

Banned in Boston:



INC.

Busing into Southie

The troubles in Southie grew from ancient grudges and a bitterness beyond the battles of the day. Before busing, before desegregation, before black emigration from Dixie, South Boston was a racial and class ghetto where the Yankee brahmins contained the unruly Irishmen who intruded on the old genteel order. Like the dwellers of all ghettos, the men and women of Southie are burdened with a combative pride that strikes wildly at every real slight or imagined threat from outside. Threatened and fearful, the people of Southie will attack anyone who diminishes the integrity of their poor world and meager lives.

They have been attacking black people for more than a century. Despite Massachusetts's celebrated liberalism, historian C. Vann Woodward wrote, "Whites in South Boston boasted in 1847 that 'not a single colored family' lived among them. Boston had her 'Nigger Hill' and her 'New Guinea' . . ." Things have not gotten much better in the intervening time. Two years ago, South Boston whites firebombed 50 Puerto Rican families in the D Street housing projects, ban-

ishing them from Southie like St. Patrick drove the snakes from Eire. A posse of white youngsters killed a black child. A two-year-old Puerto Rican boy was found hanging from a basketball net in a playground. Southie is a tight society of the white Irish and poor, and its streets are dangerous for those who violate its membership requirements.

The symbol and citadel of the white ghetto is South Boston High—called Southie, like its setting—a gloomy, ochre-brick fortress atop Dorchester Heights. From this fine promontory General Washington surveyed the British retreat from Boston Harbor. Below, the neat wooden houses along geometrically patterned street grids convey an orderly, traditional charm that belies the fermented outrage of the inhabitants. Close up, it comes more clear. The graffiti which used to exhort Southie's athletic teams to victory over rival schools now proclaim: "FUCK NIGGERS!" and "KEEP SOUTHIE WHITE!"

Busing "to achieve racially desegregated schools," in the formal rhetoric of the controversy, is not uniquely Southie's problem, nor is it the only

problem in Southie. But the expression of white racism in the face of court-ordered integration of South Boston High is the dominant aspect of Boston's widespread opposition; and for Southie, busing is now the overriding threat. The other sections of the city, by class and culture less prone to blatant shows of anger and violence, follow Southie's lead. "We're not ashamed of Southie; we're grateful," a resident of the more upwardly mobile community of Roslindale told a visitor. If there is a vanguard in the movement of white power, Southie is its base.

What happened in South Boston might serve as a political cautionary tale, if not a moral lesson, for the rest of the country where school desegregation—and the busing that alone can achieve it—will be contested in the years ahead. The question is, however, what happened? The story of Southie does not follow all the predictable formulas with their categorical stereotypes. It is not Little Rock, or New Orleans, where stalwart liberals led naive Negroes through an attack by vicious honkies and their venal public officials. In fact, nothing is quite as it

by Andrew Kopkind

should be; and that, really, is the trouble in Southie.

[THE SPIRIT OF '74]

Busing in Boston was not particularly planned or plotted, at least not according to any identifiable reason or design. Like Topsy it 'just grewed.' Almost 10 years ago, in a fit of civil rights movement zeal, the State Legislature enacted a progressive "racial imbalance law" for school integration, which successive legislatures have sought to repeal, and which affected school boards have simply ignored. The southern states used the long time lags between court desegregation decisions and the final implementation orders to develop tactics of "massive resistance." In the same way, the die-hards of South Boston and other city neighborhoods used the years after the passage of the imbalance law to develop a politics of racism.

The phenomenal Spirit of Reaction is Louise Day Hicks, the indomitable avenging angel of the white lower classes who inevitably sweeps to electoral victory in South Boston and Dorchester (Speaker McCormick's old bailiwick), even while losing badly in city-wide *mano-a-mano* campaigns. There is a constant, deliverable anti-black vote in Boston—short of a majority—and Hicks knows all the tricks to make it her own.

Massive resistance worked so well in Boston that only a suit in Federal Court, brought by the NAACP as "insurance" against repeal or evasion of the state imbalance law, finally made the buses roll. The NAACP charged that the School Committee (that which passes for a Board of Education in Boston) had consistently conspired to maintain the segregation of schools. The suit had been lingering in litigation, and the School Committee was still temporizing on desegregation, when Federal Judge Arthur Garrity ruled, suddenly and unexpectedly last June, that integration should proceed with all deliberate speed. The white resistance was caught short without an avenue of attack—except in the streets.

The State Education Board hastily drew up a make-shift pupil-assignment plan for "Phase I" of Judge Garrity's

order. It involved the busing of some 18,000 school children to only 80 of the city's more than 200 schools. It left untouched such potentially explosive areas as East Boston, a working-class Italian analogue to Southie. Eastie would get its busing in "Phase II," if it ever came to pass.

Boston braced for the worst. Reporters who ventured into the Southie projects came back with horrifying stories of stocked arsenals and impending war. Hicks (who is now in her City Council mode; she alternates between that and her U.S. Congress and School Committee modes) and the all-white, ethnic-Irish School Committee whipped up the faithful, while never quite conceding the inevitability of busing. The School Committee chairman, John Kerrigan, opportunely took as a delaying tactic the line that busing should include suburban as well as inner-city pupils—an impossible political proposition, no matter how reasonable (and right) it seems in theory. John Kerrigan has rarely been on the side of right reason, although opportunity is no stranger to him. With only a few weeks until school opened and as the threat of armed conflict increased, Mayor Kevin White enlisted the media, the politicians, and sports stars (of all colors) for an absurd campaign of propaganda and news management in the interests of racial peace and harmony.

"Hello, this is Louise Day Hicks (or Bobby Orr or Ed Brooke or Jim Plunkett)," the ubiquitous television commercials began, and went on in effect: "You may believe as I do that forced busing is the worst thing that's happened here since the Boston Massacre, but let's see if we can't all pull together and find a solution. It won't be easy, *but that never stopped Boston before.*"

With pep talks like that (some were quite as bad as my hypothetical version), someone ought to have stopped Boston before real trouble began, which came on opening day. There were boycotts and violence right from the start. Senator Kennedy was one of the early victims: he was egged and tomatoed like a Caesar salad when he tried to talk to a white mob in the plaza of Boston's eerie new Government Center.

"Why don't you send your crippled

kid to school in a bus," they yelled at Teddy, and, "I hope they get you like they got your brothers!" Kennedy retreated into the J.F.K. Building amid cries of "Nigger lover!"

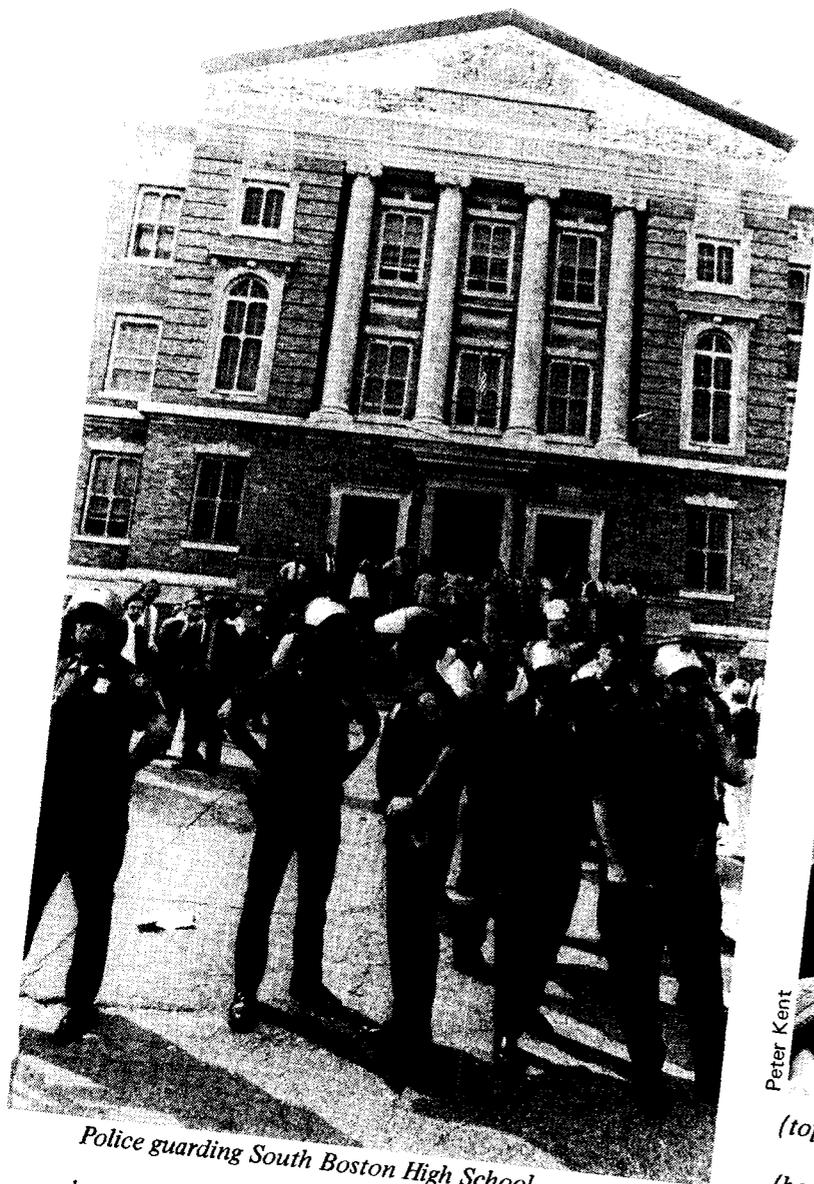
[“THE REAL ISSUE IS NIGGERS”]

If you read the papers or listen to the media in Boston, that would have been the first time you would have discovered that "race" was an issue in the busing controversy. For years, the racists of Southie and the liberals in city government and the media have adopted or accepted the Nixonian convention that the issues in busing were "neighborhood schools" and "quality education." It's true enough that those issues are important; but they are secondary to what anyone with common sense knows, despite an inane refusal to admit it. It's a matter of whites against blacks.

When the mothers and fathers and kids of Southie threw stones and bricks and cursed out the black pupils in the buses from Roxbury, they were not arguing the merits of neighborhood schools or quality education. The battles intensified in the streets and in the school corridors as the media coolly announced that everything was proceeding smoothly, that the boycott was slowly dissipating, and that with a few minor exceptions, all was peaceful and harmonious in what bumper stickers still proclaim (from the post-McGovern days) as "Massachusetts—the One and Only."

Anyone on the inside, of course, knows that conditions in Southie were rapidly deteriorating. The residents there were only made more furious by the lies of the Mayor's Office and the media, by being treated as children who were not heeded even in the throes of their worst tantrum in history. Fed up with the official "rumor control center," Southie parents moved to set up their own office with the telephone number BOY-COTT.

Every day there were rallies, mass meetings, or demonstrations of one kind or another in Southie, central Boston, or the site of an enemy camp: the *Boston Globe*, the Mayor's Office, the archdiocesan seat of Cardinal Madeiros (who ordered parochial schools to refuse places to white refugees from integrated schools), the



Police guarding South Boston High School

Peter Southwick



Peter Kent



Peter Kent

*(top) Columbia Point students waiting to board bus to South Boston
(bottom) David Duke, Grand Dragon of the Baton Rouge Ku Klux Klan, talking to Southie residents*

home of Judge Garrity (in posh suburban Wellesley, safely out of the Boston school district). Now that the battles had begun, Councilor Hicks, the entire School Committee, and assorted local Irish politicians brazenly supported the boycott and all but encouraged white violence—even after the state education commissioner announced he would enforce a law prohibiting the advocacy of truancy.

Hicks and two other South Boston cops issued a kind of white Paper justifying the boycott as a legitimate means to keep Southie's finest out of "crime-ridden Roxbury," the main black community, whose high school was paired with South Boston. The manifesto claimed that "100 black murderers of white people" were walking the streets of Roxbury un-

apprehended. No white child should be allowed to enter such a jungle (the figures were fictitious, of course, but the manifesto was a call to war, not a report of actual conditions).

Things had already gotten out of hand when one fine September day the Grand Dragon of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan flew into Logan Airport from Louisiana. Southie was only mildly disappointed that Dragon David Duke was dressed in suit and tie instead of sheet and burning cross. Otherwise, he was warmly received and even protected when the heat got too close. Although the police earlier had ejected a small band of American Nazis from the neighborhood (and were enforcing Mayor White's dubious "martial law" prohibition against assemblies of more than three persons),

Duke and his comrades were allowed to hold a Klan klatsch at the base of the Dorchester Heights monument. On a chilly night with hundreds of Southie's Roman Catholics hanging on the Klansman's shrill words, Duke orated:

"White people! White people! We are going to win a great victory in South Boston for the white race. The tide is beginning to turn against forced race mixing. It is our duty as white people, proud of our heritage, to help return civilization to this continent. Two hundred years ago our ancestors stood up and fought against the tyranny of the British bayonets. Our struggle is much harder. The Federal Government is taking money out of your pockets to finance the production of thousands of little black bastards. The

real issue isn't education. The real issue is Niggers!"

[WAR BEGINS]

Whether the Klan was responsible for it or not (Duke left town the next day), the "incidents" increased in the schools and the streets after the visit. "It's guerrilla warfare inside that [South Boston High] school," one of the corps of 'cool-it' teachers' aides reported. There were food-fights in the cafeteria that were "minor episodes" according to officials, but were major battles to the frightened blacks inside.

"You don't see what's been going on in South Boston High because most of the people talking about it aren't inside," a black student called Tina told a reporter after classes. "The whites start throwing food at the black kids. But when they started getting beat up, they went after the principal, but the black kids saved him. No one talks about that, they just say how the black kids are starting all the trouble."

It was getting bad outside, too. Every night there was sniping heard in the predominantly black Columbia Point housing project, a few miles from South Boston High. The residents believed that the firing came from Southie's whites. The police said it was done by blacks firing at patrol cars; the cops moved in and set up positions on the rooftops. Columbia Point had the atmosphere of a concentration camp. The police, mostly white and predominantly Irish, made as few moves against Southie as they had to. And everyone started making Molotov cocktails.

With unaccustomed tenacity, Mayor White and the generally liberal establishment of city policy-makers (coordinated by Deputy Mayor Robert Kiley, the former CIA official who had been in charge of subverting student organizations in the Sixties) maintained the myth that everything was progressing nicely, thank you; school desegregation was a success. Not until the ugliness of it all burst onto the television screens and front pages did they acknowledge what was really there. A crowd of whites in a Southie demonstration tore a black man, a Martiniquan immigrant, from his car stalled in traffic and beat him bloody

before the police could rescue him. The next day, blacks near Roxbury retaliated by beating a white man in his car. The cool cover was off.

Prodded by a frustrated and furious NAACP, Mayor White called on President Ford to send in a battalion of Federal Marshals. Ford refused, joining Hicks and Southie's politicians in denouncing the busing plan. Whites took Ford's words as approval of their tactics to stop busing by any means necessary, and more violence followed. Mayor White and Governor Frank Sargent (who was facing an uphill reelection campaign) spent the next several days playing coy political games against each other while the fighting raged in the streets and schools. White made up his own contingent of reinforcements from various state and local police agencies. Sargent called up the un-federalized National Guard, which camped out on the outskirts of town. And Boston girded for the next battles in a war which everyone knew had only begun.

[THE BITTER DILEMMA]

It was always a crazy idea to bus Roxbury kids into Southie, or vice-versa. The die-hard School Committee had for years been whipping up racial tension, at the same time that it was cementing patterns of segregation with school construction and districting gerrymanders. Judge Garrity specifically found that segregation was no accident, but a purposeful policy of the committee. Busing as it was conceived this year simply could not make the integrative dreams of another era come true. Even the state im-

balance law seemed anachronistic: it was passed on false premises of good will on the part of what we called then the "white power structure," and the will was lost long ago.

In Boston, at least, nobody wanted busing, although various spokespeople for the black community were compelled to support it for historical and political reasons—or because the original opposition had come from their enemies. The "official" moderate black leadership—the small black caucus of state legislators and the local NAACP—was not ready to disassociate itself from a racial contest whose terms had been decided long ago; it was too late to stop now. More radical blacks sought to remove themselves from the contest, and thus avoid the terms. Their focus was on the struggle for power for the black community, and the terms of that newer contest were far outside of the "integration" issue.

Whites who intuitively support the black community have been faced with a bitter dilemma. No expression of that support seems to make much sense in the current political situation. To argue *for* busing means to condemn black pupils to the role of cannon fodder in a school system that at best brings "death at an early age," as Jonathan Kozol once described it. To argue *against* busing is to go on the line with the most reactionary elements of society; and even if the reasons are different, the common position is uncomfortable, to say the least.

Most liberal whites, especially those who live in the suburbs outside the range of the busing order, have clung to the illusions of years past pretend-

Wall of South Boston housing project



ing that busing for Boston is a natural way to integrate the blacks and whites they never see. The *Globe* is their mouthpiece. It is perhaps the most earnestly liberal major newspaper in the country, but in all its years of passionate support of busing, it has never called the white opposition by its rightful name: racism. Without proper identification, there was no real way to fight it. You cannot struggle against bigotry when you call it "belief in quality education."

To name it and analyze it correctly, of course, would be to implicate a structure of power to which the *Globe* and Kevin White and the kindly integrationists are parties: the institutions which perpetuate white rule (Boston is perhaps the only major industrial city in the country with no black, elected officials), the real estate interests that keep Boston one of the most ghettoized cities in the country, the great universities that define culture as a product of the white European mind, the heavily interlocked banks and businesses that redevelop the blacks out of the "New Boston." It has been easier for the *Globe* and the notoriously tolerant Bostonians to cover up those

truths of white racism and to dismiss the demands of black strength, rather than to confront their own roles.

"Quality education"—which is often the red herring of the controversy—is really an issue in an important way: but because of race, not in spite of it. Because segregation in Boston is so secure and the School Committee so intransigent, black parents have recently begun to fight for control of the schools in the black community. All year, they have been in the forefront of a referendum campaign to disestablish the School Committee and set up a system of community and school councils to supervise education in the neighborhoods. Southie and many white communities already have effective "community control" because their color matches that of the School Committee and the other powers-that-be. The present "Home and School Associations," which lead the anti-busing campaign, are already accomplishing for whites what a restructured school system of local control boards would do for blacks.

The specific reorganization plan was not a perfect solution for the

blacks; it was as much a power-play by Mayor White against the School Committee as it was a license for community control in Roxbury. And it lost in the November election because it was widely associated with the integration faction. Ironically, busing has undermined the black campaign for community control of the schools. With black children leaving Roxbury for minority positions in white schools, black strength "in the community" will be diluted.

There are a hundred more ironies in the troubles, not the least of them is the prospect of everyone getting exactly what they do not want. There are perhaps other strategies for both integration and community control, but Boston has presented plans that are unworkable and unwise at best, and damaging at worst. For this "cradle of democracy," busing is no more than an available myth that has been enshrined by supporters and opponents alike as the one way to the good society. It takes a long time for the old myths of social progress to die, and they die hardest when they are attacked by the enemies of progress themselves.

Busing: A Symposium

The issue of school busing is likely to become increasingly bitter as rhetoric and court orders move closer toward reality. As we have seen this year in Boston, with busing the kind of racism that had lain dormant and defensive under the high moral tone of America's civil rights years re-emerges in its most explicit and aggressive forms.

Busing has become a code word for a multitude of goals and sins. Deep divisions over race, class, communities, private aspirations, and social mobility are involved. All converge here on the battlefield of public education.

So this month we have asked several leading "iconoclast educationists" to shed some light on the controversy.



Herb Kohl

"Any minority needs to build a culture. This is positive energy which doesn't mean that by building your own culture you need to oppress others."

By itself, busing simply means putting kids in buses and moving them around. In rural counties it's been done for years. It is only when busing is used as an instrument to integrate schools that the question becomes complicated. I don't believe that integration is necessarily a desirable goal. I don't think that all people should have one type of school in America, or one type of child — a