulation of data to justify his actions points to ulterior motives. His assessment of options suggested by various parties involved laying out the consequences of transferring different white-used buildings for

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<sup>170</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, November 2nd, 1949, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> Anliot, 'A Study of the Dual Education System', pp. 44-47.

black use. In doing so, he points out that any of the proposed white building transfers would have caused the black Senior High schools to collectively have a surplus of between 1,396 and 2,496 spaces by 1951 due to the impending completion of the new Spingarn Senior High for black students. However, these assessments were made based on the 1949 enrollment data, with no projected increase in black enrollment whatsoever in the intervening two years.<sup>172</sup> The 1949 Strayer report to Congress on the D.C. public schools- of which the Superintendent no doubt had knowledge, as he referenced it elsewhere in his report- had predicted a rise in population at the black Senior high level of almost 1,000 pupils by 1951.<sup>173</sup> Such estimates, and reasonable assumptions that this pattern would continue, easily justified the transfer of at least one white building in addition to the new Spingarn, as advocated by the parent activist groups. The Superintendent clearly attempted to selectively use certain figures to preserve white advantage.

The Superintendent's preferred solution, as with Browne, was to use an elementary school- Park View- as an annexe for a pupil overflow of 500 from Cardozo. As with the Blow and Webb solution to Browne, these facilities were clearly inappropriate for the provision of Senior High education. However, even more egregiously, this solution did not even fully relieve overcrowding at Cardozo; it would have left the main campus almost 300 pupils over capacity and rising. Further, Park View had earlier that year already been reassigned to the black system for use as an elementary school, and though admittedly underutilised as such (enrollment was c. 53% of capacity), the Superintendent's idea that 500 Cardozo pupils should occupy the remaining classrooms there while keeping the elementary contingent in the other half of the building was clearly an attempt to solve the problem with existing black resources rather than transfer white ones.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, the Park View elementary parents themselves saw through this, decrying it as unfair and "just a means of trying to avoid turning over Central High School or some other white school".<sup>175</sup>

The most obvious solution, and the one the Consolidated Parent Group advocated for, was the transfer of Central High School from white to black use. The Superintendent argued consistently

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<sup>172</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, November 2nd, 1949, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 5

<sup>173</sup> Anliot, 'A Study of the Dual Education System', pp. 41-42.

<sup>174</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, November 2nd, 1949, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 16.

<sup>175</sup> Author Unknown, 'Park View Parents Fight For School', *Washington Afro American*, 18th October 1949, pp. 1-2.

against this, even in his third report on the matter and amid consistent vehement criticism from affected groups, with arguments based on his misleading data which- as earlier established- did not account for predicted population increases. His argument was circuitous and confusing- perhaps deliberately so in order to deflect from criticism, shrouded behind supposed technical expertise and language of “educational soundness”- but essentially boiled down to the idea that transferring the Central High building would damage ongoing attempts to extract congressional appropriations to fund new replacements for Armstrong and the existing Cardozo building.<sup>176</sup> This was clearly nonsensical, as transferring Central would have provided concrete improvement to the black system, whereas hypothetical new buildings at the mercy of the budgetary process in the future were much less tangible- Spingarn had taken twenty years.<sup>177</sup> Corning further adjudicated that any potential temporary transfer of buildings such as Central would also be “palliative” and too disruptive to be educationally sound.<sup>178</sup>

Any transfer of Central was particularly emotive to whites because of the tradition and identity attached to it in the white popular memory. It was the jewel in the crown of the white school system at the time of its construction, and its position as a cultural cornerstone for whites in its vicinity and across the city led to significant white advocacy from parents, alumni, and other supporters with “almost totalitarian interest in their school”.<sup>179</sup> As with Eliot Junior High with the Browne overcrowding situation, Central High was clearly an asset the white schools would have missed, and one the Superintendent felt extraordinary pressure to retain for white use, regardless of black needs.

That Central was eventually transferred in May 1950 was testament not to the Superintendent who fought it at every turn to preserve white interests, but the voracious activism of the parents of the badly-treated black students. This transfer also did not alleviate the situation of overcrowding, as Central replaced Cardozo rather than adding to it; the original Cardozo building was deemed no longer usable due to its poor conditions.<sup>180</sup> However, the nature of the

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<sup>176</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, November 2nd, 1949, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 7.

<sup>177</sup> Woody Taylor, ‘Congress Holds Up Funds for Expansion’, *Washington Afro-American*, September 4th, 1948.

<sup>178</sup> Letter from Hobart Corning to the Board of Education, November 2nd, 1949, Records of the Consolidated Parent Group, p. 6.

<sup>179</sup> Author Unknown, ‘Central Hi Alumni Offer Plan for Cardozo Pupils’, *Washington Afro-American*, August 23rd 1949.

<sup>180</sup> Rae, ‘The Dual School System’, p. 38

way the decision was reached, against the wishes of the Superintendent, by the Board of Education is worthy of examination in the broader context of the relationship between the Board and its Superintendent, and as it ostensibly contradicts the idea that the Superintendent and Board were consistently united in their actions by a shared interest in preserving white superiority, as earlier asserted.

The reality of the situation was that the Superintendent was, throughout the Cardozo debate, fairly isolated in his position. Even his deputy for the black schools, Garnet C. Wilkinson, a “steadfast” proponent of the dual school system, supported the transfer of Cardozo and believed it would not damage the black school building program.<sup>181</sup> The relationship between the Board and Superintendent was undoubtedly complex; there was much tension and disagreement in between Corning and the leadership of the Board in the post-war period as they battled for authority and the leadership of the Board attempted to limit Corning’s power.<sup>182</sup> This had been going on since at least 1949, when Corning and Board President Sharpe had a dispute over the former’s authority over library books.<sup>183</sup> This power struggle culminated in 1952 when Corning’s reappointment to his role was being considered by the Board, and the President and Vice President attempted unsuccessfully to remove him: they lost the vote by six votes to three. Having lost this power battle, Chairman Sharpe had to be talked out of resigning on the spot by the judge in charge of appointing the Board members and Vice President Lee stated that he would not seek to renew his own term.<sup>184</sup> Thus, the Board’s overruling of Corning’s objections to transferring Central in March of 1950 can be characterised at least partly as an episode in this ongoing battle between Board and Superintendent, rather than a genuine desire by the majority of the Board for improvement to the black schools. Certainly, the Board was not reluctant to flex its administrative muscles and assert its own authority in overruling the Superintendent, even if this might not have been their ideal issue over which to battle.

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<sup>181</sup> Hamilton, ‘The Cost of Integration’, p. 52. for Wilkinson’s support for the dual-school system; ‘Committee Votes Central School Shift to Colored’, *Washington Evening Star*, 31st January 1950, for Wilkinson’s support for Central transfer.

<sup>182</sup> Author Unknown, ‘Dr Corning Defends His 5 years in Charge of District Schools’, *Washington Evening Star*, January 4th, 1951.

<sup>183</sup> Steven J. Diner, ‘The Governance of Education in the District of Columbia: An Historical Analysis of Current Issues’, Studies in D.C. History and Public Policy Paper No. 2 (1982), University of the District of Columbia, <<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED218375>> [accessed 20/01/2019].

<sup>184</sup> Coit Hendley Jr., ‘That School Board Row Just Goes On and On and On’, *Washington Evening Star*, January 13th 1952.

Indeed, the Board had previously shown a reluctance to intervene in the debate over the transfer of Central. The Parks and Grounds subcommittee had voted 2-1 on 31st January 1950 to recommend overruling the Superintendent's continued insistence that the building should not be transferred for black use.<sup>185</sup> This was a decision made in the subcommittee along racial lines: the two black subcommittee members voted to transfer Central and the third (white) member initially concurred but later recanted. However, the Board of Education itself did not act on this, and postponed a vote of the full Board on the matter for three consecutive meetings.<sup>186</sup> The Board eventually relented and held a vote at the meeting of March 8th at which it voted by five to two in favour of the transfer.<sup>187</sup> The issue of Central had become a huge political thorn in the side of the Board, who was more directly responsive to such pressures than the Superintendent who was one degree further removed from it. A legal case- *Haley v. Sharpe*- challenging the failure to transfer Central and resultant poor education of pupils at the overcrowded Cardozo school was working its way through the courts, and it is likely that- as documented with the transfer of Browne two years earlier, the Board was motivated by to avoid the negative damage to its reputation a condemning court decision would do to its institutional reputation. The legal documents for this case showed an intent by the plaintiffs to launch a particularly rigorous attack on the Superintendent and the Board's inaction and racist practice.<sup>188</sup> The similarities in that respect were noted by observers and supporters of the transfer, such as the Chair of the Federation of Civic Associations.<sup>189</sup>

Ultimately, the eventual transfer of Central from white to black use does not contradict the pattern of this period. Building transfers were not uncommon: "Between 1939 and 1954, thirty buildings were transferred. Between 1950 and 1954 alone, nine elementaries, two junior highs and one senior high were transferred."<sup>190</sup> These transfers, however, were not done on the basis of maintaining equality between black and white education, but rather to maintain a bare minimum standard in the black schools in order to avoid significant legal or political backlash, of

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<sup>185</sup> Author Unknown, 'Committee Votes Central School Shift to Colored', *Washington Evening Star*, 31st January 1950".

<sup>186</sup> Author Unknown, 'Vote on Central Due Wednesday', *Washington Afro-American*, March 7th, 1950.

<sup>187</sup> Author Unknown, 'Education Board to Act on Central High and Reorganization Plans', *Washington Evening Star*, March 7th, 1950.

<sup>188</sup> 'Proposed Examination of Hobart Corning', Box 163-20, Folder "Haley v. Sharpe Oct. 1949". The Papers of Charles Hamilton Houston, Moorland-Spingarn Research Centre, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

<sup>189</sup> Author Unknown, 'Committee Votes Central School Shift to Colored', *Washington Evening Star*, 31st January 1950".

<sup>190</sup> Diner, 'The Governance of Education in the District of Columbia', p. 36.

which Central is a prime example. The way this decision was continually obfuscated, delayed, and then eventually reached, however, does illustrate the motivations and machinations of the authorities involved as consistently prioritising white education over black.

**V: Hollow Promises of Hope: The Response to *Bolling* and the District's "Desegregation Plan"**

The Board, the Superintendent, and most citizen advocacy groups welcomed the Supreme Court decision with ostensibly open arms, in a marked contrast to their distinctly and unmistakably clasped-arm stance, girded by their apparent adherence to a clearly outlined legal requirement for segregated schools, towards earlier advocacy to the same ends.

Whereas, given the authorities' obfuscation of attempts to transfer white schools to black use in the post-war years, one might have expected at least a subtle degree of evasion or qualification, yet at various the Board meetings and in official communications, such obstructionism never presented itself in official rhetoric. This was striking, as the Superintendent and the Board had previously gone to great lengths to ensure that the system they oversaw remained entirely segregated to white advantage, and not just to the letter of the law as required by their positions, as demonstrated previously in the post-war approach to overcrowding at the Browne and Cardozo Schools.

The Board and Superintendent had little choice but to embrace the *Bolling* verdict as policy, at least outwardly and in its official stratagem. Optics and political realities forbade open evasion or obfuscation, as the federal judges who appointed the Board and were colleagues of the justices of the Supreme Court, and the President who ultimately signed off their budgets would not have allowed this. Eisenhower was ultimately the chief executive of the District, and had been an open, vocal advocate for desegregation in the city's public accommodations, having declared his intention for Washington D.C. to be "showpiece for the nation" in that regard.<sup>191</sup> The day following the *Brown* decisions of which *Bolling* was a part, Eisenhower acted to apply pressure and called the District Commissioners, imploring that he felt the District should be a "model for the nation" when it came to desegregating its public school system.<sup>192</sup> However, the reality of the D.C. school authorities' approach to forming the concrete remedial response to the integration court was one of continuing to treat white convenience as taking precedence over the black educational need for true integration.

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<sup>191</sup> David A. Nichols, "'The Showpiece of Our Nation': Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Desegregation of the District of Columbia", *Washington History*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (2004/5), pp. 44-65, p. 45

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

Though the Board's official rhetoric shifted in a complete volte face from that of strict segregationism to liberal desegregation at the drop of a gavel, what remained was a Superintendent- facilitated by the Board- continuing a white supremacist project through deliberate, technical means. The "integration plan" was no such thing, as it contained no active integratory measures, as was also the case in so many of the "liberal" northern cities. In fact, the defining aspect of active policy in the plan was allowing whites to essentially opt-out of integration. Where radical and drastic action was required to uproot and completely replant an education system built upon a century of white supremacy in order to give D.C.'s black students a genuinely equitable education, a passive approach with little to no compensatory action was taken. Though overt racial barriers were removed, their legacies were not undone. The D.C. schools continued, to all intents and purposes, to be segregated.

The Board and Superintendent had been anticipating, and planning for at some level, a potential future merger of the dual school for more than two full years before the *Brown* decisions of May 1954. At the Board meeting of February 1952, presentations were given by interested parties regarding the future of the racially-segregated system, and members debated the prospect of asking the Superintendent to make a report on the longer-term viability of a dual school system which was, as one white member- Dr. Gannon- stated: "economically and democratically unsound". While this was not necessarily the majority-view of the Board, it was clear to all that given their struggles to obtain from Congress the extra funding necessary to run a racially-segregated system, and increasing legal complexities such as an ongoing and unresolved question of whether teacher transfers across the racial divide were permissible under the law, that a unified system was inevitable at some point in the relatively near future.<sup>193</sup> That is not to say that integration was a desire of the majority of the Board, and the seven to two vote should not necessarily be read as such. Indeed, several of the members who voted in the affirmative did so only after asking clarifying questions as to the nature of the study: namely, that it was merely an exploration of facts relating to the existing state of the dual-school system, rather than any kind of blueprint for desegregation.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Minutes from meeting of 20th February 1952, Meeting Minutes, Vol. 79, Feb-March 1952, Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education, Charles Sumner Museum and Archives, pp. 90-91.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

As then-Assistant Superintendent Carl Hansen later insinuated in of these early moves to consider the future viability of the dual-school system, they were not driven by a liberalising majority within the Board itself, but rather outside factors.<sup>195</sup> In fact, requesting that the Superintendent evaluate- in the most static way possible- the economic and social viability of the racially-separate system was the very minimum action the Board could have taken at the time. Pro-integration activists had been urging the Board to “begin the process now” in order to ensure that when integration, perceived by many as an inevitability, did occur, the District was prepared.<sup>196</sup> The many speakers who advocated at the Board meeting of February 1952 for these initial steps to be taken, along with the broader climate of the increasing momentum of “local and national attacks upon racial discrimination” which would ultimately reach a “dramatic crescendo” by 1954 were already powerful.<sup>197</sup> In a city where theaters were desegregated in 1948, and playgrounds and public recreational facilities gradually so between 1949 and 1952, it would have been difficult for the Board of Education to publicly oppose such a fact-finding report.<sup>198</sup> However, this factual report was later stifled behind the scenes and was never carried out by the Superintendent, a fact which activist groups resented and objected to, such as the Washington Friends Meetings, who wrote to the Board implying that the Board’s majority-white membership was attempting to “stifle and secrete pertinent” data by “rescinding the order for a study of the possibilities of integration”.<sup>199</sup>

The lack of zeal with which the majority of the Board approved tentative measures ostensibly to aid future integration is further evidenced by their approach to the ‘Handbook on Intergroup Education’, which they approved the concept of in late 1951, and the final version of on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1952. This was, as with the Superintendent’s fact-finding report, not an action generated from within the Board, but rather the result of years of advocacy by outside groups. The Handbook was not specifically racial or integratory in its nature or intent. It was “planned to be used within the policy of segregation” and was not solely related to race: other social divisions such as religion, social status, and economic status were also included. At the meeting which approved the creation of the Handbook, no member of the subcommittee of the Board

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<sup>195</sup> Carl F. Hansen, ‘The Miracle of Social Adjustment’, (New York: The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, 1957), <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED016688.pdf>>, [accessed 2/11/2018], p. 29.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, pp. 19-20.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Letter from The Washington Fellowship to the Board of Education, March 25th, 1952, Vol. 80: April 1952, Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education.

discussed integration as the objective. Indeed, most of the content relating to race relations and the potential for interracial cooperation in education was driven and shaped by a local advocacy group called the Citizens' Committee on Intercultural Relations, rather than by members of the Board or the educational experts in the Superintendent's administrative department.<sup>200</sup>

Later that year, in December 1952, the Board discussed the future of the racially-segregated school system in light of the new legal case challenging its legality under the Constitution: *Bolling v Sharpe*, which would go on to be one of the companion cases adjudicated by the Supreme Court in the *Brown* decision of April 1954. It was broadly acknowledged at this meeting by a majority of the membership that this case, along with the pervasive climate of desegregationism, made the integration of D.C. schools a "distinct possibility at some time in the future, near or far".<sup>201</sup> After questioning whether such action might jeopardize their legal case and several white members and the Superintendent himself seeking to clarify that the meeting would be entirely "advisory" and not binding, the Board agreed to hold a meeting to discuss the "hypothetical mechanics" of integration, should it be ordered.<sup>202</sup> This special meeting, however, did not occur until six months later, on the 7th May 1953, once again demonstrating that the Board's majority was in no hurry to consider integration; the Board's membership clearly recognised that it had to be seen to take cursory steps towards such goals but did so with little commitment and in a largely perfunctory way. Similarly, much of the broader work done to prepare for integration was done by outside groups, not the Board or Superintendent. A series of seminars held on a voluntary basis for teachers and administrators throughout 1953 and 1954 which dealt with issues expected to arise in an integrated system were run by the American Friends Service Committee, and though he clearly feeling obliged to start "planning" for a potential desegregation by early 1953, Superintendent Corning's preparations consisted of little more than monthly staff meetings conceived around the vague concept of generating "guiding principles", with little substantive or tangible output.<sup>203</sup>

At the May 1953 meeting itself, the Board heard from various prominent citizens of the District, though as the meeting lasted only forty-five minutes, it is hard to make any claim that the meeting was of any real depth or constituted anything more than a cosmetic activity on the

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<sup>200</sup> Hansen, 'The Miracle', pp. 36-37.

<sup>201</sup> Meeting Minutes, December 17th, 1952, Vol. 83 (December 17th 1952 to February 18th 1953), Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education., p. 30.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, pp. 31-33.

<sup>203</sup> Hansen, 'The Miracle', pp. 36-37.

Board's part.<sup>204</sup> Members did not question the speakers, nor were the speakers permitted to question or discuss one another's presented ideas or experiences. In short, the meeting was most certainly not an earnest attempt by the Board to delve into the complexities of the issue of desegregation or reach consensus to be applied in the future. Despite this, some of the contributions by speakers were of note, particularly those of several black citizens. What was broadly agreed upon by these speakers was that such a process should "happen quickly": as Dr. Herbert C. Marshall- a prominent Georgetown physician- put it: "a series of mass meetings (following an integration decision) would stir up and becloud the entire picture".<sup>205</sup> Further, these black representatives concurred as to the necessity of any desegregation being simple and comprehensive. Mrs Robert G. McGuire, a member of a prominent black D.C. family and herself a former member of the Board of Education stressed the importance that the process be "total" and "system-wide".<sup>206</sup> The contribution which would later become most pertinent in the context of Corning's post-*Bolling* integration plan came from Dr Phillip T. Johnson, a member of the Washington Urban League and one of the Board's black members at the time, who stressed that newly-zoned catchment boundaries post-desegregation must be "clearly and strictly adhered to... to allow administrators conscience free and non-evasive responses to any challenges".<sup>207</sup> Finally, and perhaps most illustratively, Mrs. Frances M. Wood expressed her concern that the educational establishment- The Board and Superintendent- was detached entirely from the experiences of black citizens, and that this could be a hindrance in their execution of any future integration order: "We feel that maybe if you would among yourselves open your minds and sort of get to know us better, the matter of putting integration into effect in the public schools would be no problem".<sup>208</sup>

When the *Brown* decisions were handed down by the Supreme Court on 17th May 1954, the D.C. Board of Education and Superintendent were certainly not taken by surprise. As the *Brown*

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<sup>204</sup> Meeting Minutes, May 7th, 1953, Vol. 84 (March to May 1953), Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education, pp. 1; 13 which indicate that the meeting started at 3:05 pm and adjourned at 3:50pm.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, p. 8.; For Marshall's prominence as a Georgetown physician, see: Kathleen Menzie Lesko, Valerie Babb, and Carroll R. Gibbs, *Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of its Black Community from the Founding of the 'Town of George' in 1751 to the Present Day*, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2016), p. 57.

<sup>206</sup> Meeting Minutes, May 7th, 1953, pp. 9-10.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, pp. 6-7.; For Johnson's involvement in the Washington Urban League, see: Blair Gately, "Fletcher-Johnson School Dedicated", *The Washington Post*, April 20th 1978, <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1978/04/20/fletcher-johnson-school-dedicated/5d445f67c-b6f2-4fa7-ae6a-4ecbe1403af8/>>.

<sup>208</sup> Meeting Minutes, May 7th, 1953, p. 13.

decisions compelled the states to integrate their school systems under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, so a corollary in *Bolling* specifically required that the District of Columbia do the same according to the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause. As the *Brown* decision famously contained no specific remedy or standard for desegregation, neither of course did the single page, two hundred word ruling in *Bolling*.<sup>209</sup> The D.C. authorities were thus required to interpret desegregation, and apply it to a dynamic, underfunded school system of over 100,000 pupils.<sup>210</sup> The response from these authorities was immediate. Within eight days of the decision being handed down, a special meeting of the Board of Education had been convened, established a firm "Statement of Principles" to shape the nature of desegregation and facilitate prompt action, and instructed the Superintendent to immediately begin planning the steps necessary to desegregate the schools.

The special meeting at which the "Statement of Principles" was adopted was, however, not uneventful or perfunctory. The black members of the Board wanted to see the Superintendent's initial report (a general document outlining the general approach and broad strokes of his plans rather than the specific, detailed integration plan he would later present) in advance of the meeting in order to allow them time to analyse its contents and thereby utilise the meeting itself to critique the proposals and as Dr. Butcher, one of the most outspoken integrationist members of the Board stated, to "facilitate prompt action".<sup>211</sup> The white majority of the Board obstructed this, and the Superintendent argued that presenting his report to everyone at the same time- press and public included- was preferable as this would allow him to dynamically illustrate the report "with maps" to provide a better understanding.<sup>212</sup> What came out of this was essentially a compromise, whereby a subcommittee of the Board would draft its own "Statement of Principles" for desegregation, which Dr. Butcher demanded should be "clear and unequivocal", and another member argued should "transcend any details of a proposed plan by the Superintendent", which the Board could use in "guiding it in consideration of the Superintendent's plan".<sup>213</sup> The Statement of Principles was to be presented at the same time- the special meeting on 25th May- as the Superintendent's initial desegregation report, in order to compensate for the fact that members could not see the latter in advance and provide them

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<sup>209</sup> '*Bolling v. Sharpe*, 1954', <<https://casetext.com/case/bolling-v-sharpe>>, accessed [17/08/2018].

<sup>210</sup> Hansen, 'The Miracle', p. 22.

<sup>211</sup> Minutes from Board of Education Meeting 19th May 1954, Vol 89 (16th April 1952 to 2nd June 1954), Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education, pp. 11-12.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, pp. 44-46.

with some element of control over the plan going into the meeting. While the Superintendent argued that this was not necessary and would cover much of the same ground as his own report which was not itself a detailed integration plan but similarly a set of guiding principles, he did not actively oppose it. The drafting of the Statement of Principles was narrowly approved by four votes to three with the Chair and Deputy Chair abstaining and the black membership making up the bulk of the yes votes.<sup>214</sup> Even though the Statement was effectively a compromise to placate the black membership which, led vigorously by Dr. Butcher, sought assurances that the Superintendent would be strongly integrationist in his report, there was little compromise from the white majority, and the Statement's drafting attracted only one white vote. When presented to the Board and adopted, the Statement was largely as firm and unequivocal as Butcher had hoped, requiring amongst other things that "no pupil of the public schools shall be favored or discriminated against in any matter or manner ... by reason of race or color". Even this statement, however, fell short of demanding rigid adherence to the new, "desegregated" school boundaries and allowed exceptions for "the most necessitous reasons or for the public convenience", handing the Superintendent a huge degree of discretion in what constituted "necessitous reasons" or "the public convenience".<sup>215</sup> Ultimately, the superficially liberal step of adopting these principles should not be viewed as an organic act of the majority of the Board intended to make segregation truly equitable or indicative of a strong integratory mood, but rather as a compromise forced by the tireless advocacy of a minority of the Board to those ends. Even then, the final version did not compel the Superintendent to any particular action or approach due to its broad caveats. As previously demonstrated in his attitudes to building transfers, the Superintendent had a history of promoting white interests at the expense of black students and shrouding such manoeuvres in language of educational expertise.<sup>216</sup> These principles left the door open for similar acts in obfuscation of desegregation in the name of educational necessity or public convenience.

As well as the Board's adoption of its Statement of Principles at the special meeting to react to the Court decisions, held on 25th May, such was the volume of information and contributions from both board members and interested outside parties that it was necessary to call the meeting to recess and continue it the following week on June 2nd. It was at this meeting that

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Report of the Special Committee on Integration, May 25th, 1954, Folder: "Implementation- Board Moves 1950s", Vertical Files, Records of the Washington D.C. Board of Education, pp. 11-14.

<sup>216</sup> See Chapter IV.

Corning's initial integration plan was presented. An editorial in the *Washington Afro American* the day before had predicted that a majority of the Board's membership was "perturbed" by the plan and that this would result in Corning "taking the worst spanking at the hands of the Board since he has been superintendent". Specifically, it was assumed that a majority of five: the three black members and two white liberal ones would be dissatisfied with Corning's failure to set the date of integration earlier than September 1955 and his assertion that achieving it by September of 1954 would require additional funding. The *Afro American* also predicted that transfers were to be made mandatory in all but a few exceptions, and that pupils would not simply be allowed to remain where they were until graduation.<sup>217</sup> These predictions placed far too much faith in the white liberals on the Board.

At the meeting on the 2nd June, after much discussion and debate- particularly on the part of Dr. Margaret Butcher, by far the most forceful voice for the District's black children on the Board- the Board voted five to three entirely along racial lines to deny a motion to request that the Superintendent redraft his report to be more ambitious, and address the shortfalls pointed out by the *Afro American* and others. Dr Butcher decried her fellow (specifically white) Board members, stating that this move represented "a new low in public education".<sup>218</sup> In the end, the result of more than five hours of discussion over two separate meetings was the adoption of the Superintendent's report, as was, in convenient deference to the Superintendent's expertise by the Board's white majority. The next steps approved by the Board were for the Superintendent to complete the rezoning of the District's school catchment areas by July 1st, and for him to present a full-time schedule for "complete integration in all its phases" at the next regular Board meeting on June 23rd.<sup>219</sup>

The full timeline for desegregation presented by Corning at the June 23rd Board meeting was one which was to all appearances already set steadily and earnestly in motion. The Superintendent went to great pains to highlight the steps already taken up to that point, including the temporary merging of the Boards of Examiners, notice of a merger given to the principals of the teaching colleges, a complete tabulation of the data of all of the district's circa

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<sup>217</sup> Al Sweeney, 'Board to Order Integration Now!', 1st June 1954, *The Washington Afro American*, p. 1.

<sup>218</sup> Minutes from Recessed Session of Special Board Meeting of May 25th, 1954, June 2nd 1954, Vertical Files, Folder "Implementation: Board Moves 1950s", Records of the Washington, D.C. Board of Education, P. 73.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.

100,000 pupils, and the “preliminary steps” to effect some initial pupil transfers.<sup>220</sup> These were however largely superficial acts, with little concrete integratory activity having occurred, and little in the way of permanent structural changes made. In fact, the majority of these were acts of tinkering, largely or entirely preparatory, and could or perhaps should have been done in advance of the Court decisions had the Superintendent wanted to give desegregation the best basis upon which to be implemented as quickly as possible. In fact, though the Superintendent and the Board had known that integration had been a distinct possibility for at least two years, it was perhaps summative of the Superintendent’s deliberately neglectful approach to such preparations that these preparations were left unmade until expressly and inexorably required by law. At the meeting of 19th May 1954, when prodded by the suggestion that a good administrator “would have been preparing himself on this subject for a long time,” Corning responded that he had been “preparing for weeks”, rather than the months or even years implied by the member’s barb.<sup>221</sup>

Crucially, the detailed plan and timeline presented by Corning at the June 23rd meeting was not by any measure immediate. It was, despite his claims to colleagues at the first interracial meetings of school staff in the immediate aftermath of *Bolling* that “complete desegregation of all schools is to be accomplished with least possible delay”, a distinctly gradualist approach.<sup>222</sup> Though the Superintendent accepted that he could draw the new school boundaries well in advance of the new school year, by July 1st, the school year 1954-55 was to be used as a transitional, rather than transformational, one. Corning planned for September that year that only new entrants to the school system- i.e. those entering at the Kindergarten level from pre-school or moving to the city from elsewhere- would attend schools according to the newly established zoning. There was extremely limited active transferring of pupils to newly-zoned schools at the start of the 1954-55 school year. Some 2,803 pupils were to be transferred from overcrowded former Division II (black) schools to under-utilised former Division I (white) schools: 1503 at the elementary level, 844 at the junior high level, and 460 in the senior highs. However, these transfers were carried out within the same paradigmatic administrative priorities as the school building transfers between the racial divisions earlier that decade: to relieve overcrowding, not to actively improve the lot of black students, the vast majority of whom

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<sup>220</sup> Minutes from Board of Education Meeting of 23rd June 1954, Vol. 90 (June-Aug 1954), Records of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia, p. 41.

<sup>221</sup> Minutes from Board of Education Meeting 19th May 1954, p. 11.

<sup>222</sup> Hansen, ‘The Miracle’, p. 45.

remained in schools worse than their white peers due to decades of systematic neglect under the segregated system. The number of pupils to be transferred at the start of that school year in order to remedy their having to travel excessively long distances to their school and allow them to attend closer ones now zoned to them was around 100. This brought the total number of students to be transferred in September 1954 to under 3,000: less than three percent of the total enrollment of the public schools.<sup>223</sup>

Superintendent Corning justified the lack of large-scale change in the first year after *Bolling* as being all that could practically be done and indicated that to achieve integration in September 1954 would be administratively impossible. This was an assertion for which he failed to give any evidence or any coherent explanation beyond his own instinctive judgment, even though Corning had no experience in the process of integrating a school system. Dr Butcher took Corning to task over this assumption and accused him, correctly, of having “simply stated that it could not be done, but not proved it”.<sup>224</sup> Butcher was alone in her objections as the other two black members- Colonel Hamilton and Mr Willams- chose to essentially support Corning’s assertions about the unviability of faster integration and therefore supported his presented integration schedule, stating respectively that “the steps outlined in the Superintendent’s time schedule are in the direction of progress” and that the Superintendent had convinced that he would “do anything that can be done by September”.<sup>225</sup> Dr. Butcher, though isolated, was unrelenting. She eviscerated the Superintendent’s plan as “a report not on integration but on the subject of relief”: Corning was operating within the same paradigms as under the dual-school system by simply addressing the very worst excesses of racial inequity rather than the drastic structural changes necessary to counteract a century of accumulated and entrenched racial disparities. Further, Corning’s decision to take a thirty-day vacation along with his entire administrative staff that Summer provided yet more evidence that he was not in fact doing everything possible to achieve integration at the earliest date. When challenged by Dr. Butcher on the effect of this holiday on integration, Corning claimed perversely and counterfactually that “in his considered opinion,” integration “could not be done any quicker”, even if his staff worked all Summer. Butcher’s concrete, if slightly pugnacious, suggestions such as hiring someone to cover the Superintendent’s role while he vacationed were dismissed out of hand by the rest of

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<sup>223</sup> Minutes from Board of Education Meeting of 23rd June 1954, Vol. 90 (June-Aug 1954), Records of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia, pp. 42-45.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 52

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

the Board.<sup>226</sup> While this Summer break for the administrative staff was entirely ordinary practice, that the authorities, including the Superintendent and the majority of Dr. Butcher's colleagues on the Board refused to compromise these norms indicates a refusal to accept that the challenge of integration before them was extraordinary, or black educational equality a goal worth disrupting comfortable, established administrative practice for. This adherence to viewing the status quo as organic and inherently virtuous, rather than as a reality and a system of norms and mechanisms specifically constructed and perpetuated in the context of white racial supremacy is one which also shaped further actions by the majority of the Board and superintendent towards desegregating the schools.

Indeed, even by the start of the school year 1955-56, when Corning's integration plan was administratively completed, the schools remained segregated and the program of desegregation remained gradual. Where previously only new pupils entering the school system would be assigned schools according to the new boundaries, from September 1955 all pupils entering a new level of the system- e.g. graduating from junior to senior high- would be allocated as such.<sup>227</sup> Though admittedly a positive incremental step towards integration, this continued a gradualist approach whereby significant numbers of children would have to wait up to five years before being zoned to their newly zoned schools: tens of thousands continued to attend schools according to the old segregated boundaries. These multitude of administrative steps was viewed by parents and interested desegregationist parties as "unnecessarily slow and complicated", according to Chris Asch and Derek Musgrove.<sup>228</sup> A key further shift to be acknowledged was that from September 1955 the burden of accommodating optional transfers (those pupils who sought out of choice to move from their current school to their newly-zoned school) was shifted. In the previous year, such transfers were only possible provided it would not cause overcrowding. From September 1955 the case became that students wanting to attend their newly-zoned local school had priority over those already enrolled there but who lived outside the new zone when it came to avoiding overcrowding.<sup>229</sup> However, as Irene Osborne observed that year in an assessment of the situation in *The Journal of Negro Education*, the burden of integration continued "to depend on positive action by parents and children to provide the initiative" and that many children remained assigned to their existing

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, pp. 50-51.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, p. 45

<sup>228</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, p. 314.

<sup>229</sup> Minutes from Board of Education Meeting of 23rd June 1954, pp. 61-63

schools on a “racial basis” because “they failed to comprehend the procedure of options”.<sup>230</sup> By avoiding wholesale, automatic pupil shifts to ensure desegregation and instead providing simply ‘options’ to switch to newly-zoned schools, Corning effectively abdicated the responsibility for desegregating the schools and imposed it upon individuals in the black community: on black parents having the time, administrative skills, and ability to navigate bureaucracy in order to get their children a fair schooling. In fact, even those who did manage to circumvent these administrative hurdles and request desegregatory transfers did not necessarily get them: in the 1954-55 school year, only 900 of 2,400 option requests at the elementary level were granted, which likely further reduced the incentive for parents in following years to request them despite the shift in the burden of whether transferees or existing pupils took priority in the event of overcrowding.<sup>231</sup> The very real impact of gradualism was thousands of children spending an extra one or more of their formative years in racially-assigned, inferior schools.

In justifying this continued incrementalism in desegregating the schools, Corning expressed a key tenet of his educational philosophy as it related to desegregation, which essentially amounted to prioritising order over justice. Tellingly, when relaying his overarching principles for desegregation in the first Board meeting (25th May) after the court decisions, Corning stated that “the transition of a desegregated system is to be accomplished by natural and orderly means”, and that “artificial and immediate reassignments of large numbers of pupils... would be disruptive and should be avoided.”<sup>232</sup> This idea of “naturalness” was the same approach the Superintendent had taken when opposing the transfer of buildings from white to black use under the dual-school system, and he continued to operate under these self-imposed limitations after the integration court decisions, to the advantage of whites and the disadvantage of blacks. Once again, in decrying any significant transfers of pupils as “disruptive”, Corning framed the existing situation which advantaged whites as an organic one, and any structural attempts to redress racial imbalance within that status quo as therefore “artificial”. The underlying assumption in all of this is inherent white racial supremacy; and it is to this supremacy- not white education per se- that large-scale transfers would have been “disruptive”. This concept of the natural is one which can be tied to the same principles undergirding the ‘neighbourhood schools’ discourse

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<sup>230</sup> Irene Osborne, ‘Desegregation of Washington Schools: The First Sixty Days’, *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (1955), pp. 78-86, p. 81.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79.

<sup>232</sup> Hansen, ‘The Miracle’, p. 46.

which was used to similar ends in limiting the effects of school desegregation on whites in 'Northern cities' experiencing similar racial demographic shifts to D.C.

In fact, the similarities between the District of Columbia in terms of its shifting racial makeup of its general population, and therefore its public school population, and the northern metropolises were recognised at the time by the school administrators. Carl Hansen, Assistant Superintendent at the time of desegregation, wrote just two years later comparing the shift towards drastically increased black enrollment in the D.C. public schools to that in Los Angeles and Chicago.<sup>233</sup> In these cities, as in D.C., a reluctance to disrupt 'naturalness' was used as a way to frustrate real integration. In Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, patterns of housing segregation resulting from government policy had led to largely monoracial neighbourhoods. As work from J.L Rury, Josh Sides, and Jeanne Theoharis amongst others have pointed out, the authorities in these cities implemented neighbourhood school policies not simply by coincidence, but explicitly to maintain a sense of natural community which was based entirely around racial exclusion.<sup>234</sup> This was also the case in Washington, D.C.: though legal enforcement of restrictive racial covenants was made impossible by in *Shelley v Kraemer* (1948), they remained enforced in reality by the real estate and banking industries: in 1950, much housing in D.C. remained restricted to white use.<sup>235</sup> Thus, a purely neighbourhood-based school zoning system coupled with deliberately constructed monoracial neighbourhoods in D.C., as in these other cities, led to little integration.<sup>236</sup> Corning's new attendance zones were based entirely on proximity of a child's home to the school and failed to take into account any other factors or attempt to compensate for years of neglect of black children's schooling. While school officials in Los Angeles later openly gerrymandered their school zones on an ongoing basis, and authorities in New York and Chicago continually refused to make theirs any more racially equitable as this would conflict with the neighbourhood schooling philosophy, D.C. officials acted similarly.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>234</sup> For Chicago, see Rury, 'Race Space and the Politics'; for New York see Theoharis *A More Beautiful and Terrible History* pp. 33-61; for Los Angeles see Theoharis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight'.

<sup>235</sup> Mapping D.C. Segregation, Map 'Restricted Housing and Racial Change, 1940-1970', <<http://mappingsegregationdc.org/#maps>>, [accessed 02/06/2019].

<sup>236</sup> Prologue D.C., 'Mapping Segregation in Washington D.C.', <<https://jmt.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=061d0da22587475fb969483653179091>>, [accessed 05/07/2019].

<sup>237</sup> For Los Angeles, see: Sides, *LA City Limits*, p.159 and Theoharis, 'Hidden in Plain Sight', pp. 57-58; For Chicago, see Rury, 'Race, Space, and the Politics', pp. 130-131; For New York, see: Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, pp. 37-38.

What is telling, however, of his continued adherence to these neighbourhood principles in service of white interests is Superintendent Corning's insistence on the ability of pupils to be able to opt out of transfers. Corning insisted upon including an "escape" option in his integration plan. This option amounted to essentially allowing parents to opt-out of integration, and request that their child attend a school outside of their prescribed attendance zone. The Superintendent used the "laxness" of the Board, as characterised by Dr. Butcher, to take advantage of vague Board policy which entrusted great discretion to his expert educational judgement. Board members had approved in their own statement of principles that the Superintendent could make exceptions to the boundaries "for necessitous reasons or for the public convenience", and further signed off on Corning's own plan which stated that he had the authority to "take additional progressive steps as are consistent with the welfare of the children".<sup>238</sup> Corning and his administration took advantage of the discretion these vagueries afforded them by allowing pupils to switch schools to ones outside of their zone for reasons as fatuous and blatantly racially-coded as "emotional hardship".<sup>239</sup> Further, they even allowed pupils to switch in cases where the pupil "was among a very small minority in the school and the parent applied for relief": an absurdity in the context of desegregation which created a clear logical impasse. If white pupils could opt-out of small-scale integration, but at the same time the administration had concretely ruled out any measures for large-scale integration, white parents had the power to stop integration entirely. Indeed, these opt-outs were almost entirely applied to whites. As then-Assistant Superintendent Hansen pointed out: those who applied for these 'escape' clauses were "a number of white parents".<sup>240</sup> These 'escape' options also represented an exception of double standards to the neighbourhood school philosophy which benefited whites and disadvantaged blacks. Maintaining "naturalness" was given as the reason for not allowing black children to transfer to schools outside of their zoned school- which was likely to be a former Division II inferior (black) school- yet white pupils were allowed to transfer out of these neighbourhood zones on an emotional whim. While theoretically black students could also take advantage of the options and request a transfer, they did not have access to the same arguments to justify them as whites. Any black student requesting a transfer to what were on

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<sup>238</sup> For Butcher's "laxness" characterisation, see: Meeting minutes of the Board of Education, 23rd June 1954, p.53; For the Statement of Principles, see: Report of the Special Committee on Integration, May 25th 1954, p. 13; for approval of discretion in Corning's report, see: Meeting minutes of the Board of Education, 23rd June 1954, p. 49.

<sup>239</sup> Hansen, 'The Miracle', p. 51.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

average newer, better-equipped majority-white schools outside of their zone would have been doing precisely the opposite of what the justifications for such transfers required: actively becoming part of a small minority at a largely monoracial school, rather than avoiding that exact scenario as in the rubric for justifying these transfers demanded. Further, as activists such as Julius Hobson have pointed out, black students were less able to take advantage of transfers to better, further away schools due to the financial costs of transportation.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, a decade later in a Court case relating to a pupil tracking system, a federal judge concluded that options were deliberately and explicitly established “to permit white children to ‘escape’ from predominantly negro schools”.<sup>242</sup> Thus, as Jeffrey Henig has mapped, in the five years after ‘desegregation’, “none of the former Division 2 schools experienced more than minor integration”: they remained an average of over 97% black enrollment, with an average of fewer than fourteen white students each. Due to the one-way nature of these options, the burden of attending these inferior former-Division 2 schools was carried almost entirely by black students well beyond 1955.<sup>243</sup>

That the D.C. school administrators’ aversion to any active steps toward racial integration was based in the naturalness of white superiority is further evidenced by the emergence of a similar “culturalist” discourse there, particularly in the aftermath of Corning’s desegregation program being implemented, as Jeanne Theoharis has pointed out was present in the northern metropolises.<sup>244</sup> In order to explain the disparity between black and white achievement which was immediately obvious in a system whose administration was integrated and centralised, the school authorities fell back upon racist and white-supremacist arguments of cultural deprivation amongst black children, rather than the obvious deficit in the quality of the education they had hitherto received. The “naturalist” attitude which inspired the lack of integratory administrative action was exemplified further here, as the Superintendent refused to consider the impact of structurally racist schooling practices, instead concluding that black underachievement in D.C.

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<sup>241</sup> Julius Hobson, ‘A Report on Educational Policy and the Courts’, 1978, Folder “Hobson vs. Hansen studies”, Vertical Files, Records of the Washington, D.C. Board of Education, p. 13.

<sup>242</sup> ‘An Evaluation of the decision in Hobson v. Hansen’, A Report and Evaluation by the National Capital Area Civil Liberties Defense Fund, February 1968, Folder “Hobson vs. Hansen Studies”, Vertical Files, Records of the Board of Education of the District of Columbia.

<sup>243</sup> Jeffrey Henig, ‘Patterns of School-Level Racial Change in D.C. in the Wake of Brown: Perceptual Legacies of Desegregation’, *PS: Political Science And Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sept. 1997), pp. 448-453, p. 449.

<sup>244</sup> Theoharis, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight’ in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, p. 51.

was the natural result of black children growing up in “a cultural Siberia”.<sup>245</sup> Further, not only did Corning absolve his own administrative decisions’ contributions to black underachievement but actively attempted to laud them as the reason black children had made any academic achievements at all, claiming “it is a wonder that Negro children who have so little in their homes have gained so much in school.”<sup>246</sup> The evident entrenchment of these ideas amongst the administrators of the school system would go on to be channeled into a pupil tracking system in the public schools implemented under Corning’s Assistant Superintendent and successor, Carl Hansen, in 1958. Once again, this mirrored events in similar cities such as Los Angeles, where a similar tracking system was implemented.<sup>247</sup>

The Track system’s roots were laid by Hansen himself while still Assistant Superintendent in 1956, almost immediately after the implementation of the desegregation plan. It is clear from an analysis of the racial makeup of each of the different tracks in September 1956- a document which was at the time confidential and unable to be scrutinised by the public or advocates for equality- that the track system was in its manifestation segregation by another name. Hansen explicitly linked it to segregation, framing it as the “Big Solution” to the problems of desegregation.<sup>248</sup> Pupils were tracked into one of four streams- Honors, College Preparatory, General, or Basic- according to academic ability, as judged by standardised test scores. In the first year of the track system, in which it was rolled out only at the Senior High level, there were 1,921 white students (38%) and 3,178 black students (62%) in the Senior High schools. Despite this, white students made up a combined 73% of the top two tracks- Honors and College Preparatory, while black students made up a staggering 89% of the Basic track which in Hansen’s own words was for “stupid” children who were not to “aspire towards higher education and professional careers”.<sup>249</sup> It was clear duplicitousness then, likely due to the necessary political optics, that Hansen claimed throughout his tenure that the Track system was working and proclaimed his satisfaction that “the bright child will not be brought down by lagging students” despite the fact that re-testing was only done every three years, effectively consigning

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<sup>245</sup> Erwin Knoll, ‘The Truth About Desegregation in the Washington, D.C., Public Schools’, *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 1959), pp. 92-113, P. 102.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Theoharis, ‘Hidden in Plain Sight’ in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. By Meyer and Crespino, p. 57.

<sup>248</sup> Hobson, ‘A Report on Education Policy and the Courts’, p. 8.

<sup>249</sup> For statistics, see: Evidence submitted by Hobart Corning to the House District Committee, September 18th 1956, Box 174, Folder 3-332A, the Records of the Temporary and Permanent Boards of Commissioners, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., p.5.; For Hansen’s characterisation of the Basic Track, see:

pupils to their initially assigned track and thus disadvantaging from the outset black pupils who had received inferior educations.<sup>250</sup>

Ultimately, more than a decade after the Track system's implementation, a federal court ruled in *Hobson vs. Hansen* (1967) that the tracking system, along with the options put in place in the desegregation plan, constituted a violation of black students' constitutional rights to equal education. While the Court stopped short of excoriating this as deliberate segregation, and agreed that the officials "sincerely believed in the neighbourhood school policy" despite its segregatory outcomes in an increasingly residentially-segregated city, it was equally "impossible not to assume that the school administration is affirmatively satisfied with the segregation which the neighbourhood policy breeds".<sup>251</sup> However, given the cumulative effects of these authorities' actions before, during, and after 'desegregation', which consistently benefited whites over blacks, it is impossible to conclude anything other than the fact that such actions were intentional, and though a belief in naturalness and neighbourhood schools may well have been earnest, it was one which complemented rather than disproved this racist intent. The court also saw it necessary to step in and order the active integratory measures, such as the option of busing for black students as courts would similarly do in Northern cities such as Boston, which the Superintendent and Board had failed to implement in their so-called desegregation plan over a decade earlier.<sup>252 253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Author Unknown, 'Corning Calls Last School Year Best Since Start of Integration in District', *Washington Evening Star*, 14th July 1957.

<sup>251</sup> 'An Evaluation of the decision in *Hobson v. Hansen*', p. 4.

<sup>252</sup> Matthew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Segregation*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

<sup>253</sup> 'An Evaluation of the decision in *Hobson v. Hansen*', *Ibid*, p. 6.

## **VI: The Impact and Import of the Deliberate Continuation of Public School Segregation in Washington, D.C.**

The first purpose of this piece is to demonstrate decisively that despite the *Bolling* decision and a racially-liberal rhetorical patina from those in administrative power, Washington D.C.'s schools never integrated. Though authorities attempted to manipulate the data by using statistics such as the number of pupils attending integrated schools or the number of schools with both black and white pupils to show otherwise, these were substantively poor measures of integration. The latter statistic, for example, showed that 116 of 163 schools in September 1954, rising to 139 out of 163 in 1956, had some level of both black and white enrollment.<sup>254</sup> However the numbers of black children in the white schools supposedly making them "integrated" were miniscule: only twenty-nine of these schools in September 1954 had a minority enrollment greater than 20%.<sup>255</sup>

Further, the conditions created by the authorities' neighbourhood school zoning and optional transfers created a situation in which whites could continue to re-segregate themselves in the context of white flight. As Jeffrey Henig has demonstrated, around two-thirds of the formerly-white schools experienced "significant racial turnover" in the years following desegregation, this was due to whites fleeing and ceding them to black use. A snapshot of these schools might show some reasonable levels of integration in, say, 1956, but by 1960 the process of racial inversion had been completed and these two-thirds of formerly-white schools were almost entirely black, while the other third remained almost entirely white.<sup>256</sup> White parents were using the mechanisms established in the desegregation plan to avoid integration in a dynamic way. The almost total lack of backlash to desegregation, which Hansen admitted was carried out "smoothly" should not be read as an achievement of the administrators but rather a symptom of the fact that little had changed.<sup>257</sup> Just as in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and other cities affected by the same racial demographic shifts, a refusal to actively integrate the schools undergirded by a 'neighbourhood schools' policy and an underlying belief in white supremacy as natural facilitated the continuation of racially-segregated schooling. The school authorities at no point made any attempt at true integration.

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<sup>254</sup> Hansen, 'The Miracle', p. 60.

<sup>255</sup> Osborne, 'Desegregation of Washington Schools', p. 79.

<sup>256</sup> Henig, 'Patterns of School-Level Racial Change in D.C.', p. 451.

<sup>257</sup> Hansen, 'The Miracle', pp. 49-50.

Secondly, this piece seeks to contribute to the plethora of recent scholarship dismantling of the “Myth of Southern Exceptionalism”, while suggesting a renewed point of focus for future study on the metropolis as a key unit of analysis within this field. It argues that Washington, D.C.’s response to court-ordered desegregation as being one of superficial compliance which maintained the racially hierarchical status quo in its public schooling was not an artefact of its “northernness”, “southernness”, or indeed its liminality. Rather, that the ongoing segregation of the races in the public schools of the nation’s capital was the result of its Americanness.

D.C., alongside the other cities compared to it in this piece, is often considered a temple of American liberalism. When Eisenhower declared that he wanted D.C. to be a “showpiece for the nation” with regards to school desegregation he was, sadly and perhaps inadvertently, prescient.<sup>258</sup> In the end, D.C. was indeed a showpiece for the nation for how to effectively evade true integration while patting itself on the back for its efforts. Eisenhower’s expression that D.C. should lead the way in desegregation, while doing little to exert any of the actual authority he had over municipal authorities in the city to do so, is perhaps a microcosmic display of the vacuity of much white liberal elite thought. Words did little when actions perpetuated the status quo. In fact, as Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove pointed out in their recent book *Chocolate City*, “liberal white supporters of school desegregation often took their children out of the public schools” and “wanted none of it”. Superintendent Hansen himself openly admitted that he would rather his children attended a school where they were the predominant race.<sup>259</sup> While Myers and Asch were only able to devote a few pages to highlighting these attitudinal tendencies of the liberal white elite in their sprawling history of D.C., this piece seeks to examine with much more granularity the actions of these hyperlocal administrators. In assessing their attitudes, priorities, and incentives, this piece not only underscores the presence of these attitudes amongst liberal elite whites, but crucially how these attitudes were consistently directed into policymaking and the implementation of “desegregation” to preserve the separation of the races in public schools. The evidence and arguments proffered seek to draw a fine, bright and fresh line of causation between these attitudes and resultant consistent, deliberate, and racist policy outcomes.

Rather than contradicting the liberal American concepts of “neighbourhood schools” and “freedom of choice”, the inferior education of black children in the public school system was

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<sup>258</sup> Nichols, ‘Showpiece of Our Nation’.

<sup>259</sup> Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, p. 316.

integral to their perpetuation. In the context of the capital district, as elsewhere, “neighbourhood schooling” meant monochromatic schooling, as white flight combined with decades of racist government housing policy created and maintained segregated neighbourhoods, as was highlighted by the judge in *Hobson vs. Hansen*. Similarly, “freedom of choice” meant giving those with the means to do so- wealthy whites- the “choice” of opting out of integration altogether, stranding black children in inferior schools with no mechanism of escape. Superintendent Corning’s “Desegregation Plan” institutionally entrenched this with its system of “options”. White freedom, as so often had been the case throughout American history, was zero sum. It came at the expense of black opportunity.

As such, while undergirding the literature espousing the national nature of race relations and white supremacy (rather than its mythical exceptional southernness), this piece also seeks to contribute to an emerging field within this arena of study. That is, metropolitanism. Washington, D.C.’s response to court-ordered desegregation was essentially the same as any other American place experiencing similar migration patterns and concomitant shifts in racial demographics. This is not to say, of course, that every place in American responded in precisely the same way to school desegregation orders, but that the way places responded was not in any meaningful way because of their geographic location beyond that of being in the United States. As earlier elucidated, the cities at this time experiencing such significant migration dynamics- namely significant numbers of black Americans moving there- were the northern metropolises. Hence, their rhetorical and political responses were broadly similar. As the work of Jeanne Theoharis and others has highlighted out in Chicago and in New York, authorities in these large northern cities paid lip service to vague liberal ideas of equality and racial equity while not just doing nothing to achieve these goals, but actively hindering them. The clear pattern in these cities, now bolstered by the example of Washington, D.C. provided herein, compels further study of the metropolis as a unit of analysis to expand upon this body of evidence, to enable more sturdy comparisons to be drawn and provide greater insight into the urban grassroots of American racism. Each further study at the hyperlocal municipal level provides a data point to facilitate analysis across traditional (and often artificial) historiographical divides, such as regionalism. In this sense, such studies of metropolitanism are an essential part of the ongoing attempts to dismantle the Myth of Southern Exceptionalism. The conclusions drawn in this study are evidence of the fruitfulness of placing a city’s ostensible liberal metropolitanism front and centre as a driving force behind its patterns of racism, rather than viewing the two things as discordant and setting out to explain any apparent contradiction

between them. In any further study, historians should endeavour to treat the metropolises' espoused and vaunted liberalism not as incidental to their racist public policy, but rather at the very core of it.

In the first instance, policies related to school desegregation enacted in D.C. and other northern metropolises might appear different to "southern" states or municipalities. While this may be the case on a superficial level, these policies all shared a single universal, fundamental purpose: to maintain racially separate schools. One useful and demonstrative comparison is to the Stanley Plan, enacted in Virginia in the exact same month, September 1956, which Corning's "Desegregation Plan" came into effect in D.C. These two plans were rhetorically extremely different in their presentation and politicking to appeal to necessary constituencies- the Virginian elite who had committed itself to "Massive Resistance" and the D.C. elite who had committed itself to racial equity right up to the point of their own inconvenience. Those proposing the Stanley Plan were overt in their intent to defy the court order as part of a wide campaign of "Massive Resistance", whereas the D.C. Board of Education moved swiftly to accept it and set the wheels in motion for a "desegregation plan" under the Superintendent of Schools.<sup>260</sup> However, the mechanisms put in place by these two plans were remarkably similar. Where, as earlier outlined, the D.C. plan's system of "options" essentially allowed whites to opt out of going to school with blacks, the Stanley Plan provided that "no child be required to attend a school wherein both white and colored children are taught and... the parents of those children who object to integrated schools".<sup>261</sup> In function, these plans were similar. Unsurprisingly and, crucially, uncoincidentally, these plans produced similar outcomes. Both systems remained segregated by any meaningful definition.

The conclusion that rhetoric and framing of respective desegregation plans was ultimately immaterial given that these had similar outcomes and in fact, on many levels, similar intent, is not some fundamentalist philosophical exercise or lazy abandonment of nuance. Rather, it is to highlight the very real destructive legacy of school segregation which continues to blight the chances of black children in America's cities, none more so than in Washington, D.C, that shining city on a hill.

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<sup>260</sup> Titus, *Brown's Battleground*.

<sup>261</sup> Garland Gray, 'Report of the Commission to the Governor of Virginia', (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia Division of Purchase and Printing, 1955), <<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/documents/images/commissionreportonpubliceducation.pdf>>, [accessed 17/12/2019], p. 8.

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