UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

# Contested Campuses:

# Politics, race, and the battles over public education

# in the Greater Los Angeles Area, 1949-1972

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in History

by

Brian Robert Kovalesky

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Janice L. Reiff, Chair

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, during the height of protests and actions by civil rights activists against *de facto* school segregation in the Los Angeles area, the residents of a group of small cities fought to break away from the Los Angeles City Schools and create a new, independent school district. If established, the district would serve white pupils nearly exclusively, preserving and reinforcing racially segregated schools in the area. Proponents of the plan were residents of the majority white, working class cities just southeast of the city of Los Angeles. Their crusade was a response to the merger of the Los Angeles schools, up until this time comprised of separate elementary and high school districts, into the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). I argue that this movement represented the continuation of a much longer and foundational debate over control of public schools in the U.S. at both the federal and state level. This conflict pitted advocates of a vision of “neighborhood” schools controlled by the

communities they served against policy makers who endeavored to create larger school districts in order to exert more control over funding and administration.

This challenge to the LAUSD's creation was just one of many fights in the decades following World War II in the Greater Los Angeles area over public school district organization and attendance zones. These battles were inextricably tied to larger issues like taxation, control of community institutions, the size and role of state and county government, and racial segregation. As civil rights activists and the state government advanced a version of public schools that were more inclusive and demanded larger-scale, consolidated administration, race became an increasingly important aspect of debates over school district organization in Los Angeles County. The actions of white residents of the region in response to attempts to create larger school districts reveal an often-overlooked grassroots activism connected to an exclusionary notion of smaller-scale school districts based on local control and "community identity".

The dissertation of Brian Robert Kovalesky is approved.

Robert P. Brenner

Mary A. Yeager

Jonathan Zasloff

Janice L. Reiff, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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As an undergraduate college student, I believed that I could capably handle any writing assignment with ease. Then I went to graduate school, and discovered just how much I did not know about historical research and writing. At one point during my graduate school career, I once again reached a point where I believed I knew nearly all there was to know about writing. Then I began composing this manuscript, and discovered just how much I still did not know. That said, this dissertation would never have been possible without the help and encouragement of a group of individuals who provided me with incredibly generous support, advice, and guidance. Although graduate school is often portrayed as a lonely time in a scholar's life (and yes, there are plenty of days spent in relative isolation), collaborations with others, both professionally and personally, is an important part of the experience.

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# VITA

## Degrees

Candidate of Philosophy, University of California, Los Angeles

Master of Arts in History, University of California, Los Angeles

Master of Arts in History, California State University, Northridge

Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, California State University, Northridge

## Academic and Professional Employment

Adjunct Faculty, California State University, Long Beach

Adjunct Faculty, California State University, Dominguez Hills

Adjunct Faculty, West Los Angeles College

Teaching Fellow, Freshman Cluster Program, University of California, Los Angeles

Teaching Associate, University of California, Los Angeles

## Introduction

Los Angeles-area high school students Ken Dixon, Ruby Jackson, Jacqueline Jenkins, Betty Conley, and Amy Phillips enrolled at a new school for the second semester of the 1963 academic year. Their registration at South Gate High was an effort to desegregate the all-white school and was part of a broader effort to desegregate schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The students were greeted on the first day by a Confederate flag flying on the flagpole, a representation of the harassment the group would face in the coming months. The black students had transferred from Fremont High, which had a majority African American student population, to South Gate High in the overwhelmingly majority-white city of South Gate, which was located just across a major thoroughfare from the city of Los Angeles. Throughout the remainder of the school year the students were targeted in ways that are reminiscent of the backlash against school desegregation efforts in the American South at the same time. The attempts at intimidating the black students ranged from name calling to violence. At one point during the semester the area where the five ate lunch on a daily basis was spray-painted with an anti-black racial epithet. At various other times objects were thrown at them—eggs in one instance, and a brick in another. The students became known as the South Gate Five, and despite the significant challenges they faced, all five persevered and remained at the school.[1]

[1] "Five Negroes At South Gate High School Pelted With Eggs," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 20, 1963, B1; "Negro Students Dodge Eggs During Last Week At South Gate High," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 4, 1963, A19.

The South Gate Five leveled a serious challenge to segregation in Los Angeles-area schools. However, opposition to racially integrated schools extended beyond the South Gate High School campus. Schools with entirely white student populations had been a fixture for decades in South Gate and the cluster of small cities that surrounded it located in the shadow of the city of Los Angeles. It was a racial regime in local schools constructed, defended, and reshaped when necessary by white residents, politicians, business interests, and students. By 1963, a coalition of residents had been fighting for years to further institutionalize their segregated schools by seceding from the Los Angeles City Schools and creating an all-white school district. In the opinion of at least one local resident, the success of the South Gate Five in enrolling at South Gate High was directly related to the effort to secede from the Los Angeles Schools and create what proponents called the "San Antonio Unified School District" (SAUSD). According to the *Los Angeles Sentinel* newspaper:

> When one of the neighbors was queried about the incidents at the school she allegedly replied that the Los Angeles City School Districts were penalizing South Gate by allowing Negroes to enroll there because South Gate, Huntington Park and Bell Gardens have been trying to withdraw from the L.A. School district and form a San Antonio School District.[2]

This resident's comments reflected the fact that the South Gate Five were part of a much longer struggle in the area over race and ethnicity as determining factors in the creation of school district borders and attendance zones.

The story of the South Gate Five, however, was not simply about racial segregation and desegregation, even though it was set within the larger context of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and sixties. Segregated schools in the Greater Los Angeles area and the

[2] "Five Negroes At South Gate High School Pelted With Eggs."

battles fought over attempts to preserve or eliminate them were part of wide-reaching, multifaceted struggles that pitted those who advocated for increased government intervention in the administration of services like public education against proponents of local, community control of the distribution and oversight of public goods. Attempts to define the meaning of "community" exacerbated the tension between these groups. For white residents of some areas of Los Angeles County in particular, both racial segregation and neighborhood schools were crucial, and related, factors in community consciousness. Residents often felt a particularly strong affinity for local school campuses that had long served as makeshift community centers that were locations of important social and political events. Debates over school consolidation or changes to attendance zones became commonplace in communities across the Greater Los Angeles area in the 1950s and 1960s as unprecedented population increases, the growth of a consumption-oriented middle class, the attempts of state lawmakers to make districts larger and more standardized, and the work of civil rights activists in challenging racial exclusion made school district organization a topic of tremendous concern.

The coalition forged to create the SAUSD represented a group of independent cities along the Southeastern edge of the city of Los Angeles that included South Gate and its high school. The effort reflected the growing antipathy between significant numbers of Californians and state government in an era of social and political change. This animosity was heightened by the attempts of state legislators to centralize important services like public education and give more power to the state Department of Education, which was led by the California State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The fight to preserve and reinforce segregated schools in some communities in the Los Angeles area was given additional urgency by the determination of civil rights activists like the South Gate Five and their supporters to

eliminate segregated schools that were not only exclusionary but represented the unequal distribution of educational capital according to race. The SAUSD coalition, comprised of residents of a group of municipalities I refer to as the Southeast Cities, was not simply one of the communities that resisted, but became the center of opposition to the creation of larger, more racially integrated school districts in the State of California.

The seed for this project was planted much later in time during my experience as a student in a LAUSD high school in the early-1990s in the San Fernando Valley, located about 40 miles northwest of the Southeast Cities. There I encountered, interacted with, and befriended peers from a variety of backgrounds, races, and ethnicities. It was an experience in what is often casually referred to as "diversity." This experience was limited to the school day, facilitated by a voluntary student transfer program that brought students from majority minority areas, mainly from what was then known as South-Central Los Angeles, to our school in the majority white community of Granada Hills. Every day, yellow school buses would arrive in the morning, bringing students from other parts of the city and life experiences that seemed as different as could possibly be from mine. In late afternoon, as the school day wound down, the buses returned and the experiment in diversity concluded. It was a unique and ultimately culturally enriching experience, but the questions I already had about what precipitated the long daily journeys of these students were made even more salient by a week in late April of 1992 when the school buses did not arrive. Our half-empty campus of nearly entirely white and Asian American students were left to speculate about the fates of our colleagues from the faraway places that we referred to simply as "L.A." Large parts of Los Angeles had exploded into protest, violence, and looting that week, triggered by the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers in the beating of black motorist Rodney King, but resulting from entrenched racial

animus, a sense of persistent injustice, a long history of police brutality, and a city very much divided by race, ethnicity, and class. My high school's daily multicultural experience soon resumed, but the civil unrest highlighted the divisions in the city, and the buses became a powerful, and daily, reminder of those divisions. My experience with busing and multiculturalism as a teenager lives in my memory as a series of images that influence my thinking and the scholar I have become in profound ways. The goal of this project was to discover the roots of the racial, ethnic, and class dynamics that became representative in microcosm at our high school of about 5,000 students. My quest led me to pursue the longer history of school district organization, and ultimately, to the fight over the LAUSD waged in the Southeast Cities between the late 1950s and mid-1970s.

The busing that brought students on a voluntary basis from various parts of the city to my suburban high school was the legacy of an attempt to implement a desegregation program in the LAUSD by transporting students between schools to achieve racial and ethnic balance. The fact that schools in the Los Angeles area were still largely segregated by race and ethnicity in the 1990s was in large part due to the opposition of white residents, like those in the Southeast Cities, to both district consolidation and integration. The busing program in Los Angeles followed a nationwide trend of post *Brown v. Board of Education* court-mandated desegregation programs that required the movement of students between schools. Busing in communities across the country generated significant opposition, mainly from white parents, resistance that was mirrored in the Greater Los Angeles area. Once enacted in the LAUSD in the late 1970s, anti-busing sentiment was particularly strong in the San Fernando Valley, which was separated by a mountain range and roughly 30 miles from the two schools that were the focus of the lawsuit that led to the original desegregation mandate. First filed in 1963, plaintiffs in the case

alleged that the attendance zones for Jordan High School in the South Los Angeles community of Watts and South Gate High, home of the South Gate Five and located about two miles to the east in the Southeast Cities, were gerrymandered to maintain segregation.

The opposition to busing that emerged in the Los Angeles area in the late 1960s and 1970s was an extension of the struggle that began decades before between state policymakers, who attempted to standardize administration through the creation of large school districts with powerful, centralized leadership and those who believed in "neighborhood schools" that were controlled by the communities that surrounded them. The idea that public schools should be funded by states but administered locally was closely bound with the development and growth of public schools as a nationwide institution. According to proponents of community control, schools should reflect the characteristics of the cities, towns, and neighborhoods they served. However, what precisely delineated a "community" and "neighborhood" eluded consensus definition. The battles that broke out over the size and form of school districts in Los Angeles County in the late 1950s and 1960s, therefore, were rooted in conflicting visions of public schools. It was a clash of philosophies that was further complicated by a protracted history of racial segregation in the region.

By the time I was in high school in the early-1990s, activists on both sides of the debate over school district size and configuration in the Los Angeles area claimed victories. However, the result of the long fight over public education was a permanent mix of large and small school districts, and largely ineffective integration programs. At this point, the LAUSD had also become representative of a nationwide narrative that large school districts were failing the students and

parents they served. This version of public school history was declension caused by large, consolidated districts that were inherently faulty.

The actual story of school district organization in the Greater Los Angeles area, however, is one of activists in communities across the county fighting to create administrative units based on a specific vision of public education. These residents had tremendous influence over the success or failure of school district consolidation and, therefore, the future of public education in the region. I contend that despite the blame assigned to overzealous policymakers and to an allegedly faulty administrative model, consolidated school districts were under constant threat from the start from grassroots groups that argued for smaller configurations that reflected a long-standing ideal in American public education of schools controlled by local communities. This ideal often conflicted with the need to create larger bureaucracies to serve larger populations of children who needed increasing levels of education, as well as the calls of civil rights activists and judges for the ending of racially segregated schools. The LAUSD was a particularly noteworthy target. If not for the efforts of individual politicians at various points in time, the district would have been broken up into pieces. Had LAUSD opponents succeeded, the region's school districts would be a fragmented group of small- and medium-sized administrative units competing for resources.

This project is built upon a foundation of work already done by social, political, and educational historians who have established the importance of public education as an important part of American political, social, and cultural life. These scholars have explored both institutionalized schooling and the importance of informal education in the nation's history. Many have also scrutinized the relationships of class, race, and ethnicity to the practices

Americans adopted for educating children as well as access to formal schooling that may confer a level of social status or economic mobility. My methodological approach, however, is to use public education as a lens through which to examine social and political currents. By examining the ways that public education as institution and idea has interacted with American political and social life, I hope to contribute to a more nuanced understand of the role of public schools in American history. It is my contention that public education is a central influence on American life in various and complex ways, and it is too often overlooked in this regard by scholars.

I focus on the greater Los Angeles area and the fight over the LAUSD that was closely tied to a movement of white residents of South Gate and the small, independent cities that surrounded it to secede from the district and create the SAUSD. This case was particularly important for two reasons. The first is that it constituted the initial challenge to the largest school district in California and second-largest in the nation. It was a test of the survivability of the consolidated school district model. The second is that approval for the creation of the SAUSD, which would be comprised nearly entirely of white students, would give official sanction to the institutionalization of segregated schools.

The effort to create the SAUSD had far reaching consequences. Proponents became the vanguard of resistance to both the growth of state government's influence over the administration of public schools and school desegregation efforts in Los Angeles County and, eventually, statewide. Their attempts at seceding from the Los Angeles City Schools, which became the LAUSD in July of 1961, spanned nearly 15 years. Although they failed to create the new district they envisioned, proponents succeeded in challenging the large, consolidated district model for public school administration in California in unprecedented ways which nearly led to

the break-up of the LAUSD. In time, their focus turned increasingly to opposing desegregation, and their work merged with a successful statewide crusade in the 1970s that blocked the implementation of mandatory integration programs in the state.

State legislators first took action to bring administrative organization to a largely improvised system of public schools in the first quarter of the twentieth century. From the start, the goal was to create efficiencies that would reduce the cost of providing educational services to increasing numbers of students. As Drayton B. Nuttall, chief of the California State Department of Education's Bureau of School District Administration wrote in 1958, one of the four primary objectives of school district consolidation efforts was: "To provide a more efficient use of public funds, brought about by the creation of school districts capable of furnishing necessary educational services at a reasonable unit cost."[3] Their initial focus was on the combination of rural districts that still utilized one or two room school houses and a single teacher to provide elementary education. The ability of state officials to create larger districts, however, was limited by the widespread belief that authority over schools should reside with the residents they serve. These ideas were firmly embedded in the Common School Movement of the mid-nineteenth century, which was the basis for the growth of "schooling for all" in the U.S. The notion of local control was also encoded in the California Constitution, which also gave citizens the responsibility of initiating consolidation via petition. State education policymakers devised a set of incentives over time to encourage communities to initiate the consolidation process and to help overcome resistance the idea might face.

[3] Drayton Nuttall to Dr. Dale Wren, memorandum, October 10, 1958, Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration-Bureau of School District Organization-Bureau Office Files, 1957-58, F3752: 1765, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

As a result, the shift to a larger number of consolidated school districts was gradual, and forces outside of the control of the state bureaucracy and citizen groups were important factors in the story. Population booms and economic downturns were particularly significant, and led to major alterations in school district organization. In Los Angeles County, these factors ushered in an era of widespread consolidation in the late 1920s and 1930s, initiated entirely by local residents and school leaders responding to escalating operational costs and growing tax burdens. A massive movement of people to cities and accelerating urban sprawl during the period also shifted the focus of state policymakers from the one-room rural school house to urban public school districts struggling to manage influxes of new students. Additionally, increasing demand for high school education necessitated a new layer of school administration, and new high school districts, which were normally comprised of a single high school run by its own administration serving graduates of multiple primary schools in the surrounding area, emerged to further complicate the district organization landscape.

The end of World War II marked the start of another important change in school district organization in California. Another unprecedented population boom gave new urgency to the project of district consolidation. New legislation armed the state educational bureaucracy—now comprised of a board of education, state superintendent of public instruction, and a department of education—with increased power to affect district combinations that included the establishment of county-level committees tasked with encouraging, deliberating, and accepting or rejecting consolidation schemes and other proposed changes to public school district borders. These issues had previously been decided by county supervisors. The power of the county-level committees was still limited, and while they had the power to accept or reject proposals and shape individual plans, changes to school districts still had to be initiated by residents via petition. The process

gave community members a more structured way to present arguments for changes to school districts and attendance zones. Therefore, while the process had given more power to the Department of Education to effect consolidation, it also empowered citizens to have greater influence in the school district organization (SDO) process.

While the State of California began to take a larger role in SDO, the federal government gradually increased its supplemental funding for public schools, which gave further impetus to district consolidation efforts. Federal funding was limited in the immediate post-war period, but expanded significantly after the Soviet Union launched the first Earth-orbiting satellite in 1957. It was an achievement long-sought by the U.S. and the fact the Soviets were the first to succeed sparked increased Cold War tensions, initiated a "space race," and created a new national imperative for producing scientists and engineers who could give the country a strategic advantage. As a result, the U.S. Congress authorized a program of federal funding for education—a step many lawmakers were previously reluctant to take. This reluctance was consistent with a longer tradition of national leaders who were disinclined to intervene in schooling because they saw it as primarily as responsibility of individual states. At the same time, politicians at the federal level had taken piecemeal steps toward more involvement in education at all levels through programs like GI Bill funding for war veterans, aid for schools that were located adjacent to military bases, and the convening of the National Commission on Higher Education by President Harry Truman in 1947.[4] In the meantime, just a month after the

[4] Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History, Fourth Edition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 335. Controversy over federal funding was based to a large degree on a constitutional debate. Many who opposed the idea argued that because education was not specifically mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, it was a state-level issue.

first launch, the Soviet Union sent a second satellite, Sputnik 2, into orbit before the U.S. managed to complete its first successful mission the following year.

Sputnik and the new national urgency it created to compete with the Soviet Union, along with the lobbying of the National Education Association (NEA), proved to be the impetus needed for action on a larger scale.[5] In 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), the first large-scale federal education funding package, signed into law that September. NDEA funding was directed in large part toward college and university students and post-secondary institutions, but it set the stage for a larger funding regime for primary and secondary school districts.[6] That increased allocation came with the signing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965. The ESEA ushered in unprecedented federal expenditures for primary and secondary education, with most money earmarked for the poorest students in individual school districts. The increasing involvement of the state and federal governments in primary and secondary education, exponential population increases, and economic downturns and upswings influenced the trajectory of public school organization in the Los Angeles metropolitan area in profound ways. The foundational disagreement, however, remained consistent. It was a fight over local control versus a trend towards larger, more inclusive bureaucracies.

[5] Ibid., 336-337. The NEA's enthusiasm for the NDEA was tempered by the fact that it directed most aid to science and math instruction and to the National Science Foundation (NSF), which was primarily higher-education oriented. The NEA lobbied for more funding for the U.S. Office of Education, which was more representative of educators at the primary and secondary level.

[6] Ibid., 338.

In communities across the region, coalitions formed that agitated for public schools that fit specific visions of their educational ideal. For some, education held the potential to be a means for social and economic mobility and a racial and ethnic equalizer. This view was espoused by civil rights activists and exemplified locally by the South Gate Five. Others held that schools should reflect the neighborhoods in which they existed in some specific ways and be controlled primarily by local stakeholders. Residents that held this perspective were mainly found in majority white communities with a history of racial and ethnic segregation. Their coalitions were able to use the school district organization (SDO) process in ways that turned its original goal to facilitate the creation of larger, more consolidated administrative units on its head. The county SDO process became a way in which white residents in some of the region's communities sought to claim their right to neighborhood schools—a concept that was inextricably tied to race because the neighborhoods that surrounded these schools were segregated. While I highlight several examples, the LAUSD case was particularly important because it involved the massive Los Angeles City school system and because in time the political movement it initiated merged with an ultimately successful statewide effort to block attempts to integrate schools through mandatory busing of students.

A foundational concept I have adopted for interpreting and deciphering the actions of some of the key stakeholders in the battles over SDO is racial innocence. Applied as an analytical tool for understanding California's political history and the use of ballot initiatives (propositions) for the benefit of interest groups by political scientist Daniel Martinez HoSang, the concept is an intellectual framework for understanding the motivations of white Americans in

supporting structures of segregation, either legal or informal.[7] The term refers specifically to the assertion of blamelessness in order to create plausible deniability for political actions that might bolster racist regimes or support white supremacy. It relies heavily on the work of scholars like George Lipsitz, Alexander Saxton, David Roediger, and Ira Katznelson, who have written about the ways in which white Americans across class and political lines have supported white supremacy and racist social, political, and economic systems, even while advocating for conditional expansions of rights for marginalized groups. HoSang's analysis of the use of ballot initiatives in California to enforce what he calls "genteel apartheid" reveals the ways in which racial innocence has been employed in the state's politics in order to maintain and reinforce structures of white supremacy. Racial innocence provides a theoretical means for analyzing the consequences of peoples' actions while acknowledging the various motivations for those actions in the first place. On the other hand, the assertion of racial innocence by primarily white residents of the greater Los Angeles area has been used as a defense against accusations of racist motivations for political actions that have exacerbated racial and ethnic segregation in public schools. Ultimately, school district policy decisions are influenced by a network of individuals motivated by political and economic interest even in the extent to which they either work to strengthen or challenge racial exclusion. As Ansley Erickson has argued about desegregation efforts in Nashville: "Segregation and desegregation depended on hundreds of small choices

[7] Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010).

made by local, state, and federal officials, at times in response to legal and other pressures from community advocates."[8]

Since the focus of this project is the ways in which social and demographic changes, trends, and debates affect the politics of schools and vice-versa—this dissertation purposely does not deal with curriculum and pedagogy, but rather about the ways the politics of public education interacts with major social and civic debates.[9] It is also not about the role of public education in propagating and creating institutions and ideologies or how it either creates or discourages upward mobility. While I draw upon work on the broader history of education in the U.S. to create a link between the ways in which public education has been imagined, described, and implemented from a very early point in American history, I situate this study among larger political and social trends where public schooling has played an important role.

I have structured the manuscript in a way that first provides readers with broader historical context that situates SDO in Los Angeles County within the larger debate over state versus local control of institutions. I then account for the social, political, and economic issues that became important parts of the debates over the form and function of public schools in California and that affected the development of the institution in profound ways. While I provide several examples of battles over SDO in communities across the Greater Los Angeles area, the

[8] Ansley T. Erikson, *Making the Unequal Metropolis: School Desegregation and Its Limits* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 4.

[9] The scholar who has perhaps best accomplished the monumental task of constructing a larger history of American Education—both formal and informal—is Lawrence Cremin. His voluminous and prolific writing on the history of education in the United States has been foundational to my work and the work of numerous scholars over time. The most applicable of his works to this project is *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

LAUSD was a particular target of secession efforts. These movements were not simply a reaction to attempts to consolidate districts or to the prospect of racially-integrated schools, but part of a long tradition of activism in some communities to shape public education in the area. The most significant of these battles was over the proposed secession of the Southeast Cities and creation of the SAUSD. The movement to secede initiated in that part of Los Angeles County in the late-1950s was a direct precedent for subsequent secession campaigns and a statewide crusade against mandatory integration programs in California's public schools.

In Chapter One, I provide an overview of the history of public education in the United States. I contend that the idea of local control over school districts has been a guiding principle of the national movement to provide free schooling from when they were first established during the mid-to-late 1800s. Within the scope of the longer history of education in the U.S., neighborhood schools became a part of an area's community self-identification in many localities. In California, this phenomenon significantly complicated efforts to institutionalize standardized practices in public school administration in the first half of the twentieth century.

After World War II, as the California Legislature, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Board of Education worked to encourage districts to consolidate and ultimately create a massive bureaucratic structure for public education at all levels, grassroots resistance grew. Policymakers anticipated this kind of resistance, but may have underestimated its strength and vitality. In the Los Angeles area, a divide also emerged between the county-level committee established to facilitate and oversee consolidations and the state education bureaucracy. The county committee consistently expressed dismay at the inflexibility of state

policy regarding school district organization and what members saw as the detrimental effects of the intractability of the rules coming from the state level.

In Chapter Two, I reveal that some consolidation was happening organically, and outside of the purview of state officials, through the process of annexation—where small districts voluntarily joined larger districts. In Los Angeles County, officials in small districts across the region initiated a slew of annexations in the late-1920s and early-1930s, driven by exponential population increases and economic turbulence. They were also motivated by the changing needs of a populace and an economy that progressively required more levels of formal education for greater numbers of Californians. The decision to annex often involved compromises that shone a spotlight on the interrelatedness of school district organization with issues of class, race, and taxation that were part of the complex social and political lives of residents. Annexation also challenged the neighborhood schools ideal because it resulted in larger districts. It did not, however, diminish the desire among many residents to maintain local control of their local schools. The financial situation for a number of school districts worsened in 1933 when the region was struck by the Long Beach Earthquake—a moderate-sized temblor that caused major structural damage to buildings in a broad swath of Southern California. Public school facilities in the independent cities east and south of downtown Los Angeles were hit particularly hard. This act of nature left new difficulties in its wake for school districts that were often already stretching their resources to the limit. The financial crisis faced by the area's school districts forced residents in many cases to reconsider the ways local schools were financed and the size and function of school districts more than ever before. Annexations serve as another example of the ways in which residents of the Greater Los Angeles area actively worked to shape the region's public school districts.

In Chapter Three, I outline the ways in which changes in population and economy during both the interwar period and after World War II complicated state efforts to better standardize education planning. I also argue that civil rights activism in the 1950s and 1960s by non-white residents of the Los Angeles area was a significant motivator for the efforts of mainly white residents in independent cities across the region to strengthen segregation. Public education was an important part of this struggle. Meanwhile, the state legislature and board of education created a county-level bureaucracy to encourage and facilitate the consolidation of districts. This process, however, was utilized in numerous instances by local community interests as a tool for creating districts that were both considerably smaller in size than the state education bureaucracy wanted, and were exclusionary according to race and class. I cite two cases in this chapter as examples, both of which involved the movement of students and territory out of larger districts—actions that were antithetical to state education policymakers' goals.

In Chapter Four, I focus on the protracted fight over the attempts to break away from the LAUSD and create the SAUSD that started in 1959 and lasted for nearly the entirety of the 1960s. Initially, their movement was a response to the initiation of planning for unification of the Los Angeles City Elementary District and the Los Angeles High School District. The municipalities that comprised the Southeast Cities were nearly entirely white, and during and after World War II featured a growing local industrial tax base that was critical for the financial viability of the SAUSD. If successful, their effort would have created a nearly all-white, racially segregated district of considerable size immediately adjacent to the multiracial and multiethnic LAUSD. What resulted was a fight that involved residents of these independent cities, LAUSD administrators and the Los Angeles Board of Education, the county committee that oversaw school district organization, and the California State Board of Education. It also involved civil

rights activists who had, early on, agitated for school desegregation in the Southeast Cities. Although proponents failed in their bid to secede when the proposal was rejected multiple times by the state board of education, it marked the start of a protracted and often bitter dispute that placed this cluster of cities just east of Los Angeles at the center of resistance to both state consolidation efforts and mandatory desegregation programs.

In Chapter Five, I tell the story of the continuing efforts of Southeast Cities residents to secede from the LAUSD after it failed through the official SDO process, which continued well into the 1970s. Proponents of secession saw the state board of education's denial of their plan as an example of the overreach of an increasingly out-of-control state government into the local affairs of their community. They took their fight to the state legislature by electing a local businessman named Floyd Wakefield to the California Assembly in 1966. Wakefield ran on a politically conservative platform that prioritized local control of schools and staunch opposition to any program of racial integration. His political ascent marked the joining of the LAUSD secession movement to a larger statewide campaign to block school integration programs, which coalesced around opposition to the busing of students between schools to achieve a racial and ethnic balance that was difficult to define. The very existence of the LAUSD was challenged, and despite attempts to break it apart via legislation, the district survived intact. Demographic changes in the mid- to late-1970s to areas where the secession movement was born meant that the center of opposition to both LAUSD and school desegregation shifted to the San Fernando Valley.

The story of school district organization in the Los Angeles metropolitan area was ultimately one of compromise, negotiation, and political action that reflected the ways public

schooling was closely bound to social, cultural, and demographic change. The importance of an educated polity to American republicanism and as a defense against tyranny was established from its start by those responsible for the nation's founding philosophy.[10] The significant economic activity public schools generate, along with the fact that the majority of Americans since the late 1800s have attended public schools makes it central to the political and civic lives of Americans. But the strong bonds between individual school campuses and their local communities are an additional factor that has rendered public education a virtual and physical site where larger debates of the day play out within in the context of educating children.

[10] Expressed through treatises on government like John Adams', *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, 1765. In it Adams argued for the necessity of education to opposing and preventing tyranny in opposition to the Stamp Act—imposed on the American colonists by the British Crown that same year. Adams famously wrote that "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people."

## Chapter One - Public Education: An Institution Shaped through Compromise

The history of public education in the United States, which has been considered over time by numerous scholars employing a multitude of theoretical perspectives and focus areas, reveals that the project of education for the masses that is a distinct feature of the nation's political and social landscape is ultimately the result of a continuous series of negotiations and compromises. This is perhaps not unexpected, as public education is a feature of the American landscape in which the majority have an interest, and consensus is rarely, if ever, achieved in politics. As a result, public education has played a central role in broader social and political battles that have shaped American history. These include fights over race, class, immigration, and labor as well as cultural debates over language and the arts. The focus of scholars who have studied public education in the U.S. has often been on pedagogy, curriculum, and the role of education as a means for both inclusion and exclusion in civic life. Critical and fundamental to any debate involving public education as an institution, however, is the form its administration and bureaucracy has taken over time, and the effects on larger social and political debates, movements, and structures. The ways in which government at various levels has funded and administered public education is the result of the efforts of key stakeholders at various points in time articulating and asserting their vision of what public education should be.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of students in the U.S. have been educated by public schools—a fact that by itself accounts for the importance of public schools to

American life. This continues to be the case today. Approximately 50.1 million students attended public elementary and secondary schools nationwide in 2015. When compared with the relatively paltry five million or so attending private elementary and secondary schools, it becomes clear that Americans are by-and-large educated by state-supported institutions. Public education is also a crucial source of employment for Americans and a significant source of economic activity—which adds to its importance in the lives of Americans, whether or not one attended or has children that attend or attended public schools. Taxpayer-supported school systems currently employ about 3.1 million full-time teachers, and expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools stand at about $630 billion per year.[11]

The "local district" model of administration, which generally features a representative school board that oversees a group of schools in a distinct, geographic area that often approximates that of a city, town, or a group of cities or towns, became the dominant means of school district administration across the country in the mid-to-late 1800s. This configuration was originally necessitated by the need to manage the decentralized and sparse locations of the earliest schools in a largely agrarian society. The school districts that exist today that are often characterized in the vernacular as essentially unmovable, unchanging bureaucracies—especially those in large metropolitan areas that serve tens-of-thousands or even hundreds-of-thousands of students. But the persistence of the local district model was never assured, at least not in Los Angeles County. It has faced constant challenge throughout its history—which often resulted from an inherent tension between districts that became increasingly larger over time in order to

[11] "Fast Facts," National Center for Education Statistics, http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372.

serve more students seeking increasing levels of education and the desire of constituents to maintain a sense of ownership over what they considered to be their local schools.

The story of school district organization in Los Angeles County is a new addition to a complex and rich set of narratives that elucidate the centrality of education to ideas of citizenship, inclusion, community, and identity within the longer scope of American history.[12] The first truly critical history of public education in the U.S. was published by Bernard Bailyn in 1960. Bailyn's groundbreaking research on colonial education helped to broaden the study of the topic beyond a celebratory narrative and into the mainstream of academic historical inquiry. He accomplished this through what historian Michael Katz described as a metaphor that "portrayed education as a flower of democracy planted in a rich and liberating loam which its seeds continually replenished."[13] Bailyn focused on the ways in which meaning was assigned to educational institutions, arguing that the primary function of public education in the U.S. has been to transmit the dominant culture from one generation to the next. This opened the door to a more comprehensive and critical historical examination of the various ways children are educated and the institutions that have been established for this purpose.[14] Taking Bailyn's call for a broader definition of education as a conceptual starting point, historians have asked,

[12] Although this project is focused on the post-colonial U.S., I acknowledge the vital contribution of scholars who have taken up pre-colonial education as a means of cultural transmission as part of a broader historiography of American education.

[13] Michael B. Katz, "The Origins of Public Education: A Reassessment," in *The Social History of American Education*, ed. B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 91.

[14] B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese, introduction to *The Social History of American Education*, ed. B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), viii.

answered, revised, and debated important questions about the institutions of American education.[15]

The idea that education should be offered to at least a portion of the American populace has been present since the British colonial period. The establishment of public schools in the U.S. began in colonial Massachusetts, and was initially motivated more by religion than a belief in a more engaged and informed citizenry.[16] In 1647, the Massachusetts legislature passed the first law in the colonies for the provision of schools by the government, motivated primarily by a Protestant Christian belief in broadening access to the Bible to larger groups of people. The law stated that towns of more than 50 people should establish a school, although attendance was not compulsory. "Free" was also never part of the equation, so families still had to pay at least part of the cost of attendance. In addition, access to comprehensive schooling was generally limited to boys, and the decision whether to send children to school was left completely up to parents. Instruction was generally limited to six week terms offered primarily in winter and summer. Formal education essentially "swayed to the rhythms of agricultural work and the determination of most towns to provide only modest resources for schools."[17] As a result, formal education was not a central part of the lives of most children in colonial New England. There were prominent leaders in the late colonial and early republican periods, like Thomas Jefferson, who advocated

[15] These include the roots of schooling and its relationship to democracy, the development of market capitalism, immigration and "Americanization" projects, and the public schooling's relationship to notions of social mobility.

[16] The dominant narrative around the growth of Common Schools espoused by historians like Bailyn, Carl Kaestle, and Lawrence Cremin for the bulk of the twentieth century began with New England as the vanguard, with the movement spreading gradually west and south from there.

[17] Carl F. Kaestle, "Victory of the Common School: A Turning Point in American Educational History," in *Historians on America* (U.S. Department of State, 2008), 22-29.

for a public school system in Virginia strikingly similar to the district-based system that was eventually implemented. The importance of Jefferson's exhortation for public schooling should not be underestimated, as he connected the idea of education at public expense directly to the ability of Virginians to avoid falling under the control of despotism, and therefore a critical part of the emerging U.S. experiment with democracy. As he wrote in 1779:

> the indigence of the greater number disabling them from so educating, at their own expence [sic], those of their children whom nature hath fitly formed and disposed to become useful instruments for the public, it is better that such should be sought for and educated at the common expence [sic] of all, than that the happiness of all should be confided to the weak or wicked.[18]

Formal schooling, however, remained sporadic, mostly private, and for the most part lacking any administrative organization, and remained this way through the early republic.

The most important development for the growth of public education in the U.S. was the widespread adoption in the mid-1800s of elementary education that was mandated by state governments and administered and controlled locally. Referred to as the "Common School" movement, this period marked the first time that public schools were established on a large scale across the U.S. In the 1840s, the Common School model became the foundation for a national system of public primary and secondary instruction when a number of northern states voted to create school systems based on this approach.[19] It was educational reformer Horace Mann,

[18] "79. A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, 18 June 1779," *Founders Online,* National Archives, last modified June 29, 2017, http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-02-02-0132-0004-0079. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 2, *1777–18 June 1779*, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, pp. 526–535.]

[19] Kaestle, "Victory of the Common School," 22-29. The importance of the Common Schools movement to the development of a system of government-administered, free public primary and secondary schools that became widely accepted has been acknowledged by numerous scholars of American education. Common Schools represented the nation's first public school systems.

whose establishment of and advocacy for publicly-funded schools best represented the "essence of the common school [sic] movement."[20] A one-time Massachusetts state senator, Mann was elected secretary of its board of education in 1837, and served in the position for twelve years. His reforms to the state's education system included initiating taxpayer-funded elementary schools and were very much in line with what became a longer tradition of progressive politics in education that shared connections with other social reform movements.

The widespread adoption of free or low cost public schooling consistent with the Common School movement was fueled by the combination of a very practical need for a more educated workforce and a belief in education as the solution to a specific set of problems emerging as a result of mid-nineteenth century capitalist society.[21] The mid-to-late nineteenth century ushered in unprecedented growth in communication, transportation, and a wholesale movement of populations to cities. While the western expansion of the United States necessitated and fueled these changes, they were also sparked by new technology like the telegraph, which sent information across continents and oceans at the speed of an electric current, and the steam engine, which made the nation seem a much smaller place at the same time it had expanded to cover the entire east-to-west span of the continent. The era also marked the beginning of the ascent of the U.S. as a world economic power.[22] Along with these changes came the need for

[20] Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History*, *Fourth Edition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 116.

[21] Katz, "The Origins of Public Education," 100. Katz also posits the idea that the emergence of public schools in American cities in the mid-nineteenth century was driven primarily by a "shift in the nature of social organization consequent upon the emergence of a class of wage-laborers."

[22] There is a considerable corpus of historical literature about the changes the U.S. underwent in the period between approximately the end of the War of 1812 and 1870. The complexity of these changes were in many ways tied to the nation's westward expansion and the major conflicts of the era—the Mexican-American War and the U.S. Civil War. Some more notable works on this period are: Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The*

more available, accessible, and comprehensive schools, a need that states and counties nationwide began to mobilize to meet. As historian Lawrence A. Cremin described it, "the United States became a nation of cities at the same time that it became an exporter of culture and civilization to the world. And education, in a bewildering variety of forms and institutions, was profoundly involved in both phenomena."[23] The wholesale move of populations into cities in the northern part of the country in particular and the attendant shifts in the type of labor in which the population was engaging demanded a new emphasis on formal education, a significant change from the colonial period and life in the early republic where the practical needs of a largely agrarian society were prioritized far more than education.

The adoption of the Common School model across the country in the mid-nineteenth century was significant because it represented a broad acceptance of the principals of free, or nearly free, schooling for the masses sanctioned by the state. The idea espoused by some in the nation's founding generation that a large-scale system of education was necessary to the growth and maintenance of a republican system had become tangible. This took place in the context of three additional critical developments in American society—the assumption of some responsibility for social welfare by the state, the advent of institutions as the basis of solutions to social problems, and a redefinition of the family due to a new labor market that was focused on a workplace rather than home.[24] Common Schools, however, were a broad-based approach to the administration of schools, advanced by educational reformers of the mid-nineteenth century,

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*Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007), Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005).

[23] Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 2.

[24] Katz, "The Origins of Public Education," 93-94.

rather than a particular type of educational institution. This meant that beyond the idea of accessibility to a broad swath of the population, the specifics of how to administer public schools was open to wide interpretation for local stakeholders.[25] In many localities, access to "public" education in the nineteenth century for non-white or non-Protestant children was limited.[26]

As the demands of American metropolitan life increased around the turn of the century, a new wave of education reformers sought to utilize public education as a means of social reform. This was consistent with the broader spirit of institutionalized reform in fashion during the Progressive Era as a response to the swift current of industrialization and the unprecedented levels of capital accumulation that marked the fin de siècle. Progressives generally sought to bring new order and structure to the process of raising and educating children by applying scientific principles to the task. Their ranks included experts with a broad range of specialties, typified by advocates like pediatrician L. Emmett Holt, whose book *The Care and Feeding of Children: A Catechism for the Use of Mothers and Children's Nurses*, published in 1894, was a pioneering work in the science of pediatrics. He also founded the first American journal of pediatrics, the *Archives of Pediatrics,* and is credited with a number of breakthroughs in disease prevention, including milk pasteurization to kill potentially deadly bacteria.[27] In education, the Progressives believed that schooling had become too tied to the mechanized industries of the day and lacked focus on the development of analytical and critical thinking skills. This became a particularly severe problem in urban areas. As historian David Tyack described it: "The large

[25] Urban and Wagoner, Jr., *American Education*, 112.

[26] Ibid., 112-113.

[27] Peter M. Dunn, "Dr. Emmett Holt (1855-1924) and the foundation of North American paediatrics," *British Medical Journal, ADC Fetal & Neonatal edition* 83 (2000): F221-F223.

city schools became increasingly mechanized and structured like the large bureaucracies of industry, commerce, and the military that were arising in this age of consolidation." Progressive reformers sought to recast educational institutions as a means to overcome the challenges of the era.[28]

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, reformers and public intellectuals like Walter Lippmann and Ellwood Cubberley proposed ideas and methodologies for new and expanded approaches to education that would help educational institutions manage the burdens of metropolitan society. Cubberley's book, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (1909), advocated the creation of a politically independent, professional cadre of school administrators trained by schools of education. The challenges faced by these reformers ranged from providing the social discipline that was deemed essential for life in the crowded conditions of the city to the idea that schools should convey every manner of vital knowledge. They proposed a range of solutions, from Lippmann's "new machinery of knowledge" to the extending of Christianity and its moral ideals to all areas of human endeavor.[29] Common to all of the Progressive education exponents, however, was faith in formal education as a means of reform.[30]

Philosopher and public intellectual John Dewey is the figure most often associated with progressive education reform in the first quarter of the twentieth century. He believed that instruction should include less passive recitation and more exploration of the methods of science and social cooperation. Dewey's Lab School at the University of Chicago exemplified the

[28] David B. Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1967), 314.

[29] Cremin, *American Education*.

[30] Tyack, *Turning Points*, 318.

experiential nature of the pedagogy he and other reformers like him espoused. The school's curriculum emphasized practical activities like weaving, cooking, and woodworking, which served as points of departure for studying core academic subjects like geography, history, science, and literature.[31] From Dewey's point of view, education should emphasize the forging of well-rounded pupils who would thrive in an increasingly urbanized world. This approach included lessons that were once conveyed through family structures or smaller, closely-knit rural communities.[32]

The Progressive movement in education, like the Common School movement, was to a considerable degree simply an idea. Progressive reformers suggested new ways in which public education could be a solution to the problems of industrialization and the explosive growth of metropolitan populations. Implementation of their ideas was left to administrators and teachers. In its complexity it was comprised of "a dazzling variety of particulars, some of which conflicted with each other."[33] But a number of progressive reforms became part-and-parcel of public schools across the U.S., but a backlash against many of the more experimental curricular approaches reached a particularly fevered pitch after World War II. This backlash was steeped in the anti-communist fervor that swept the nation in the late 1940s and 1950s. One of the more tangible results of Progressive reform in education was the professionalization of administrators, and a move toward more centralized administration. A movement that developed in reaction to growing centralization and consolidations of power and resources ultimately resulted in more

[31] Ibid., 320.

[32] Dewey's major published work on education is *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916).

[33] Urban and Wagoner, Jr., *American Education,* 227.

centralized school administration. However, reformers believed that centralized administrations would create a professionalized and experienced leadership that could devise and implement ways to better prepare the nation's youth for the new century. The Common School model of public education became bound to a new Progressive Era bureaucracy that required consolidation and centralization of functions.[34]

The development of public schools in California mirrored the institution's evolution nationwide and closely followed the Common School model. In time, the system of public education that was given official sanction in the California State Constitution became one of the nation's largest and most complex. California's current school district landscape reflects the battles over administrative organization that have taken place since the 1850s. It is comprised of districts of different sizes, shapes, and with widely varying budgets and student populations. As of the 2015-16 school year there were approximately 6.2 million public school students in California divided up among 1,025 districts. Unified districts that serve elementary and secondary school students within their geographic footprint comprise only 343 of those administrative units. There are, however, also 526 elementary school districts that serve exclusively primary school students, and 77 high school-only districts.[35] The size of the state's school districts, measured by pupil attendance, range from the three largest—the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) (639,337 students), San Diego Unified (129,380 students), and Long Beach Unified (77,812 students), to districts as small as the Blake Elementary School

[34] Ibid., 228-229.

[35] "Report of various statistics about California's public schools and districts for the 2015-2016 school year," Fingertip Facts on Education in California, CalEdFacts, California Department of Education, http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/ceffingertipfacts.asp. There were 79 school districts in the state in the 2015-2016 school year that employed alternate means of configuration, categorized by the California Department of Education as "Other" in its data collection.

District in the central California town of Woody—comprised of eight students, one teacher/principal, and a one-room schoolhouse.[36]

The diversity in size and structure of California's school districts and the often unintended consequences of attempts to bring order to school district organization in the state reflects a tension inherent in the Common School ideal between a mandate for the state to provide educational opportunity for the "masses" against the concept that schools should be controlled to by the communities that surround them—goals that often do not coexist in practice. The California State Board of Education, tasked with administering public education in the state and navigating this contradiction, was first established in 1852. It consisted of the governor, the superintendent of public instruction, and a surveyor general.[37] The board was expanded four times throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. The modern version of the board was established in 1912 when the California Constitution was amended to facilitate the creation of a seven member body to oversee state schools by gubernatorial appointment to four year terms. As the need for a larger statewide bureaucracy to oversee the public schools grew, the California State Department of Education was established in 1921, with the board of education as its governing body and the state superintendent serving as its ex-officio secretary. In 1927 the board's format changed again, this time to a ten member body appointed by the governor with the state senate's consent. This was the configuration that endured into the twenty-first century.[38]

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[36] "Largest & Smallest Public School Districts," *CalEdFacts*, California Department of Education, http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/ceflargesmalldist.asp. "Blake Elementary School," Blake School District, http://blakesd.org/.

[37] The Superintendent of Public Instruction is an elected office. The first was John Marvin, elected in 1851.

[38] A good overview of the history of the California State Board of Education and the California Department of Education is found in the Records of the Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration - Bureau of

The expansion of the state's education bureaucracy was a Progressive Era effort to professionalize administrative structures and bring order to a disorganized, largely improvised public school system. Public education in late nineteenth century California was largely a patchwork of elementary school districts of various sizes and community connections. The board of education and superintendent recognized the growing need for better forms of organization early on in the twentieth century. While the effort was consistent with the spirit of Progressivism, it was also motivated by very practical considerations. The most pressing was the need to create standardized forms of schooling that would allow for consistent standards and evaluation, curriculum, and more efficient means of distributing funding.

For reformers and policymakers alike, making sense of the hodgepodge of school districts was a critical part of bringing coherence to the state's public education system. As the population shifted from small towns to cities, merging the functions of district administrations became a primary goal of the state department of education, as many districts were comprised of only one or two schools. An official effort to affect consolidation was initiated around the end of the nineteenth century, but showed limited results. By 1920, some state policymakers lamented their lack of progress. The 1920 Report of the Special Legislative Committee on Education, authorized by the California State Legislature and tasked with investigating and evaluating this effort, concluded that: "The trouble with the consolidated school idea, as usually carried out, is that the consolidated schools are too hard to form and when formed are usually too small." Despite a 1901 law that removed administrative barriers to merging school districts, the report revealed that only 59 consolidated elementary school districts had been formed since then, and

School District Organization - Bureau Office Files Memos 1955-56, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

most had been too small to make any difference in terms of administrative efficiencies. It concluded that county-wide units established by the legislature would be preferable to voluntary consolidation by the districts. The report blamed the slow pace of consolidation in large part on local politics, arguing "that the laws usually require an affirmative vote of the people of the districts, and mistaken conceptions, real-estate ambitions, and an erroneous local pride usually block constructive action."[39] This was the start of increased state intervention to affect the creation of larger, presumably more efficient school districts. It was an effort that often ran into significant opposition at a local level.

Despite the efforts of the state educational bureaucracy, school district consolidation continued to proceed at a snail's pace for at least the next 30 years. In 1949, a state commission created to again study the consolidation problem cited the same 1920 Report of the Special Legislative Committee on Education to make the point that, despite long-standing awareness of the benefits of creating larger school districts, progress was halting. This was the case despite nearly fifty years of policy designed to make it happen on a larger scale. By the 1948-1949 school year, only approximately 300 consolidated elementary districts had been formed throughout the state.[40] It was progress from the fifty-nine that were counted during the 1919-1920 school year, but equaled a rate of just under five consolidations per year. But there was an additional problem with the consolidations to that point—they were too small to ensure that any substantive scale would be achieved to justify the incentives the state had provided for districts to combine. As described by the report of the California Commission on School Districts: "Most

[39] "REORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND STATE SCHOOL FINANCE," Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration – Bureau of School District Organization Commission of School Districts Minutes of Meetings 1949, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

[40] Ibid.

of them merely provide a larger one-room school in place of two very small one-room schools." That same report claimed that those small districts had enjoyed subsidies from the state amounting to $3 million annually in aggregate.[41] The belief that consolidation would provide more efficient and better education remained untested because the new districts being created were not large enough, for the most part. The key question for policymakers was why this was happening.

One of the answers to the lack of traction on consolidation was that state tax assessments disincentivized larger-scale consolidation. Taxes were absolutely essential to the state's public schools because, until the 1970s, the Common School vision of state oversight with local control of public schools was funded in California, as it was in most of the country, through local property tax revenues.[42] Assessments were conducted at the district level to determine value, and then an "equalization" process was applied by the state that provided additional funds to districts that generated less tax revenue than others. Over time, this system evolved into a very complicated equation. In the first half of the twentieth century, when separate school districts over increasing distances combined, a reassessment was done that leveled the valuation across the newly consolidated area. The state provided little equalization money during this period, so the effect of consolidation was that districts with relatively high tax assessments would lose out on funding. The state incentives did not include a specific formula that tied the size of the new district to the additional funding, so there was little motivation for districts to combine at a larger scale.

[41] Ibid., 2.

[42] This included both residential and commercial property.

Driven by a population explosion in the 1930s and the attendant increase in the numbers of children needing public schooling, along with projections that they would continue to increase at an even more rapid pace, the state began to increase incentives for district consolidation and for larger combinations. California's population grew exponentially in the thirties, driven by migration from the Great Plains, which was hit particularly hard by the Great Depression. Los Angeles County alone added 500,000 new residents during the decade. The growth of industry in the area triggered in large part by World War II later ushered in even faster growth in the region, a trend that state policymakers recognized early on. As a result, by the 1940s, a scramble had begun to devise ways of encouraging district consolidation in order handle the increasing numbers of students entering the state's public schools and to prepare for future increases.

In 1945, the legislature established the California Commission on School Districts to study the consolidation problem and make recommendations for solutions based on the notion that school districts needed larger, streamlined administrations to better facilitate future state aid to schools.[43] That year's session of the legislature was a consequential one for school district organization in particular. The most significant result of this activity was the passage of the Optional Reorganization Act, drafted by the California State Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission, established in 1943 to plan for the transition of the state's economy and public services from war production to peace time. The Optional Reorganization Act not only mandated the establishment of the Commission on School Districts, it opened the door for new financial incentives meant to encourage district consolidation. The commission was specifically tasked

[43] The commission was established in 1945 by the California Legislature by the passage of AB 960.

with creating recommendations for ways in which these new funding schemes would be structured.

The effort to reorganize school districts and the attendant push back against the move to create larger districts was not unique to California. The debate over the idea that education held solutions to society's ills and the perceived need for formal education for an ever-growing number of citizens was as vigorous in the 1940s as at the turn of the century for education policymakers nationwide. In 1948 there were approximately 103,000 school districts, or units equivalent to districts, in the U.S. Nine states at the time had 5,000 districts each at the high end, while five other states, which had adopted county-wide school district organization, had fewer than 70 each at the low end. The average geographical footprint of districts nationwide was 18 square miles, representing student populations that ranged from zero to hundreds of thousands, an illustration of the wide variations in district organization. Based on the fact that local taxes were the predominant means of funding public schools nationally, the varying sizes of districts had a tangible effect on the distribution of funds in locales across the U.S. Expenditures per pupil per year for the all districts in the U.S. in the late 1940s ranged between approximately $3.70 to $200, and there were more than a million children attending schools with less than $500 total per classroom to spend each year.[44] Beyond the efficiencies that might be possible with larger, standardized administrative units, smaller, fragmented districts were a primary reason for unequal funding at individual schools on a national scale.

Another reason for the variations in school district size and funding across the country was that with rare exception, public education was the exclusive purview of states, counties, and

[44] Howard A. Dawson, et. al. *Your School District: The Report of the National Commission on School District Reorganization* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association of the United States, 1948), 15.

cities until the late 1950s. Until it became the U.S. Department of Education in 1979, the federal agency tasked with the oversight of schooling was a relatively low-level agency folded into a larger "health, education, and welfare" bureaucracy.[45] But the common concern nationwide in the forties with school district consolidation was revealed by the extensive work of the National Commission on School District Reorganization, sponsored by the National Education Association's Department of Rural Education and The Rural Education Project at the University of Chicago. The majority of commission members were experts in rural education, although the body's purview was far wider and reflected the growing realization that the problem of school district organization was not just a "rural" issue. The commission issued a comprehensive report on its findings in 1948 that served as an unambiguous endorsement of district consolidation at as large of a level as possible. It also recommended the establishment by each state of a commission and local committees to study and plan the reorganization of districts. It warned that "piecemeal adoption will cause needless delay and perhaps defeat of needed reorganization."[46]

The recommendations of the National Education Association's commission were strikingly similar to those of California's Commission on School Districts, which also issued its final report in 1948. The most significant difference was the California Commission's finding that "financial penalties" in state law discouraged the creation of larger, more efficient districts. It recommended that these disincentives be replaced with provisions "designed to encourage constructive local solutions to problems created by inadequate local school district

[45] The federal Office of Education was created in 1867, but remained a relatively minor part of the Department of the Interior until 1939, where it was transferred to the Federal Security Agency (FSA). In 1953, the FSA became the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and was given cabinet-level status. It was not until 1979 that the standalone national Department of Education was created, by President Jimmy Carter.

[46] Dawson, et. al. *Your School District*, 142.

organization."[47] As a solution, the commission proposed that the California legislature guarantee funds to new, larger-scale districts either equivalent to no less than the total amount apportioned in the year immediately preceding unification to each of the districts involved, or a sum of $2,400 for each of the elementary districts, and $4,000 for each of the high school districts included in the new combination on top of the normal apportionment.[48] Essentially, the commission sought to directly incentivize the creation of new districts, and set five years as the time limit based on the experience of other districts that had reorganized within that time frame and had shown "substantial economies in terms of good educational services at a reasonable unit cost."[49]

The commission also emphasized the need for strategic planning of new school construction to help facilitate consolidations. This was especially important for rural areas, where the goal was to move students from multiple one-room school buildings to new, larger facilities that could better serve a consolidated district, but it was also an important consideration for urban districts seeking to create new combinations with larger geographic footprints. In addition, the distinction between "urban" and "rural" was often ambiguous at the edges of cities at mid-century. To help the consolidation process along, the commission proposed that the legislature require the "approving authority" for new school buildings to "give due consideration to the need for improvement in district organization prior to the making of any allocation," as well as a small

[47] "REORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND STATE SCHOOL FINANCE," Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration – Bureau of School District Organization Commission of School Districts Minutes of Meetings 1949, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 3.

[48] Ibid, 4-5.

[49] Ibid., 5.

amount of money that would help facilitate the consolidation process and overcome any financial hurdles that would come with building a larger school serving a broader geographic area.[50]

No matter how attractive the incentives or comprehensive the planning, the commission's report acknowledged that "local pride" was still a significant barrier to consolidation. This was a concept far less tangible than finance or state subventions, but a factor that dogged efforts for large-scale district consolidation for decades. Although policymakers acknowledged local pride as an important consideration, they grossly underestimated its importance for many areas of the state, and failed to realize that state aid might not be enough of an incentive to overcome it. While the commission mentioned local pride several times in its concluding report as a significant impediment to effective district consolidation, it also overlooked its complexity. Not only was it intricately connected to issues of taxation and local autonomy, in many instances it was also deeply connected to race and class. These were important factors in shaping community identity, especially when tied to property values.

Apparently believing that the answer to this obstacle lay with financial incentives and disincentives, the commission recommended that the state put the burden of maintaining "unreasonably" small school districts on the residents of that particular area: "The Commission, while highly mindful of the virtues of pride in one's immediate neighborhood, is of the opinion that any costs to maintain a non-isolated small school, in addition to the constitutional guarantee, should be met by the locality which insists upon the maintenance of such a school."[51] The message sent by the commission was clear—monetary incentives would eventually trump local

[50] Ibid., 6.

[51] Ibid., 8.

pride in creating more efficient school districts. The members of the commission failed to see that "local pride" or the maintenance of "neighborhood schools" would eventually become a powerful rhetorical and emotional tool used effectively to oppose comprehensive consolidation across the state.

The Commission on School Districts set up local survey committees at the county level to study problems with district organization and make recommendations for individual localities. After holding its initial two meetings in late 1946, the survey committee for Los Angeles County met 22 times throughout 1947 and 1948 and late winter and spring of 1949. In the absence of specific guidelines from the state, most of its work consisted of interpreting its role vis-à-vis the state board of education and department of education, as well as determining exactly what would constitute the ideal size and shape of districts in the county. It also conducted studies of the possibility of consolidation specifically for ten high school districts in the county.

The positions of the local committee in Los Angeles County often challenged those of the state commission, illustrating tension between state and county officials that would characterize the school district organization effort moving forward. The local committee's primary function, however, was to evaluate the situation in Los Angeles County and determine a way forward to facilitate school district consolidation. It concluded its work by issuing a final report that included recommendations for future committees tasked with adjudicating school district organization, the continuation of which it said it "endorses unanimously." The commission also encouraged consolidating separate elementary and high school districts in the same geographic area into unified units based on the borders of the often larger high school districts. This position represented a shift away from a focus on rural areas where geographic unification was the imperative, to unification of separate administrative units in the same district footprint, which

was a characteristic of urban schools. It also recommended that once often separate elementary and high school districts were effectively unified, future committees should consider situations where a district should then divide to form two or more unified districts, or two or more unified districts should merge to form a single district—again suggesting a change in focus away from geographic footprint as the main factor for determining the shape and type of district organization, and a shift to a greater focus on the needs of urban areas. The Los Angeles County committee encouraged a level of flexibility in decision making on consolidation that did not match the state's relatively inflexible and ambiguous standard of creating districts that were as large as possible. Finally, the committee excoriated state representatives for what members saw as indecision and inaction: "The California State Legislature," the report read, "should not continue to evade its legal and moral obligation to provide adequate legislation to insure proper school district reorganization in this county and throughout the state."[52]

State and local policymakers saw the problems facing the district consolidation effort in starkly different ways. For example, perhaps recognizing a wider array of complications involved with simply creating larger administrative units, the Los Angeles County committee advocated for fixes to the system to create better incentives for unification, including more flexibility in deciding the size and shape of individual districts, while the State Commission on School Districts saw the primary obstacle to consolidation as local opposition based on an unreasonable community pride and financial interests that profited from smaller districts. In an overarching study of consolidation produced in late 1946, while acknowledging the need to

[52] LOS ANGELES COUNTY LOCAL SURVEY COMMITTEE of the California State Commission on School Districts, May 9, 1949, Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration - Bureau of School District Organization Commission of School Districts Los Angeles 1947-48, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 2.

adjust the incentives given to districts for unification, the State Commission again placed particular emphasis on problematic "local" issues, listing what it characterized as possible objections to the consolidation process. It emphasized these issues because a popular vote in the areas effected was required in order for consolidation to take effect.[53] The report was a critical evaluation of what the commission as a whole considered to be unfounded fear of the consequences of school district unification. It is a telling document in terms of the thinking that undergirded the state commission's approach to the district organization problem, which was based on the notion that changing perception was the solution rather than the possibility that there were deeper, more complicated factors at play.

The essence of the commission's counterarguments to the possible objections of local stakeholders was that consolidation of public educational resources was already happening in ways people in localities with small school districts may not even have noticed, and residents had little power to turn the tide. For example, among the objections it listed to consolidation was the notion that it would "destroy community life." The commission's retort to this was less a reification of the benefits of larger school administrative units as it was an argument that the replacing of small, locally-based government structures by larger bureaucracies was simply inevitable. As the report stated, the idea that consolidated units would destroy community life "is just as likely to be advanced by people whose community life has already disappeared because of the construction of highways and the drifting of the population toward larger communities."

[53] Staff of the State Commission on School Districts to State Commission on School Districts, Regional Commissions on School Districts, Local Survey Committees, memorandum, "Problems Involved in School District Reorganization as Reported in Selected Studies of the Topic," December 14, 1946, Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration - Bureau of School District Organization Commission of School Districts Minutes 1946, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 4.

Another possible objection cited by the commission was the idea that local control of schools would be taken away. To this point, the commission argued that in many cases, very small school districts already had inadequate resources and funding to supply a number of essential services, and therefore "such services are superimposed by some larger unit, such as the county or state."[54] Finally, among other points, the commission cited multiple instances where individual self-interest drove opposition to consolidation. It used as its examples owners of property "whose value they would like to enhance by the location of a school," a merchant whose store is located by a school who "does not want the school moved because he fears it will injure his business," directors of local schools who "are proud of their position because of the influence it gives them in their respective communities," and non-resident property owners who oppose consolidation "in order to avoid the payment of higher taxes."[55] The consensus of the state commission was that a combination of irrational fear and very rational personal interest on the part of local stakeholders was a significant driver of opposition to consolidation.

Based on its findings, the state commission put forward a set of criteria for future evaluation of school district reorganization proposals, intended to assist the local survey committees in their decision-making with regard to district consolidation. The guidelines included the idea that the district should preserve "a sense of community membership," and that "natural barriers, not easily penetrated by modern means of communication, should not divide, isolate, or separate one part of the population from another." On the other hand, the commission also suggested that "the boundaries of the proposed administrative unit should not necessarily

[54] Ibid, 4.

[55] Ibid., 5.

follow those of any existing political units, and the unit proposed may include several, or parts of several, political units." The commission also emphasized the importance of creating a more equitable tax base when consolidating districts, not only to affect a more equal and consistent distribution of funding, but also "result in the creation of reorganized districts financially capable of supporting a modern, fully adequate educational program."[56] While its recommendations were practical and comprehensive, they still did not address the deeper issues of community self-identification and autonomy the local committees would encounter, nor the problems with financial disincentives.

True to plan, the California Commission on School Districts concluded its work during the summer of 1949, when it handed its responsibilities over to the permanent state bureau of school district organization. The board of education established new bodies called county committees for school district organization (CCSDOs)—one for each county in the state—to guide, deliberate, and decide on unification efforts and questions of school district organization, and inherit the work already started by the previous local committees. Members of the committees were chosen by county superintendents, with one member representing each supervisorial district. The committees operated under the aegis of each county's board of education and superintendent of schools. If a specific county's CCSDO made a recommendation, the ultimate decision on boundary changes or unification would be made by vote of the county supervisors and then by popular vote in the affected area. By this time, thanks to the efforts of legislators and the recommendations of the commission on school districts, the California

[56] Minutes of the Meeting, Commission on School Districts, Berkeley, California, September 13, 1946, Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration - Bureau of School District Organization Commission of School Districts Minutes 1946, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

Education Code had been amended to allow for clearer guidance and classifications for school district organization in the state. As a result, the CCSDOs had 15 specific organizational forms available for school district consolidation. Among them, a "Unified" district, which became the most common mode of reorganization, was defined as one which "operates both elementary and secondary programs which are under the control of one governing board and one administrative staff." There were also "Joint Unified" districts, which allowed for a unified district comprised of territory in two or more counties, and "County-wide Unified" districts, which as the name suggests, are districts with borders coterminous with the boundaries of a county.[57] The remaining forms were variants of non-consolidated types of separate elementary, high school, and community college districts.

The Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization (LACCSDO) faced a mixed landscape of district sizes and types when it formed in 1949. Consistent with the rest of the state, schools in the Greater Los Angeles area in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries had been relatively dispersed throughout the region, built as a need arose and most representing the small, rural municipalities that dotted the landscape surrounding the city of Los Angeles. With the waves of new residents that followed the extension of railroad lines, the boosterism of real estate and business interests, job seekers, and waves of migrants escaping economic malaise, the number of elementary schools built to accommodate the growing numbers of children grew exponentially in Los Angeles County between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1920s. The number of elementary-only districts grew from 12 in 1865 to a peak of 156 around 1915. The number of elementary-only districts, however, began to slowly decline

[57] Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, *History of School District Organization in Los Angeles County* (Downey, California: Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, 1976), 1.

because of consolidation. By 1925, Los Angeles County counted only 134 elementary-only districts, and by 1930 the number had dropped to 119.[58] In an approximately 15 year period, the number of elementary school districts in Los Angeles County had declined by almost 25 percent. This indicated a steady, but certainly not rapid, pace of consolidation. A more dramatic indication of the increase in the size of elementary schools, and the move away from the one-room schoolhouse, was the marked increase in the number of schools with ten or more teachers from 150 in the 1936-37 school year to 515 a decade later. At the same time, the number of small districts under the supervision of the county—meaning they did not maintain their own board or administration—decreased from 63 in the 1936-37 school year to 46 in the 1948-49 school year, with the number of districts in the county maintaining their own system of supervision decreasing slightly from 50 to 47—another important indicator of consolidation.[59] Although the merging of elementary school administrative units in the county was happening, by-and-large they did not represent the kind of large combinations that state policymakers sought to effect.

As the number of elementary-only districts in the county declined, the number of high school districts was steadily increasing, representing another shift in public education. As the need for higher levels of education grew, an elementary school education was no longer sufficient for a growing number of California's children. The number of high school districts nationwide also began to grow around the turn of the century, reflecting the needs of an increasing population of youth hungry for higher levels of education and employers who wanted a better-trained workforce. The 'rise' of the high school is an apt characterization of the trend.

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, *School District Organization in Los Angeles County, Prepared by the Special Services Area of the Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools* (Los Angeles, California: Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, 1962), 94.

Between 1890 and 1920 new secondary schools were constructed at a rate of one per day nationwide.[60] The first public high schools in the U.S. were established in the first half of the nineteenth century in Boston and Philadelphia. Their curriculum developed according to the needs of the primarily middle class population they served.[61] In 1821, Boston established the equivalent to what in a later era might be considered a high school, one that emphasized English composition and mathematics for boys between twelve and fifteen who intended to be merchants and craftsmen.[62] For the most part, however, the high schools that appeared sporadically in the pre-Civil War period were located in areas experiencing rapid social change and industrial growth.[63] However, a large-scale, nationwide move towards high school education for large numbers of students did not happen until the Progressive Era when the ideals and curriculum of the Common School movement were reshaped and reformers began to advocate for consolidated districts.

In California, the growth of high school districts prodded policymakers to gradually expand the scope of consolidation efforts to include unification of elementary and secondary districts whenever possible. In recognizing the need for high schools in the late nineteenth century, the state legislature passed the Union High School Act, which gave state sanction to the creation of high schools to serve one or more elementary school districts.[64] The high school

[60] McClellan and Reese, *The Social History of American Education*, 161.

[61] Urban and Wagoner, Jr., *American Education*, 208.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid, 209.

[64] Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, *School District Organization in Los Angeles County*, 97. The Union High School Act was passed by the California State Legislature in 1891.

districts were not configured to replace or consolidate elementary-only districts, but rather were designed to capture graduates of several elementary schools in a specific local area. In smaller areas they were comprised of only one or two high schools, with some notable larger exceptions. It was a stop-gap solution to a problem driven by factors outside of policymakers' control. It effectively led to the creation of an additional layer of the state's educational bureaucracy that would need to be addressed in time by the CCSDOs through vertical consolidation of elementary and high school districts.

Awareness had been growing among policymakers and legislators in California for decades that even a high school education would not be sufficient for the needs of a labor market growing in new and complex ways. As a result, in addition to the steady growth of high schools, legislators sought to both expand access to and preparation for post-secondary education, particularly in the immediate aftermath of World War II. By the early decades of the new century, the state already had established a well-regarded system of public universities—the University of California, overseen by a board of regents and president. It also had established a system of teacher's colleges, which eventually became the California State University system, administered by the state board of education, and junior colleges that were administered by local school districts. Now, legislators and education policy advocates sought to expand the system both in terms of geography and the range of degrees it offered. Motivations for this expansion ranged from a Progressive-inspired desire to create a planned, public system of education from the earliest grades to graduate school, to individual legislators' desire to reap the potential economic benefits of a university in their district—an important factor for politicians with a local constituency to impress.

In order to address these needs and desires, and in the face of a previously failed effort to create an "Education Planning Committee" to bring improved organization and coordination to the state's public higher education system, the 1947 session of California's legislature initiated a wide-ranging study of schools in California, with higher education as its focus. The study was conducted by a committee led by George D. Strayer, professor emeritus of Education at Columbia University's Teachers College, and organized by a joint committee of the Regents of the University of California and the state board of education. It released its findings in March of 1948 as *A Report of a Survey of the Needs of California in Higher Education*. The "Strayer Report," as it became known, recommended that the former state teacher's colleges be expanded into a comprehensive state college system offering bachelor's and master's degrees, the building of new state colleges, and the establishment of a state grant program to assist needy students at both public and private universities. After two additional "restudies" of the Strayer Report in 1955 and 1957, the legislature enacted the California Master Plan for Higher Education in 1960. It solidified a system of governance and expansion for California's public universities and junior colleges throughout the state.[65]

Both the Strayer Report and the Master Plan also argued for the centralization of primary and secondary school districts into larger, unified units in order to further standardize the entire system of public education in the state. But consolidation of primary and secondary school districts continued to be elusive on a broad scale, and unlike the state's public universities, there was an additional group of stakeholders at a local level who maintained a vision of public

[65] Committee on the Conduct of the Study, Appointed by the Liason Committee of the Regents of the University of California and the State Board of Education, *A Report of a Survey of the Needs of California in Higher Education*, Sacramento, California, 1948.

education that differed from that of state planners who sought to centralize into large administrative structures. In fact, a master plan for primary and secondary education for each county was mandated by the state legislature in the late 1950s.[66] The decree caused great consternation for the LACCSDO, which as a body raised the issue constantly at its meetings in the early 1960s, often accompanied by the complaints of committee members about lack of clarity from the state board of education and superintendent about requirements for planning. The deadline for the county-level primary and secondary education master plan was pushed back several times by the legislature, and in 1964, the LACCSDO, expressing considerable frustration with the inflexibility of state policies, made it official committee policy that it had given up on instituting unification plans for all areas of the county. The committee's new policy was that if ultimate determination was made that "that all available plans of unification violate the intent of the Master Plan Law (i.e., the submission of a plan which has promise of improving the education of children)," in a specific instance, the committee would not submit a plan, but rather report to the "State Board of Education, the Governor, and to appropriate Legislative committees" explaining why a plan had not been submitted.[67] In other words, the LACCSDO had determined that the goals of the state to affect unification across the county in order to create districts that were as large as possible actually violated the spirit of the Master Plan law. This exemplified the ongoing tension between the local committee and the state board of education

[66] This mandate became California Educational Code Sections 3581-5.

[67] "Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization March 4, 1964," Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1963-June, 1964, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

and superintendent over consolidation policies. This antagonism had grown over time to the point where the committee stood in direct defiance of the state mandate.

In addition to its attempts to facilitate the implementation of county-wide master plans, the state legislature had offered new incentives throughout the 1950s in an attempt to convince school districts to consolidate. In 1959, the California State Legislature upped-the-ante significantly, and essentially stripped the CCSDOs of responsibility for countywide master planning through new legislation that gave the state board of education the legal right to initiate unification if local school boards did not begin the process on their own. The state's action had school districts large and small across Southern California scrambling to jumpstart the unification process; and administrators, teachers, and parents engaged in debates over its possible consequences. It also had residents, business owners, and other stakeholders organizing at community and neighborhood levels to influence the form their local school districts would take in the future. This grassroots organizing, made possible because the Optional Reorganization Act required a petition signed by local residents to initiate action on a change to school districts, took the form of both advocacy for and resistance to unification.

By the early 1960s, the tension between the goal of state policymakers to facilitate the creation of large districts and an alternative that featured more local administration and "neighborhood" schools inherent in the Common Schools movement had not abated. The ongoing conflict was reflected in Los Angeles County by friction between the LACCSDO and the state board of education. In Los Angeles County, as indicated by the actions taken by local stakeholders to shape their school attendance zones and administration through the CCSDO process, and by the positions taken by the LACCSDO in opposition to state policies, school district organization had become a negotiation, and in some cases a fight, over differing concepts

of what public schools should be. In numerous cases, in line with what the commission on school districts had earlier characterized as an unreasonable focus on issues of local pride, residents—particularly those in majority white, working and middle class communities—used the process to advance their vision of neighborhood schools that had more to do with affirming the characteristics of their local communities than creating more efficient units of administration. Recognizing this dynamic, like the county-level commission that preceded it, the LACCSDO called for a more flexible approach to district organization and the consolidation process because state policies often seemed inflexible and impractical.

The board of education and bureau of school district organization, not recognizing the extent of local animus towards unification, encouraged the participation of local stakeholders in the process. In a series of marketing materials produced by the bureau in the mid-forties, the basic characteristics of "weak" and "strong" school districts were outlined and residents were prodded to ask the question: "What kind of district have you?" They were then encouraged to study their local school district organization, acquaint themselves with the work of their county committee, attend hearings, and "vote strong districts." The materials also asserted that: "The quality of a school depends upon… the interest of the people…plus…the strength of the district."[68] What was either not understood or ignored by state policymakers was that some residents had a different take on what the "interest of the people" meant and what a strong school district looked like.

[68] "Equal Opportunity For All Children?" Dept. of Education-Div. of Public School Administration - Bureau of School District Organization Commission of School Districts Reports 1946-49, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

## Chapter Two – Grassroots Action and Local Schools: The Era of School District Annexation in Los Angeles County, 1920-1933

The Greater Los Angeles area experienced a dramatic reconfiguration of its public school districts between 1920 and the early 1930s that had nothing to do with the efforts of lawmakers to effect consolidation. Both the growing need for more and increasing levels of schooling and economic pressures resulted in consolidations initiated entirely by residents and commercial interests across the Los Angeles area. These happened through a process called "annexation"—when a larger school district acquired a smaller one at the smaller district's request. Annexation served as another means of school district organization and consolidation that lay outside of the purview of the state bureaucracy to achieve larger administrative units. It was a move that was almost always predicated upon an ever-present concern about local economy and tax rates. The appeal of annexation, and the ways in which it often conflicted with a desire for local control of schools sheds light on another layer of the public school district organization story. From early on, local stakeholders both assumed and enjoyed a tremendous amount of agency in determining the geography and boundaries of school districts, and took action to either modify or reinforced their configuration based on economic, social, and political circumstance.

The use of the annexation process in response to the economic turmoil of the late 1920s and 1930s in particular marked the start of a gradual change in school district organization in the Greater Los Angeles area, driven by the needs of a new generation of students, and by taxpayers

who were sensitive to the potentially negative effects of government-initiated policy on their own economic destinies. As a result, the geographic footprint of the Los Angeles City school districts expanded both in parallel with the growing city of Los Angeles and beyond its boundaries. Residents of smaller cites contiguous with the growing metropolis joined their schools and attendance zones with the multiracial Los Angeles City school districts in the name of fiscal security and lower taxes. This was a compromise, however, and was tenuous from the start with some of the annexations considered by residents to be *ad hoc*, and therefore potentially reversible. The Los Angeles Board of Education, on the other hand, dependent upon local tax revenue to fund the operations of its districts, came to consider a number of these annexations and the income they generated as permanent and, in time, necessary.

That said, the Los Angeles City schools, until 1961 comprised of two districts that administered elementary/junior high and high schools separately, was a considerable beneficiary of the annexations of smaller school districts in terms of expansion. In the 1920s and 1930s in particular, many smaller school districts in Southern California found it economically advantageous to join themselves to the larger districts. The dual economic calamity of the Great Depression and a California law called the Mattoon Act that increased property taxes on many homeowners created a sense of urgency to lower the tax burden. The era was also characterized by a marked increase in population, which put pressure on local districts to relieve increasingly overcrowded classrooms with less funding upon which to draw because of the declining economy. Many of these small districts were part of either independent cities or unincorporated areas that were themselves annexed as municipalities to the city of Los Angeles, and as part of that process also merged their local schools into the city elementary and high school district. These municipal annexations were driven by economic necessity and the inability of many small

areas or cities to effectively provide civic services. In some cases they were also motivated by the desire to access water from the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which was completed in 1913.

The pressure on small municipalities to annex to the growing metropolis next door was fueled by a population explosion driven by what was then an unprecedented migration. Los Angeles County grew from just over 504,000 residents in 1910 to more than 936,000 in 1920. By 1930 it had over 2.2 million residents.[69] The population of the city of Los Angeles grew approximately 287 percent during the same period, from just over 319,000 residents in 1910 to in 1,238,048 in 1930.[70] Although the percentage of the state's population who were under 16 remained a steady 20-to-25 percent of the total population, they represented total growth in the number of the state's school age children from about 860,000 in 1920 to around 1.3 million in 1930.[71] By that same year the County of Los Angeles accounted for nearly 40 percent of California's population—a near 80 percent increase since 1920. This included an increase in the total population of children under 16 from around 214,000 in 1920 to about 480,000 in 1930.[72]

Residents of most of the small, independent cities that annexed their schools to the Los Angeles City districts experienced this population boom in particularly strong ways. The city of Huntington Park, incorporated in 1906 and one of the larger cities just east of Los Angeles,

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[69] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, Los Angeles County, California, 1910, 1920, and 1930*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[70] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, Los Angeles, California, 1910, 1920, and 1930*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[71] U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Less Than 16 Years and Total Population Less Than 15 Years, California, 1920 and 1930*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[72] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, California and Total Population Los Angeles County, California, 1930*, Prepared by Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Less Than 16 Years and Total Population Less Than 15 Years, Los Angeles County, California, 1920 and 1930*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

experienced a population jump from just over 4,513 in 1920 to 24,591 by 1930.[73] The city of Compton, which did not annex to Los Angeles or join the Los Angeles City Schools but forged on with its own city school district and attendance agreements with other independent districts in surrounding areas, experienced the same significant growth during the period when its population grew by more than 740 percent in the 1920s.[74]

An important result of this population increase was the annexation, *en masse*, of small school districts to the larger Los Angeles City schools between 1909 and 1932, with a particularly important set of annexations in the 1920s and early 1930s. These annexations included a cluster of districts that represented the Southeast Cities.[75] The addition of the Southeast Cities significantly increased the Los Angeles City districts' combined footprint beyond the city of Los Angeles. Another important distinguishing characteristic of the Southeast Cities was their nearly entirely white racial composition, which was reflected in the populations of their local schools. Residents of the Southeast Cities became key players in the political debates and negotiations over what eventually became the giant Los Angeles Unified School

[73] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, Huntington Park, California, 1920 and 1930*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[74] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, Compton, California, 1920 and 1930*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[75] I first mentioned the Southeast Cities in the Introduction. They are a group of independent cities and unincorporated areas just south and east of the city of Los Angeles, and would attempt to secede from the unified Los Angeles City school districts in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These municipalities lay between Alameda Street on the west—a major thoroughfare that spans an approximately 21 mile distance from downtown Los Angeles at its northernmost point southbound to near the Port of Los Angeles—and the Los Angeles River on the east. The city of Lynwood serves as the southern border for this group of cities.

District (LAUSD) because of their unique position as independent cities within the larger footprint of the district—most of which was part of the city of Los Angeles.[76]

The larger implications of joining the Los Angeles schools was far from clear for residents, business owners, and politicians in the Southeast Cities, many of whom valued civic independence and embraced an ethos of self-reliance.[77] However, due to the pressures of economic hardship and the increases in population growth that characterized the twenties and thirties, annexation became a preferred compromise despite the loss of local control and the possibility of racially and ethnically integrated schools. The latter would become an increasingly important issue for residents of these majority white cities that had successfully maintained the racial homogeneity of public schools within their borders. Some of the same issues of concern with the preservation of "community identity" anticipated by state policymakers over consolidation emerged in these cases over whether or not to annex.[78] However, chambers of commerce and the merchant classes, particularly powerful political interests in the Southeast

[76] These districts, which accounted for approximately 17 square miles in territory, were annexed to the Los Angeles City school districts on the following dates: Bell and Maywood, December 6, 1926; San Antonio, May 18, 1927; Vernon City, January 23, 1928; Tweedy, August 31, 1931; Huntington Park, January 18, 1932; Graham, November 15, 1923, and Huntington Park High School, July 22, 1932. The municipalities that comprised the Southeast Cities were Bell, South Gate, Huntington Park, Vernon, and Maywood. The area also included the unincorporated neighborhoods of Walnut Park and Cudahy (which incorporated and became a city in 1960).

[77] Becky Marianna Nicolaides, "In search of the good life: Community and politics in working-class Los Angeles, 1920-1955" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1993). Nicolaides' extensive work on one of these cities—South Gate—documents its development and the evolution of the city and municipalities that surrounded it from its founding in the early 1920s until the mid-1960s, highlighting the premium placed on autonomy, self-reliance, and minimal government in the formation of their community identity. She argues South Gate and the other Southeast Cities that shared so much in common with it are representative of a larger group of working class suburban municipalities that proliferated across Southern California in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

[78] See Chapter One for my discussion on the types of objections state policymakers anticipated to school district consolidation in communities across the state.

Cities were, by-and-large, supporters of annexation. Chamber members also frequently occupied multiple community and government positions, an occasional source of conflict when their interests would clash with those of blue collar, working class residents.[79] Motivated by a desire to keep taxes low, they played a pivotal role in efforts to annex school district functions, whether leading the charge or playing a supporting role. With the support of merchants, public school annexation became an issue upon which a relatively unified front was forged behind fiscal conservatism and an aversion to the possibility of an increase in local taxes.

In the Southeast Cities, the discourse in the late 1920s and early 1930s over annexation demonstrated the extent to which the politics of education was intertwined with debates over race, class, and community autonomy, and reflected a public school system in flux. Schools in the area at the time were administered by a number of small elementary districts. The most significant among them in terms of geographic footprint and numbers of students was the Huntington Park district. The students from the area's elementary schools who continued their education all fed into the Huntington Park Union High School District, which oversaw junior high schools and Huntington Park High School. The debate over annexation of these schools to the Los Angeles districts was framed by proponents in terms of local control versus lower taxes, but it was largely driven by a rapidly increasing population of school children. This gradual but significant increase was noted in the *Los Angeles Times* in September of 1931, which reported that at the start of the school year "Huntington Park and South Gate high schools reached a total

[79] Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 148-149.

of 2650" students, "as compared with 2370 the first day of last year." The elementary district's initial enrollment increased from 5,536 to 5,727 during that same year.[80]

The effort that led to Huntington Park's successful annexation to the Los Angeles City schools in the middle of 1932 was preceded by an unsuccessful attempt just a year before that failed due to significant local opposition—a reflection of how rapidly economic decline shifted public opinion. In April of 1931, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors—until the 1950s the arbiters of school district organization proposals—had denied a petition, signed by 6,000 residents of the area, to annex. This group of petitioners, however, had faced a significant homegrown counter effort to annexation in the form of a group that called itself "the Home Control of Schools Association," which presented an anti-annexation petition to the County Supervisors with more than 4,000 signatures. After hearing speakers from both sides, the supervisors voted unanimously to deny the annexation.[81] A year later, in the face of economic crisis, the revived annexation petition was approved with little-to-no opposition.

The starkly different responses of residents to the two Huntington Park district annexation petitions reflected the fact that support for the move was a conditional reaction to the financial pain inflicted by the Great Depression and the Mattoon Act. The sudden and overwhelming support given annexation in the area in the early 1930s reveals that a controversial idea that was the subject of heated debate in the 1920s became a preferred path forward only because of necessity in the midst of crisis. In the mid-to-late twenties, even the potential annexation of very small units like the West Maywood district, comprised of a section of the city

[80] "LARGER ENROLLMENT SEEN IN HUNTINGTON PARK," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 16, 1931, 12.

[81] "ANNEXATION OF SCHOOLS DISAPPROVED: Huntington Park Project to Annex to Los Angeles Refused by Supervisors," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1931, A8.

of Maywood which in total was only approximately 1.1 square miles in size, to its neighboring Huntington Park district was a source of controversy. When West Maywood sought to annex in 1926 after a majority affirmative vote of the area's residents, the action was blocked by opponents who sued, alleging a discrepancy in the process for getting the issue on the ballot. A second vote was taken the following year, which again gave approval for annexation, and once again was challenged in court. This time, however, a judge ruled in favor of annexation, and West Maywood joined the Huntington Park School District,[82] which had been a significant beneficiary of annexation in terms of growth.[83]

Another important addition to the Huntington Park School districts was Home Gardens—an unincorporated part of the Southeast Cities that became part of the city of South Gate in 1927. In the 1920s, as residents of the neighborhood petitioned unsuccessfully several times to annex to the Huntington Park school district, it was a key player in a fight over school districts that revealed the importance of race in the shaping of local community identity and school district border preferences. At the same time, however, the controversy reiterated that local economy was paramount, even overshadowing social and cultural considerations. Home Gardens represented the ultimate in municipal economy, characterized by a focus on keeping property taxes, and thus the cost of owning a home, as low as possible.[84] The controversy over schools centered on the configuration of the area's attendance borders. The original city of South Gate—

[82] Mirroring district configurations throughout the state at the time, the Huntington Park School District served elementary school and junior high school students, while the Huntington Park Union High School District served high school students in multiple small cities in the area just southeast of Los Angeles.

[83] "MAYWOOD TO FINALLY GET NEW SCHOOL: Decision on Annexation Suit Clears Way for Start of Ten-Room Building," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1928, B8.

[84] Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 288.

which, when it acquired Home Gardens in 1927, became the northern, more prosperous, part of the city, had joined the Huntington Park districts in order to keep the local tax rate for municipal services as low as possible. In the early twenties, poorer Home Gardens chose to join the Watts School District, presumably for similar economic reasons. Watts was then a racially and ethnically diverse area comprised of working class residents which also came with a lower school tax rate than the Huntington Park districts. The compromise was that the population of Home Gardens, made up nearly entirely of white ex-Southerners, had to accept that their high school-age children would attend integrated Jordan High School in Watts, comprised primarily of a mix of white, black, and Mexican American students.[85]

The municipal boundary between Home Gardens and Watts was Alameda Street, but it might as well have been a wall as the communities had minimal interaction with each other. The schools were the place where the communities' connections were closest, and they "became the center of an important political drama,"[86] one that ultimately coalesced around two factors. The first was race, and the fact that Watts included a growing population of African Americans in the 1920s—a population that stood in stark contrast to the heterogeneous white population of Home Gardens and South Gate.[87] The second factor was that Home Gardens' schools were described by residents at the time as "squalid"—a direct result of the compromise the community made for lower taxes, as the Watts district's lower tax rate left little money available for improvements to

[85] Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 159*;* Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 19-20.

[86] Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 286.

[87] Ibid. In 1920, approximately 14.4 percent of the population of Watts was African American.

facilities. The merchant elite of Home Gardens, and later South Gate, sought to remove the area's schools and students from the Watts district, and then from the Los Angeles City schools after the Watts schools annexed in 1927. Proponents of the attempts to realign Home Gardens' district affiliation argued that their children were being marginalized compared to the students in Watts, a perception "made more odious in their minds because black pupils were being treated better than their own white children."[88] The belief that their children were being treated at best equal to and at worst marginalized by an area with a significant population of black children was the issue that galvanized Home Gardens residents and merchants to seek a new compromise that would create a more satisfactory district alignment.[89]

When the Watts School District proposed a $128,000 school improvement bond in 1924, Home Gardens responded by forming a "Citizens Committee" that urged fellow residents to vote against the proposal. This was a reflection of an ongoing aversion to indebtedness and the increased taxation that might result, even in the face of the miserable conditions of local schools. Opponents of the bond issue also claimed that they believed that most of the money would go to the schools in Watts and that Home Gardens would get a raw deal. The measure was defeated, due in part to the committee's opposition. The same bond issue, however, came up again in 1925, this time with the public support of Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Mark Keppel. The bond was paired with the plan to annex the Watts School District, including Home Gardens, to the Los Angeles City School Districts. This proposal passed by a 4-to-1 margin, despite strong opposition from Home Gardens.[90]

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[88] Ibid., 289.

[89] Ibid., 289-290.

[90] Ibid., 290-291.

The battle over Home Gardens, however, was far from over, as residents who had not generally supported the annexation to the Los Angeles schools sought to create a new district configuration that connected local schools to others in the Southeast Cities. Even though taxes were slightly lower in the Los Angeles districts, improvements to facilities were slow in coming and residents were literally even further away from administration than they had been when Watts was an independent district. Rhetorically, at least, a disconnectedness from district leadership was the motivation for residents and business leaders to seek annexation to the Huntington Park districts, but their arguments became increasingly focused on the fact that a significant portion of the residents of Home Gardens wanted nothing to do with sending their children to multiracial schools.[91]

In early 1926, advocates in Home Gardens appealed to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for annexation to the Huntington Park schools and were met with rejection, specifically because of the potential for racial segregation in the area's schools if it was approved. South Gate had already annexed its schooling to the Huntington Park district by that time. Leaders of the Home Gardens annexation effort then decided that the area's overall political weakness as an unincorporated area was its Achilles heel in the school fight, so they sought to either combine with another city or incorporate as an independent city. They decided to pursue a proposed civic combination that would include Home Gardens and Huntington Park. The merger would include annexation of the schools to the Huntington Park districts. The idea became particularly controversial over the question of whether or not Jordan High School, located in Watts near its eastern border, would remain in the Los Angeles High School District

[91] Ibid., 291-293.

or join the newly-expanded Huntington Park High School District. If it joined Huntington Park, proponents pledged to exclude African American children from attending heretofore racially and ethnically diverse Jordan. Ultimately, Home Gardens residents had the chance to vote on the proposals, and both were handily defeated at the polls, in large part because of fears that the new configuration would include a higher school tax rate—an indication that the threat of high taxes continued to trump all other considerations. The plan was also somewhat impractical, as the geography of the new district would have been u-shaped, with South Gate awkwardly filling in the center of the "U."[92]

Residents of Home Gardens continued to seek a solution to their schools problem and took a significant step in the direction of finding one just over a year later when the community annexed entirely to the city of South Gate. The new configuration made more sense, logistically and practically, than the previously sought civic combination with Huntington Park, but the move did not include annexation of schools. Home Gardens, then, remained in the Los Angeles City school districts while the rest of South Gate was part of the Huntington Park districts. The civic consolidation, however, achieved the goal of giving residents more political clout, and the clarion call for moving out of the Los Angeles City schools now became one of unifying the schools and students within South Gate. The opening of South Gate High School in 1930, built in the northern part of South Gate by the Huntington Park High School District, added new heft to the argument that the local districts should be reconfigured, as children in what was now the Home Gardens section of South Gate were not able to attend the new school because of their status as part of the Los Angeles schools.

[92] Ibid., 294-299.

After its acquisition of Home Gardens, the South Gate Chamber of Commerce took the lead in seeking to unify the city's schools and formed a study committee to offer up alternatives to the problematic arrangement. It devised three possible solutions: annex to the Huntington Park districts, a proposition that had failed before, but was much more feasible now that Home Gardens had merged with the city of South Gate; annexation of all of South Gate's schools to the Los Angeles City schools, which opened up the possibility of the children in the entire area attending racially integrated schools—a situation that had proven to be problematic in the past; or allowing parents in Home Gardens to obtain permits that would allow their children to attend South Gate High School. The city moved forward with the permits idea, a temporary fix but one that would at least allow South Gate's children to attend the same high school and avoid multiracial Jordan High.[93]

Although it had incorporated smaller districts, as well as Home Gardens' students, into its footprint, annexation also worked against the Huntington Park districts' growth. It lost a significant portion of its territory in 1928 when the city of Vernon, which in 1920 had only about 1,000 residents but was important because of the tax revenue the concentration of industry within its borders generated, left and joined the Los Angeles districts. The switch was approved in January of that year by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, moving the Vernon City Elementary School into the Los Angeles City School District and Vernon's high school students out of the Huntington Park Union High School district and into the Los Angeles High School District.

[93] Ibid., 299-300.

The Vernon petitioners argued that their action was motivated by a "vast disproportion" between the taxes paid by their city toward the Huntington Park districts and its school population, again highlighting the centrality of civic finance to local decision making. The petition was supported by "several hundred residents of Vernon" who made the trip to downtown Los Angeles and the board of supervisors meeting where the plan was up for consideration. There was also vocal opposition to the proposal, including that of K.L. Stockton, principal of Huntington Park High School, who expressed puzzlement at the petition and argued that the move would increase Vernon's school tax rate by 48 cents per $100. He also alluded to the idea that the effort may have been fueled by fear caused by a false rumor about the Huntington Park School Board planning to raise a special tax to fund a new junior high school. Despite Stockton's objections, the plan was approved by the county board of supervisors after a lengthy hearing.[94]

The departure of Vernon could not have come at a worse time for the Huntington Park districts because it meant the loss of a significant portion of funding just before the economic downturn of the 1930s and in the middle of a population boom. While the effects of the Great Depression in the Los Angeles area were generally felt less acutely than in other parts of the country, cities across California like Huntington Park had an additional burden that only magnified its economic effects in the form of legislation called the Mattoon Act. Officially titled the "Acquisition and Improvement Act of 1925," the law became more commonly known by the last name of its author, Everett W. Mattoon, the chief deputy counsel of the city of Los Angeles. The act created temporary tax assessment districts in order to streamline the process of funding infrastructure improvement projects for local communities. These improvements were sought in

[94] "SCHOOLS OF VERNON JOIN CITY REGION: Huntington Park Loses in Fight of Neighbor Town to Leave Union District," *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 1928, A1.

the Southeast Cities by the merchant elite in particular. In order to expedite the process of initiating projects, the law allowed city councils to create assessment districts without the consent of property owners. Previously this required a request of 10 percent of local voters and then approval of two-thirds of voters in a local election.[95]

The Mattoon Act, however, quickly became an issue for homeowners because of a particular element of the law that required the placing of a collective lien on all real estate within an assessment district when a bond was issued. An individual's property would be subject to the lien, even if they had paid their own portion of the assessments on the bond, until all the property owners in the district had paid in full. If a neighbor was to default, the assessment burden was distributed among the other residents. In addition to the possibility of chain-reaction defaults, the special levies imposed on local property owners via a yearly tax assessment increased rates markedly, a phenomenon that was happening all over Southern California at the time as an effect of the Mattoon Act.[96] As taxpayers in communities across the region were hit doubly hard by the early 1930s, lowering or at least holding the line on tax rates became even more important. Education, therefore, became a focus of activists as the vast majority of funds for schools came from property taxes.

Public support for the Mattoon Act quickly eroded as property tax bills began to mount and homeowners realized just how little influence they had over the creation of assessment districts and the projects that would be funded. Some residents took legal action challenging the

[95] Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 260-261; State of California, *Acquisition and Improvement Act of 1925: (Mattoon Act) Statutes of 1925, Part 419* (San Francisco: A. Carlisle & Company, 1925).

[96] Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 261-262, 265-266. South Gate, the subject of Nicolaides' study, was a prime example of the consequences of the Mattoon Act and the ways it exacerbated the economic woes of the Great Depression for Californians. South Gate city leaders wasted no time in initiating Mattoon Act funded projects. As a result, the property tax bill for residents could run around 21 percent of annual income.

authority of county tax officials to sell the properties of those who had paid property taxes in full in order to cover the delinquent assessments of their neighbors. Lawyers representing a group of residents in a South Los Angeles neighborhood argued that the act "results virtually in double taxation and is confiscatory."[97] As early as 1928, original supporters of the legislation were jumping ship and calling for changes.[98] Everett Mattoon himself began to help formulate amendments to the law that would help ameliorate its negative effects. Despite those efforts the negative repercussions of the law only grew until it was repealed in 1931. The repeal, however, did not nullify the debts already accumulated, so it did little to ease the burden. The broadly felt effects of the Mattoon Act and the subsequent backlash was epitomized by the establishment of the Special Assessments Relief Association, a statewide organization set up to advocate for taxpayers suffering the effects of Mattoon Act assessments.[99]

The consequences of the Mattoon Act were striking. In South Gate, for example, home ownership fell from 90 percent in 1929 to 56.6 percent in 1930.[100] In 1935 the Mattoon Act was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, a judgement that validated the constitutionality of the law prior to its repeal. This meant that cities and taxpayers were still responsible for the debts that were incurred.[101] The Mattoon Act, together with the onset of the Great Depression, amplified tax relief as a political issue across California.

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[97] "DECISION IN ASSESSMENT SUIT PENDS," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1932, A7.

[98] "CHANGE SOUGHT IN MATTOON ACT," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1928, E4; "LAW CHANGE ADVOCATED: Los Angeles Realty Chief Cites Asserted Defects in Present Draft of Mattoon Legislation," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1928, 14.

[99] "LAND OWNERS GIRD FOR FIGHT," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1932, A8.

[100] Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 274.

[101] "Mattoon Act Upheld," *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 1935, 7; "MATTOON ACT UPHELD," *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 1935, A4. The case involved was *American Securities Co. v. Forward*.

It was within this context of economic adversity and peaked aversion to taxation that public discussion of the transfer of the Huntington Park schools to the Los Angeles City schools began in early 1931. Signatures for the original, ill-fated petition were collected while the city of Huntington Park began to offer food aid directly to its unemployed and struggling residents, a sign of the increasingly desperate economic conditions of the period. In July, a delegation representing Huntington Park comprised of its mayor, city councilmen, and "members of civic bodies" appealed in person to the county board of supervisors for an across-the-board reduction in the assessed valuation of property in the city, which would reduce the overall tax burden. The officials pointed out that the county had already granted a 10 percent reduction in valuation to "a large portion, if not all of Los Angeles city" in 1930. They argued that in Huntington Park, "residents are becoming discouraged with property ownership because of the exorbitant taxes." Supervisors contended that the county itself received a relatively small portion of the local tax, pinning most of the fiscal burden on the Huntington Park school districts. They estimated that Huntington Park's tax burden was "$4.64 on the $100 assessed valuation, of which sum [sic] $2.27 is for schools alone." The board refused the group's request, with one county supervisor in particular pointing out that "If the valuation is reduced there will be less revenue, which will mean further curtailment in expenditures."[102] The cost of running a relatively large and growing school district had been magnified by the area's ever-increasing population of school children along with the burden of the Great Depression and its attendant job losses. In addition, the increasing tax burden created by Mattoon Act assessments created the impetus to lower the

[102] "HUNTINGTON PARK LEVY HIT: Delegation of Officials and Taxpayers Makes Appeal to Supervisors for Assessed Valuation Cut," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1931, A12.

school tax burden while minimizing cuts to municipal services. Annexation of the Huntington Park school districts was the most obvious solution.

In their determination to reduce the local tax burden, annexation proponents were deterred by neither the failure of the original petition nor the supervisors' refusal to grant a reduction in assessed valuation. A new petition drive for annexation of the Huntington Park schools was initiated, and in early 1932 the proposal again appeared on the board of supervisors' agenda. This time, the petition carried 7,040 signatures and was approved by a vote of 4 to 1. The lone dissenter among the county supervisors cited his concern with the fiscal burden it might present for residents already within the Los Angeles City districts' footprint, arguing that the difference between the Huntington Park districts' tax rate of $2.27 per $100 of assessed valuation compared with the Los Angeles City districts' rate of $1.67 would create "at least a 1-cent increase and perhaps 3 cents if the County Assessor carries out his plan to decrease assessed valuation." The petition, however, faced little-to-no vocal opposition.[103] Due to the economic downturn, public sentiment had shifted significantly in the period between the ill-fated first attempt at annexation of the Huntington Park districts and the decisive move to do so the following year.

In order to both lower and stabilize the area's overall tax burden and unify attendance zones, the entirety of the area served by the Huntington Park districts made a similar compromise to that made by Home Gardens years earlier. Their children and local schools were now part of a multiethnic and multiracial school district in exchange for the fiscal relief gained by joining the

[103] "SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNEXED: Shaw, Lone Foe of Huntington Park Merger, Forecasts Boost in City's Tax Rate," *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1932, A1.

Los Angeles City schools. The idea that these were exclusively white communities had long been a part of local identity, and the compromise indicated the extent to which the fiscal pain of the 1930s affected local politics.[104] The fact that that they were now a part of a district that served a racially diverse constituency did not, however, mean that local schools would be integrated or that local children would attend integrated schools. The Los Angeles Board of Education had already demonstrated a willingness to demarcate Alameda Street as a racial borderline by tying attendance zones directly to housing that was segregated because of restrictive covenants until the practice was outlawed in 1948. This policy ensured that the stark contrast between the nearly all-white cities east of Alameda and the relatively diverse, but largely non-white, population just west of the thoroughfare would hold true for the area's public schools as well. By the time the Huntington Park districts annexed, the remaining small elementary districts among the Southeast Cities had also annexed to the Los Angeles districts, completing the reconfiguration of nearly the entire Southeast Cities area.[105]

While the school annexation movement in the Southeast Cities was motivated primarily by economic concerns, it soon proved to be a particularly sound move when the region was struck by a major earthquake that caused significant property damage. On March 10, 1933 at just before 6 p.m., the ground below the Greater Los Angeles region began to shake violently. The 6.4 temblor that became known as the Long Beach earthquake killed over 100 people and caused

[104] Becky Nicolaides' study is particularly illuminating in terms of the extent to which this really was an accommodation: "Families who had burned crosses and donned white hoods now acquiesced to racially integrated schools. It was powerful testimony of their aspirations for family security." Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 302.

[105] Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, *History of School District Organization in Los Angeles County* (Downey, California: Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, 1976), 37-39.

damage across a wide swath of the metropolitan area. Especially hard hit were the larger group of independent municipalities just south and east of the city of Los Angeles, among them the Southeast Cities, along with Compton and Long Beach. Damage to school facilities in the area was particularly significant, with hundreds of structures either damaged or destroyed during the quake's brief duration. All 28 public schools in the city of Long Beach, the closest location to the epicenter, were either severely damaged or destroyed. The tower at Jordan High School's main entrance partially collapsed.[106] Initial reports indicated that Huntington Park High School had been burned to the ground.[107] It turned out, however, that only the administration building had been leveled by fire, with the remainder of the campus sustaining moderate damage.[108] There was notable damage to several Southeast Cities elementary schools, as well as Bell High School in the city of Bell, which was Huntington Park High's neighbor to the east.[109]

The Los Angeles Board of Education brought the full heft of its considerable administrative and economic clout to bear upon the earthquake recovery effort. Less than three weeks after the temblor, students of Huntington Park High School were back attending classes at alternate sites arranged by the Los Angeles High School District.[110] While it would be years

[106] "All City Schools Will Be Thoroughly Inspected Before Children Allowed to Enter," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1933, 6.

[107] "SCHOOL PLANS UNCERTAIN: Question of Opening, in View of Temblor Effects, to Be Decided at Board Meeting Today," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1933, 15.

[108] "All City Schools Will Be Thoroughly Inspected Before Children Allowed to Enter," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1933, 6.

[109] Ibid.

[110] "MORE SCHOOLS REOPEN TODAY," *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1933, A1.

before all the damaged structures were repaired at the area's schools, the school year proceeded with as much normalcy as possible.

The fact that the Huntington Park district had annexed to the Los Angeles schools saved local residents and municipal coffers from a potentially significant tax increase or the city from bonded indebtedness to pay for a recovery effort. While the Los Angeles Board of Education later sought to offer bonds to help pay for rebuilding damaged schools and retrofitting the remainder, any indebtedness would be spread out among communities across the vast geographic area that comprised the Los Angeles school districts, which is exactly what happened. The city of Compton, located just south of the Southeast Cities, provides an example of the problems that the Southeast Cities could have faced had they not annexed. The day after the earthquake, the *Los Angeles Times* characterized Compton as "stuck hardest" by the quake. "Practically all the city's 3000 structures—store, office and residence buildings—were either razed or severely damaged," the newspaper reported.[111] They city's schools were hit particularly hard.[112] Compton staged a celebration that September touting the city's "rapid recovery from the earthquake" and to show the "complete reconstruction of Compton's business and residential districts in less than six months." The flyover by U.S. Army planes, the fireworks, mutt dog derby, and vaudeville performance masked the fact that rebuilding Compton's schools would cripple the city financially.[113]

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[111] "COMPTON," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1933, 2.

[112] Emily E. Straus, "The Making of the American School Crisis: Compton, California and the Death of the Suburban Dream" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2006), 26.

[113] "COMPTON FETES RECOVERY: Celebration of Emergence From Earthquake Damage Gets Under Way," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 15, 1933, A8.

While the city was served by a single high school district—the Compton Union High School and Junior College District, Compton's elementary-level students were served by five separate elementary school districts: Compton City, Enterprise, Paramount, Willowbrook, and Lynwood. Since they were separate administrative structures, recovery from the devastation of the Long Beach Earthquake was far less efficient that it was for the Los Angeles districts. Each of the component districts was competing with the other for the labor and materials to rebuild; as well as attempting to pull from the same pot of limited resources and government funds. In addition, they were competing with the much larger Los Angeles City districts and the Long Beach schools. Ultimately, the five districts were forced to fund the bulk of the recovery and rebuilding through bonded debt.[114]

The liability incurred in rebuilding Compton's infrastructure after the quake had long-term and, some argue, devastating effects for Compton's schools and children. Historian Emily Strauss argues that the combination of rapid population growth, the debt taken on by the city to rebuild after the earthquake, and the effects of the Great Depression "created a tenuous civic infrastructure straining to provide basic public services, especially public schooling, to Compton's growing population."[115] To their detriment, the Compton elementary schools had not annexed or consolidated, which left significant administrative inefficiencies that exacerbated the long-term fiscal problems created to a significant degree by the devastation of the temblor.

By early April of 1933, classes in all 372 Los Angeles City schools had resumed in both permanent and temporary facilities, including those at the badly-damaged Huntington Park High

[114] Straus, "The Making of the American School Crisis," 27-28.

[115] Ibid., 25.

School and Gage Avenue School, also located in Huntington Park.[116] Although it had the resources to initially handle the literal and financial shocks of the Long Beach earthquake, like other districts across the region the Los Angeles schools sought to fund a broader damaged schools rebuilding and retrofitting project through a bond measure. This one was just multiple times larger than others on the ballot in smaller districts, with a target of raising just over $20 million for the repair and retrofitting of its schools. Ultimately, however, the prevailing "no" vote on the bond by residents revealed that anti-tax sentiment and an aversion to debt was not limited to smaller municipalities. The financial disaster of the Great Depression combined with the Mattoon Act equaled broader opposition across a wide swath of the region to taking on any new government levy or debt, even when the campaign supporting the bond issue employed the slogan "Protect the school children."[117] This was demonstrated in stark terms by the defeat of the Los Angeles City schools' earthquake repair and retrofit bond measure. Not even an earthquake could match the financial shock of the 1930s for residents of the Greater Los Angeles area, who were reluctant to raise money through the taking on of debt, even to rebuild and upgrade school facilities.

The campaign for the Los Angeles City schools bond was driven by the discovery of shoddy construction work on buildings throughout the district, revealed by the effects of the Long Beach quake on a number of newer schools. This led to statewide legislation that mandated higher quality construction of schools with earthquake safety in mind. The inquiry into why so many schools considered "modern" sustained significant damage began only days after the

[116] "LAST SCHOOLS TO REOPEN," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1933, A5.

[117] "SCHOOL BOND AID PLANNED: Safety Campaign Under Way," *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1934, A14.

temblor, when the Los Angeles Board of Education called on representatives of professional organizations representing building contractors, architects, civil engineers, and petroleum and mining engineers to a public discussion of the issue in order to create a framework for the investigation.[118] Discussion at board meetings soon centered around the idea that most buildings in the Los Angeles districts were of "Class C" construction, where they ideally should have been of "Class A" construction—a costlier proposition.[119] Very quickly, criticism was leveled at the board of education for failing to ensure the safety of students. As one construction expert charged: "Safety should have been the slogan but instead it has been size and beauty."[120] The state soon initiated its own inquiry into the issue, which resulted in the establishment of building codes that were far more stringent on ensuring that structures, especially schools, were as resistant to major earthquakes as possible. The city and county of Los Angeles had already taken steps to implement their own more stringent building codes after the Long Beach event.[121]

The tension between the desire for municipal economy and the increasing costs of public education was never clearer than in this debate over the safety of school structures. State and federal resources were made available for schools damaged by the quake, but funds primarily took the form of loans instead of direct aid, putting the entire burden for paying for rebuilding on individual districts. The Los Angeles districts put some money from previous bond issues

[118] "SCHOOL INQUIRY PLAN TO BE LAID," *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1933, 7.

[119] "BUILDING TYPE CHANGE URGED," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1933, A2.

[120] "CLASS C SCHOOL DECLARED PERIL," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1933, A2.

[121] "NEW BUILDING LAW ADOPTED," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1933, A3; "BUILDING CODE SURVEYED: Final Draft of Uniform Regulations for State Taken Up at Meeting of Experts," *Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 1933, A8.

earmarked for construction toward recovery, but in light of the failed bond proposal, the $25,000,000 estimated price tag for rebuilding and retrofitting all school buildings to the standards established by the new building codes had the board of education desperately seeking new sources of revenue. It ran into significant opposition, however, to every initiative to generate more income. During a budget planning meeting of the board that July, multiple constituents publicly expressed dismay at a plan to boost the districts' budget by $2,000,000 by raising the tax rate. Attendees that questioned the need for the increase, which included a representative of the Los Angeles Realty Board, alleged, among other things, that the board of education was squandering a $2,000,000 surplus and that money could be better utilized to rebuild and retrofit the schools if more of the district's existing budget was directed toward that purpose.[122] In the wake of the Long Beach earthquake, bond issues to retrofit schools in communities across Southern California similar to the one that failed in the Los Angeles schools attendance area were defeated. If they passed, it was by narrow margins, once again revealing concerns over taxes and public debt that drove the voting behaviors of residents. Most of the area's school districts would have to find the money in their budgets to repair and retrofit schools without the help of bonded indebtedness.

Although the Los Angeles Board of Education failed to secure the $20,000,000 bond issue it sought, residents of the Southeast Cities were beneficiaries of the city districts' financial clout almost immediately, avoiding the fate of the Compton schools after the Long Beach earthquake. While the annexation of the Bell and Maywood, San Antonio, Vernon City, Tweedy, Huntington Park, Graham, and the Huntington Park High School districts was certainly

[122] "SCHOOL BUDGET STORM LOOMS," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1933, A1.

beneficial to the Los Angeles districts, primarily because it increased its income base, they also presented a unique problem for the Los Angeles City schools because the area was not politically a part of the city of Los Angeles. After annexation, the position of the Los Angeles City schools in the Southeast Cities was essentially as a service provider, while the language of annexation and the ways in which the schools were tied to the communities indicated that the schools' facilities were very much a part of their local communities. One key indicator of this mindset was the deliberate language used to describe annexation. In most cases where a district outside of the city of Los Angeles was transferred to the Los Angeles schools, both the annexed district's board and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors noted in its official minutes that the district was to become a part of the larger district "for schooling purposes only."[123] In other words, the Los Angeles districts provided the educational services, but for these communities, public schools were more than just places where children went to school, they were community centers and places where important civic events took place. This led to a particularly strong sense of ownership and attachment to local school campuses among residents, a mentality that would become increasingly important in the context of future debates over neighborhood schools and consolidation.

Over time, public schools have held a central position in the civic life of local communities, especially smaller communities with populations comprised in large part of blue collar residents like the Southeast Cities. Residents generally advocated for extreme thriftiness when it came to government expenditures, and the limited resources of the city governments of

[123] Board meeting minutes for the districts annexed to Los Angeles Schools are found in the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records, 1875-2012, Collection 1923, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

these cities made public schools important community and municipal spaces. A prime example of this thriftiness is once again South Gate, which after its incorporation in 1923 set up its municipal functions in a minuscule storefront building. Its city council held meetings in a back room, and other city departments, like police and fire, occupied the rest of the space.[124] It was not uncommon for schools to be used in similar ways. The concept of using public school campuses as makeshift community centers was by no means unique to the Los Angeles area. In fact, it had been official policy via the California Education Code since early in the twentieth century through a provision that became known as the Civic Center Act. The law stated that "every public school facility is considered a civic center where citizens, school-community councils, and clubs as well as senior, recreation, education, political, artistic, and other organizations may meet."[125] The law encouraged the use of public school facilities for a broad range of activities, and was consistent with the idea that the importance of campuses in many neighborhoods extended beyond their functions as educational institutions.

From early on in the area's history, residents of the Southeast Cities utilized school campuses in various ways. In Huntington Park, for example, Boy Scouts of America meetings, religious services, and American Legion events were held at public school sites.[126] In late 1928, in accordance with the Civic Center Act, the Huntington Park School District Board of Education passed a resolution "granting the use of school auditoriums within this district, to

[124] Nicolaides, "In search of the good life," 251.

[125] California Education Code, § 38130 et seq.

[126] Huntington Park School District Board Meeting Minutes, Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records, 1875-2012, Collection 1923, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

church societies and other similar organizations of an educational and moral nature."[127] For this cluster of cities, at least, local schools were community hubs that held deep connections with their communities.

The residents of the cities just east of the city of Los Angeles valued political and economic independence—ideas that in practice were closely intertwined. Public schools played a central role in their social and civic lives, and as motivation for political mobilization at various points in time. Local classrooms and school yards served as social and political spaces for the larger community. Annexing the school functions of these campuses was ultimately a compromise in the name of lower taxes and fiscal prudence, but was always viewed by residents as a potentially temporary arrangement. The aftermath of World War II and the economic, social, and political changes it wrought would issue a challenge to this centrality of public schools to these communities, one that would trigger a set of political battles over the future size and form of the Los Angeles City schools.

[127] SPECIAL BOARD MEETING, December 3, 1928, Huntington Park School District Board Meeting Minutes, Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records, 1875-2012, Collection 1923, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

## Chapter Three – Contested Classrooms: Community Identity, Race, and Control of Local Schools

The school district annexations that reshaped Los Angeles County's public education landscape during the interwar period were inconsistent with the vision of standardized, consolidated administrative units gaining favor with California's public education planners. Initiated at a grass roots level by community-based coalitions made up of residents, local business interests, and politicians, these annexations happened beyond the purview of state officials. In the Southeast Cities, annexation was a tenuous compromise made in the name of fiscal necessity in response to a specific set of circumstances. The immediate aftermath of World War II, however, represented a turning point away from the compromises of the twenties and thirties. A new economic, political, and social order took hold in the late 1940s that further exposed the fundamental conflict between the competing visions of the old Common School ideal of "neighborhood schools" and the desire of the state to create large, consolidated districts. In the context of a postwar economic boom that resulted in increasing affluence not only for Californians, but for Americans more broadly, residents of the Greater Los Angeles area who had previously made compromises in school district organization in the name of municipal economy were empowered to pursue their neighborhood schools ideal. Race was a crucial part of movements initiated as a result in the late 1940s and the decades that followed to reconfigure school districts and attendance zones. White residents sought to reconstitute segregated schools

in some instances and reinforce them in in others. While segregation had long been a critical part of community consciousness and identity in many areas of Los Angeles County, calls for civil rights and challenges to racial segregation in numerous facets of public life, including schools, intensified in the decades after World War II, setting the stage for piqued battles over school district organization in the area.

The politics of public education became particularly salient in light of the relative prosperity of the postwar period that boosted many working class families into middle class status, giving them a modicum of financial security and raising their individual stakes in local decision-making. In the 1950s and 1960s, these new participants in the middle class American Dream adopted an activist politics that sought to preserve rights that many believed were inherent to their social and economic status—one that was tied to racial inequality and exclusion. The Commission on School Districts, established in 1945,[128] had ushered in the era of unification—which coincided with the growing desire of independent cities, like the ones that comprised the Southeast Cities area, to create their own school districts or join districts that would maintain segregation, reflecting what many residents and local commercial interests believed was an essential part of their community identity. While numerous factors comprised their shared neighborhood consciousness, race was central, and preserving white privilege became increasingly important as it was challenged both by a new influx of African Americans to Los Angeles and by a state government that made desegregation of schools part of official policy as it sought to increase its influence over public schools.

[128] See Chapter Two.

The growing attention given to racial segregation in public schools was in large part spurred by local civil rights activists, calls for the desegregation of schools nationwide after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, and the California State Department of Education's growing use of desegregation as an important justification for consolidation and unification. At the same time, residential segregation became more pronounced in places like the Southeast Cities and South Central Los Angeles—driven, in part, by the unprecedented migration of African Americans to the area, and the actions of white residents to contain the residential mobility of black residents as their numbers grew. Between 1940 and 1970, as part of an exponential increase in total population in California, Los Angeles's black population grew more than that of any other northern or western city in the U.S. It was an important demographic shift that had important consequences throughout the region. The ramifications of this trend were particularly salient for residents of the Southeast Cities.[129]

While white residents in the Los Angeles area sought to consolidate and reinforce segregated public institutions and services, the California legislature accelerated efforts to create new structures and more effective coordination between the state, counties, and local school districts in order to meet the needs of a rapidly growing postwar population that eclipsed the interwar boom. The total population of the state between 1940 and 1960 grew from 6.95 million

[129] The migration of African Americans to Los Angeles has been well documented, but Josh Sides provides perhaps the most complete single account of this migration and its consequences (Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)). The 1930 U.S. Census recorded about 2.2 million black residents of Los Angeles County (2.1 percent of total population), by 1960 this number had increased to just over 6 million (7.64 percent of total population), and by 1970 it had increased to just over 7 million (10.84 percent of total population). Data from U.S. Census Bureau, *Black population, Los Angeles County, 1930, 1960, 1970*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

to 15.87 million,[130] while Los Angeles County grew from just over 1.5 million residents to nearly 2.5 million during the same period. The newly-empowered California State Department of Education, directed by the state board of education and superintendent of public instruction, began to prioritize district consolidation—branded "unification"—throughout the state, relying heavily on the work of the County Committees of School District Organization (CCSDOs) to review and decide on the feasibility of unification petitions.

With the state board of education wielding increasing influence in the district configuration process by the 1950s, the stage was set for clashes over its growing intervention into the governance of public schools, a trend that some at the time labeled as the overreach of "big" government into the affairs of local communities. Because public schools were such an integral part of the lives of families and communities, they quickly became a flashpoint for this resistance to the growing state bureaucracy, especially in rapidly expanding regions like Southern California.[131] In communities like the Southeast Cities, this aversion to the involvement of the state in local issues like school district configuration was exacerbated by the threat posed by the notion of larger administrative structures to a version of community identity based largely on maintaining segregated geographies.

[130] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, California, 1940 and 1960*.

[131] This heightened focus on local institutions and state intervention was part of a broader reaction against New Deal liberalism and an expansion of state and federal interventions in various areas of American life. Historian Lisa McGirr located one of the important nexus points of this anti-liberal ethos and the growing political mobilization that accompanied it in Orange County, California, just south of the city of Los Angeles. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

World War II was truly a catalyst for economic prosperity in Los Angeles, and was a significant contributor to a new era of political mobilization throughout the region.[132] The area had become the second largest industrial manufacturing center in the U.S. during the war, and many of the jobs that accompanied this growth were permanent—an important change for workers from the seasonal, and often tenuous, employment pattern of factory jobs in the past. These jobs provided an economic boost to the financial status of blue-collar workers of all races, but the prosperity was far from equally distributed. Most white workers had full access to the rewards of their new found status. For the city's non-white residents, post war prosperity meant greater opportunity and better job prospects than in other parts of the country, but both were still limited. Employment opportunity in blue collar sectors had attracted African Americans to the city during and after the war. But they found a ceiling to economic mobility that was seemingly enjoyed so freely by white Angelenos.[133] These limits became undeniably apparent in the immediate aftermath of the war, when the abolishing of the federal Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) ushered in wide-ranging layoffs of black workers.[134]

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[132] This prosperity was far-reaching, but Los Angeles was a particular beneficiary. Lizabeth Cohen, among others, has argued that this prosperity was maintained in the postwar period though the promotion by government, private industry, and media of a mass consumer ideology that not only promoted conspicuous consumption but framed it as a civic responsibility that would expand democratic principles and opportunity. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988, 1999, 2008), 242-272.

[133] Numerous authors have outlined the ways in which for African Americans, Los Angeles was both a beacon of hope and an example of the limitations still imposed upon them in social and political life. Josh Sides provides a particularly salient account of the factors that attracted blacks from the American South to Los Angeles in great numbers between 1940 and 1970, including the opening up of blue collar job opportunities previously only open to white men, and Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, which outlawed discrimination in wartime defense industries and resulted in the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) in order to investigate racial discrimination. Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits*.

[134] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 131.

The dual traumas of the Great Depression and the Mattoon Act made taxation and the perceived imposition of government on local autonomy played primary political concerns for the region's white homeowners. Moreover, changes in the area's racial balance, accelerated by the Second Great Migration of African Americans, were increasingly seen as part of a larger threat to their independence and class status.[135] Residents of small, traditionally majority white cities in the greater Los Angeles area sought to leverage postwar affluence and their civic status to create a bulwark against the unprecedented migrations of people of color to the area, and public schools became a primary battleground for these fights.

The California Department of Education's interest in school district configuration was motivated by the much more practical consideration of population growth caused by a heretofore unseen level of migration to Southern California during and following World War II. The increase was so dramatic, in fact, that cities like South Gate suffered severe housing shortages.[136] The thriving postwar economy was a particular boon to Los Angeles's manufacturing corridor, which straddled the Southeast Cities and South Central Los Angeles along Alameda Street. A significant number of new residents migrated to the neighborhoods that surrounded the corridor in the decades following the war.

Workers shared in this prosperity in dramatic ways, particularly in the majority white suburban cities, populated largely by blue collar workers, which surrounded the city of Los

[135] The Second Great Migration saw around five million African Americans move from the South to Northern and Western locales—primarily urban areas between 1940 and 1970. The number of African American residents in Los Angeles County grew from 75,210 in 1940 to 461,546 in 1960—an increase of over 513 percent.

[136] Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 220-221.

Angeles. In the Southeast Cities, the postwar economic boom equaled a new assertion of civic independence, even while it resulted in new challenges to prevailing social and political norms.[137] It also enabled labor unions to increase their ranks in the area, a sign of the growth of well paying, full-time blue collar employment. At its height during this period in Los Angeles, union membership surged to about 26 percent of households in the region—noteworthy for the notoriously open-shop Los Angeles area.[138] This broadening of union membership, however, did not equal racial inclusiveness. Even though factories like the General Motors plant in South Gate hired black workers and some union locals admitted black members, this inclusiveness did not carry over into community life, especially with regard to local schools.[139] For residents who in the past had made compromises on the racial and ethnic makeup of their school districts and on the possibility of their children sharing classrooms with non-white peers, the economic leverage gained in the late 1940s and 1950s gave rise to the political will to launch an effort to create their racialized vision of ideal schools.

Although present in unmistakable ways before World War II, *de facto*, or extra-legal, racial segregation in the greater Los Angeles area grew in the decades following the war in response to both the influx of new residents and the outlawing of race-based housing covenants in 1948. These covenants had previously served as a legal bulwark against the movement of African Americans into all-white neighborhoods.[140] Segregation was particularly pronounced

[137] Ibid., 216-224.

[138] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 58-59.

[139] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 252-255.

[140] Housing covenants were outlawed by the United States Supreme Court via its decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

along Alameda Street in South Los Angeles and the Southeast Cities—a divide that gradually became starker as the black population of South Central Los Angeles increased exponentially west of Alameda during and after World War II. As a result, since the 1930s, when students from Home Gardens had been a part of the Watts School District, segregation on the east side of the thoroughfare had only increased, and it served as an increasingly well-defined racial and ethnic boundary that separated white and non-white residents. By the mid-1950s, the area east of Alameda between the northernmost boundary of the city of Vernon and the southern end of the city of Compton was comprised of virtually all white residents, while the area west of the thoroughfare was a diverse mix of races and ethnicities, including rapidly increasing numbers of African Americans.[141] South Central Los Angeles had been the traditional center of black settlement in the region due to both legal and extra-legal housing restrictions. But the postwar Second Great Migration marked a significant expansion in the number of black families that lived in the area, many of whom were homeowners.

What these black migrants found was a public life that held more opportunity for employment and a less blatant form of racism than they had experienced in other parts of the country. But they also faced significant barriers to economic, social, and geographic mobility that were both shifting and hardening over time. These prohibitions were not only the result of the efforts of whites who wanted to maintain segregated institutions, but were also built into the

[141] Allison Varzally argues that interethnic mixing and cooperation in "non-white" areas was typical throughout California—particularly during the population explosion between roughly 1930 and 1960. Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2008); Scott Kurashige's work has also revealed the extent to which Japanese Americans shared residential spaces and interacted socially with African Americans in Los Angeles through the 1970s. Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

structure of New Deal liberalism, which prioritized white workers and strengthened racial prohibitions on its benefits.[142] One important early example of the way in which New Deal policies served to reinforce racial segregation is the work of the Federal Housing Administration's Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), which after its establishment in 1933 oversaw the administration of government funding for home loans. It adopted existing real estate and lending practices that weighed the race, ethnicity, class, and sometimes even religion of a community's residents in determining whether mortgage loans should be made. In doing so, the HOLC gave official endorsement to existing racial divisions in cities across the country and helped facilitate their expansion into newer residential areas.

The HOLC maps of Los Angeles captured the growing residential segregation in housing in the area, and they affirmed and advanced the importance of neighborhood characteristics in determining the value of individual properties in the housing market. This meant that homogeneity was "the most important factor for describing a community and in assessing its value."[143] In their descriptions, the maps associated people of color and heterogeneous populations with "subversive elements" and "slum conditions," categorizations that earned these

[142] Ira Katznelson argues that the social safety net programs and labor legislation of the New Deal that helped create a new level of prosperity and financial security for working class white workers were discriminatory against all others, ultimately widening the economic disparity between white workers and African Americans in particular. Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005). Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2010), 17-23. The hegemony of whiteness, according to HoSang, was even inherent to so-called racial liberalism—where new rights and new opportunities were extended to non-white people but were limited in important ways.

[143] Laura Redford, "The Promise and Principles of Real Estate Development in an American Metropolis: Los Angeles 1903-1923" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2014), 92.

neighborhoods a "red" designation—the highest possible risk for loans.[144] Its approach to assessing risk once again shows how federal New Deal policies reinforced segregated urban geographies in the U.S. It also points to the idea that even legislation and policies intended to alleviate racial discrimination or community distress were still guided by what George Lipsitz has called a "possessive investment in whiteness"—the idea that whiteness brings with it both tangible and informal benefits, and that white Americans are constantly encouraged to reinvest in the racial advantages that bring about these benefits.[145] Many white residents of the Los Angeles area at the time may not have considered themselves particularly racist, but they were likely fully invested in a system that normalized segregation and granted significant advantages to them because of their race.

The practice of creating and maintaining segregated neighborhoods continued, even though racially restrictive housing covenants, which were built into the deeds of individual properties, were declared illegal by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948.[146] As a result, the Greater Los Angeles area remained as segregated as ever. The growing numbers of African Americans in

[144] "T-RACES: a Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces," R. Marciano, D. Goldberg, C. Hou, http://salt.umd.edu/T-RACES.

[145] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), vii. Lipsitz is often used as a foundational source for historians of race and ethnicity in the U.S. Other scholars have made similar arguments, including David Roediger, who contends that whiteness and an investment in racism has allowed various groups of European ethnic immigrants to assimilate into American social and cultural life and benefit from what he argues are both tangible and psychic benefits of whiteness. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York: Verso, 1999).

[146] Numerous scholars have noted the various informal, or extra-legal, ways segregation was enforced in Los Angeles. Laura Redford has argued that the Los Angeles Realty Board (LARB)—the official local governing body for realtors—was particularly important in this regard, even defining the "ideal" neighborhood as one segregated by race and class in its Code of Ethics in the 1920s. This was consistent with the policy of its national organization, the National Association of Real Estate Boards. Laura Redford, "The Promise and Principles of Real Estate Development," 86-87.

the area faced particularly severe segregation in housing. Additionally, poor and working class blacks were in large measure priced out of home ownership. There were notable exclusions, however, and black residents who had the financial means and consistent employment created middle class communities, comprised in large part of home owners in the West Adams and Leimert Park areas of Los Angeles, and in the city of Compton. An important factor in the establishment of these communities were black real estate entrepreneurs who created institutions to help African Americans finance and purchase homes.[147] Despite these efforts, racial segregation only increased with the expansion of black settlement in Los Angeles and some of its outlying areas.

Although racial and ethnic divisions were shifting in the years after World War II, they had long existed in the Los Angeles area. There were spaces of white/non-white integration in the interwar period at places like Jordan High School, but the demographic changes that happened in the early post-World War II period were consistent overall with the area's history of separation by race and class. High schools were often the sites where conflicts over segregation played out because they drew students from multiple elementary and junior high schools across larger geographic areas. Where elementary and even junior high schools served students from local neighborhoods, public high schools drew from a far broader population. Still, segregation was pronounced at the high schools in the Los Angeles districts, many of which became flashpoints for battles over school segregation as the demographics of the area shifted over time.

One significant incident took place in 1941 in the form of a student protest that featured a "mock lynching" on the campus of Fremont High School—at the time an almost entirely white

[147] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 121.

campus located in the southeast part of the city of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles High School District. The protest, which featured the effigy of a hanged figure, was initiated by white students protesting the registration of six black students at the campus. As historian Michael Slaughter has pointed out, Fremont High was located less than three miles from neighboring Jefferson High School, which was comprised of a highly diverse group of students and considered by many African Americans to be a "symbol of black Los Angeles."[148] Students, parents, and other residents asserted a community ownership over Jefferson that stood in stark contrast to Fremont's "white space."[149] The Fremont incident garnered significant media attention, both in local newspapers and nationwide outlets, and the school board received letters from local constituents and from as far away as Baltimore about the controversy. A number of these letters supported the actions of the Los Angeles Board of Education in sanctioning the Fremont principal's suspension of students involved in the mock lynching and protest. Others advocated segregation and found common ground with the students. Several self-identified whites also claimed a level of ambivalence about blacks while advocating the separation of races. A letter from a self-described veteran of World War II was typical in this regard, asserting that: "I don't hate negroes individually but I'd be willing to fight to preserve my right and that of my children, if I ever have any, to live among, and mix socially with white people only."[150] At the same time,

[148] Michael Slaughter, "Lessons on Freedom: Jefferson High School and Black Los Angeles, 1920-1950 (PhD diss., UCLA, 2014), 169-170.

[149] Ibid., 169.

[150] Letter to school board from local resident, March 18, 1947, Un-American Activities, 1947-1963, Box 2,021 Folder 4, Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records, 1875-2012, Collection 1923, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

the suspensions and condemnation of the Fremont students' actions were lauded by civil rights activists as evidence of the Los Angeles High School district's progressive approach to race.[151]

While the board of education's response to the Fremont incident indicated a willingness to address and punish blatant racism on-campus and raised hopes that this would translate into proactive steps toward ending *de facto* segregation in its schools, it also demonstrated the willingness of white residents to fight to preserve and reinforce segregated spaces. Due to demographic changes to the surrounding neighborhoods, Fremont was, indeed, in the process of a transition that would result in a transformation of its student body to one that was multiethnic with a majority of non-white students, much like its neighbor Jefferson. This transition was driven in large part by the eventual ban on racially restrictive housing covenants[152] and the influx of African Americans to the area that pushed the margins of the city's segregated areas further east.

The Fremont incident was the start of a protracted focus on public schools in South Central Los Angeles and the Southeast Cities on the part of civil rights organizations, particularly after the U.S. Supreme Court's first *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, which outlawed *de jure* segregation in public schools nationwide. By 1960 Alameda Street was as stark a racial divide as ever in the Greater Southeast Area[153] in terms of both housing and

[151] Letters to the Los Angeles Board of Education, Un-American Activities, 1947-1963, Box 2,021 Folder 4, Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records 1875-2012, Collection 1923, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

[152] This was the United States Supreme Court's *Shelley v. Kraemer* 334 US 1 (1948) decision.

[153] I am using this description here to refer to the Southeast Cities and the area of South Central Los Angeles contiguous with their western borders.

public schools. On the east side of the thoroughfare were the Southeast Cities, comprised of a 99 percent white population and schools that mirrored that population. On the west side of the street was a diversity of races and ethnicities that included some, but increasingly few, white residents and a steadily increasing African American population. The focus of activists on this area ultimately led, in 1963, to the filing of the *Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education* case, essentially the local equivalent of *Brown*. When originally filed, *Crawford* alleged that de facto segregation had been purposefully engineered by the Los Angeles Schools specifically between South Gate High School and Jordan High School. The crux of the argument was that the districts had maintained the Alameda Street boundary by gerrymandering school attendance zones, thus maintaining segregated schools within its footprint.[154]

The filing of the *Crawford* case was an important result of years of grassroots activism in the area on the part of primarily African American residents. Beginning in the late 1930s, activists led by figures like Charlotta Bass, publisher of the California Eagle newspaper, and attorney Loren Miller, who was one of the two lead attorneys in the *Crawford* case, had embarked on a wide-ranging program of resistance to segregation and racial injustice in the area.[155] Working to desegregate both the faculty and students of the Los Angeles City schools was an important part of these efforts. Public figures like Bass and Miller and civil rights organizations with national networks like the NAACP and ACLU were the most visible participants, but grassroots activists that included community organizers, communists, and

[154] Crawford v. Board of Education, 17 Cal. 3d 280 (Cal.1976).

[155] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 31-31, 116, 139. Miller actually ran the *California Eagle* for about a year after Bass sold it to him in 1951.

neighborhood churches—at first glance perhaps unlikely partners—were just as significant.[156] The advocacy of the Communist Party was particularly important during the late 1940s because many African Americans believed local NAACP chapter leadership was weak and accommodating to the white political establishment. Communists, on the other hand, were particularly effective in organizing protest against a regime of police brutality that accompanied the Second Great Migration. They established an important precedent for the area's civil rights activists through a focus on grassroots actions in response to local injustices and specific discriminatory incidents.[157] Their influence, however, waned quickly. The Cold War and its attendant domestic Red Scare created a political and social environment in the late 1940s and early-to-mid 1950s that led to the diminishing of the Communist Party's presence in the Los Angeles area.[158] The grassroots networks of activists influenced by communist organizing, however, remained active and provided boots on the ground for further desegregation efforts in the future. In education, they planned and supported targeted efforts to enroll black students at various "white" schools in the Los Angeles districts in the early-1960s. These actions, supported by a reinvigorated local NAACP chapter, included sending the South Gate Five to South Gate High School in 1963 and an attempt to enroll a number of black students Huntington Park High School the year before, which was denied by the district based on a technicality.[159]

[156] Ibid., 139-146.

[157] Ibid., 140-143.

[158] Ibid., 145-147.

[159] See introduction for the longer account of what the South Gate Five faced during the 1963 school year; "NAACP Meets Rebuff on School Enrollment," *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1962, 24.

Efforts to desegregate the area's public schools were part of a broader fight against extra-legal restrictions in a range of accommodations that included housing and real estate, employment in public services like the city's police and fire departments, and private organizations like country clubs that refused to admit black members. After 1954, activists from the local branches of the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and newer organizations like the United Civil Rights Council (UCRC), expanded the scope of their anti-segregation protests.[160] The Los Angeles Board of Education was a long-standing target that gained increasing attention from this coalition after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The board argued in response that *de facto* segregation was simply a consequence of race-based housing practices and beyond the control of school administration. While the school board conceded that parts of its district were segregated, its official position for years to come was that this was a consequence of a larger problem over which it had no control.[161] Although it agreed to look for ways it could proactively remedy *de facto* segregation, in time civil rights groups grew frustrated with the lack of urgency on the board's part, and took the issue to court.

By the late 1950s, the compromises forged during the earlier era of annexation had become an obstacle to the attempts of white residents in a number of communities in Los Angeles County to realize their specific vision of neighborhood schools. Foundational to this vision were racial segregation and increasing local control of public schools. The organizing

[160] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 148. This was actually the start of a "rebirth" of the NAACP in Los Angeles, after its Los Angeles chapter had been weakened considerably by charges of communist affiliation and investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

[161] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 159*;* Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 287-288.

employed behind these goals was a type of grassroots activism often overshadowed by the movement culture of the left during the 1950s and 1960s in particular.[162]

The efforts of these residents to utilize the state-sanctioned system of school district organization to ensure that segregation persisted stood in sharp contrast to the efforts of black activists who were marginalized in formal legal channels, and thus had to fight for equal opportunity in education through protest, direct action, and lawsuits. Local civil rights activists generally supported state efforts to consolidate districts, recognizing the difficulties inherent in maintaining segregated schools in larger political alignments. Additionally, although the Los Angeles Board of Education had avoided taking serious steps toward large-scale integration, district leadership in the 1940s had shown a willingness to take action against the perpetrators of specific incidents of racism—as demonstrated by its response to the Fremont incident—and professed to defend tolerance and equality in the schools. This further bolstered the tendency of activists to favor a stronger, consolidated administration in the Los Angeles schools over smaller district configurations. However, the Los Angeles Board of Education was far from inclined to take action in response to demands for the implementation of desegregation programs. As Michael Slaughter has argued in his work on Jefferson High School in South Los Angeles, "If we focus on school officials' actions rather than their words, we see that they nurtured the kind of thinking that produced the Fremont demonstration."[163] Underlying these debates over attendance zones and the schools to which students were assigned were very practical demands for access to classrooms that were not overcrowded, the availability of vocational and college

[162] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 7-8.

[163] Slaughter, "Lessons On Freedom," 180.

prep curriculum, and academic counseling that encouraged a variety of educational and career options.[164] Because the layout of schools and attendance zones were often tied directly to the limits imposed on the area's non-white students, the decision was made early-on to focus on "integration" and "desegregation" as a legal strategy that allowed activists to target these restrictions in the starkest and most obvious way possible. While many white residents, viewing this as an attack on their coveted racially exclusive dominions, saw these efforts as part of "a deep-seated desire among black residents to intermingle with whites,"[165] it was actually part of a strategy to build as strong a case as possible against informal segregation that regulated the distribution of wealth, resources, and public goods.

By 1949, as a result of state efforts to encourage consolidation, the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization (LACCSDO) had been firmly established as the arbiter of school district organization efforts in the region. However, until the early 1960s, the ultimate decision-making power to approve or deny a significant change in public school district bureaucracy belonged to the Los Angeles County Supervisors, except in cases where petitioners wanted to create a new school district, where approval was required from the state board of education. Only after the California legislature attempted to mandate unification in 1959 did the power to approve unifications or significant changes to district configuration shift entirely to the state board of education rather than the county supervisors. This marked an important shift from counties to the state level of government in school district organization decision-making that

[164] I do not delve deeply into pedagogical issues in this dissertation, although they are deserving of, and have been the subject of, in-depth study. My point is to emphasize the close relationship of these issues with the politics and geography of public education.

[165] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 132.

would become increasingly important to white residents who attempted to use the process to maintain or create their ideal school configurations.

As was the case in the 1920s and 1930s when schools in the Southeast Cities annexed to the Los Angeles districts, residents, politicians, and commercial interests in the area were active participants in the school district organization (SDO) process. The difference after World War II was that there was less necessity to compromise because of the dramatically improved economy. A pattern soon emerged where local interests would form committees, put together a petition for the LACCSDO requesting a change, and show up en masse at meetings—all in an effort to gerrymander attendance zones to maintain racially segregated neighborhood schools. Between 1940, when the earlier iteration of the county committees heard these cases, and the late 1950s, petitions to the LACCSDO that would have this effect were largely approved without significant resistance. While the verbiage of these petitions were devoid of any specific language that touched on race or ethnicity, the changes to district boundaries would nearly always either create, expand, or exacerbate segregation in local public schools. These efforts leveled a direct challenge to the endeavors of civil rights activists to integrate schools and standardize the distribution of resources across the vast geography of the county's public schools.

These efforts to use the SDO process, intended by lawmakers to help create larger, more consolidated districts, to craft configurations that strengthened segregated schools were initiated most vigorously in smaller independent cities and county unincorporated areas that were home to white middle and working class residents. They depended on public schools to educate their children and, in line with the Common School ideal, saw education as a fundamental American entitlement. They generally lacked the financial resources to move students to private schools

and their sense of community life and identity was tied to public school campuses in significant ways.[166] Ultimately, working- and middle-class white residents found the SDO petition process accessible and utilized it to create and maintain "white" space through "white" schools.

This racialized vision of "ideal schools" was built into the very framework of the Common Schools of the Progressive Era, and sat alongside factors like attachment to local neighborhoods as essential to how public education had been defined in the U.S. since the mid-nineteenth century. The connection between public schools and community identity was a critical part of the vision for ideal schools, both for residents and for the county committees (CCSDOs) that adjudicated changes. "Community identity" was, in fact, built into the official state-mandated SDO process as one of the five essential factors the CCSDOs should use to decide on changes or reconfiguration to district borders. As predicted by the California Commission on School Districts in the mid-1940s, community identity was a significant factor in the SDO process, and a hindrance to the broader adoption of consolidation and unification both in Los Angeles County and statewide.

In Los Angeles County, the efforts to use the SDO process to maintain segregated neighborhood schools were initiated by residents of independent cities that comprised the neighborhoods surrounding the city of Los Angeles that could claim a distinct community identity that was given heft by their autonomous civic status. The cities of Alhambra, Montebello, and Monterey Park were early sites of activity for the LACCSDO, which deliberated numerous school attendance zone and district boundary changes involving these

[166] See Chapter Two discussion of how public schools served as provisional community centers.

cities. These municipalities were located east of the Southeast Cities but similar in that, by the 1950s and 1960s, they were comprised of a majority population of white middle- and working-class residents. Coalitions representing Alhambra and Montebello in particular were involved in CCSDO petition campaigns as early as the latter part of the 1940s.

Stakeholders in these cases initially sought to make incremental adjustments to district borders, most often moving small chunks of territory from the Los Angeles City schools to the Alhambra and Montebello districts. Most of these changes were approved by the LACCSDO and the county board of supervisors. The petitioners who advocated for changes utilized a variety of arguments to make their case, including very practical considerations like minimizing the busy streets children walking to school might have to cross. But they argued most consistently to allow neighborhood children to attend school with children from their "own community"—language that implied significant differences between neighborhoods and schools that were often less than a mile away from each other. The parlance of "community," left relatively undefined, but reinforced by legal boundaries, was also consistent with that used in many of the petitions filed with the CCSDO and with the vague CCSDO statewide guidelines for acceptable reasons for district border changes.

The number of changes to school districts through revised borders and new combinations increased in the late 1940s in response to the state department of education's progressively louder calls for districts to unify. However, as detailed previously, these changes often reflected the desires of local residents rather than the goals of state education policymakers, and tended to result in more racially segregated configurations rather than the larger, presumably more efficient, and often multi-racial, administrations the state department of education sought. An

early high-profile example in the Los Angeles area of the ways in which unification efforts used to shift, rather than expand, district borders was a 1949 petition from residents of the city of Lynwood—comprised nearly entirely of white residents—to build a new high school and create a new unified district for the city's children. Lynwood was a small but growing city—in the 1940 census it counted nearly 11,000 residents, but grew 132 percent over the next decade, and by the 1950 census had nearly 26,000 inhabitants.[167] Creation of the new district would necessitate separating from the Compton High School district, comprised of Compton High and Compton Community College. The Compton schools included a notable population of black students in its Willowbrook section, as well as a small Mexican "barrio" in the northern part of the city of Compton.[168] The proposed unified Lynwood district would be comprised of nearly all white students.

Located just south of South Gate and the other Southeast cities on the east side of Alameda Street, Lynwood already had a long-established elementary district. The petitioners used the call for unification by state policymakers as a justification for merging the city's elementary district with the proposed new high school district, even though by breaking away from Compton they would be creating a smaller administrative unit and further fragmenting the area's district geography. It was clear, however, that a significant number of Lynwood residents

[167] U.S. Census Bureau, *1950 Census of Population Preliminary Counts, Population of California, By Counties April 1, 1950*.

[168] In 1940, Willowbrook had just over 1,000 African American residents, a number that would grow dramatically over time, much like the rest of South Central Los Angeles and its environs. Compton's demographic makeup changed dramatically between 1950, when the city counted approximately 50 black residents, and 1960, when it was comprised of about 40 percent African Americans, virtually all on the west side of Alameda Street. An excellent accounting of the longer social and political history of Compton is Josh Sides, "Straight into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb," *American Quarterly* 56 (Sept. 2004), 583-605.

believed the municipality now had the resources and tax base to support its own district. In making the argument that they were "above all else vitally interested in the education and welfare of their children," the petitioners also asserted that: "Education must grow from needs of the community which it serves."[169] One desire they cited as particularly important was for more vocational education, which they argued was inadequate in the Compton High School District. At the same time, they acknowledged that the emphasis of the Compton district's offerings was on "curricular offerings prescribed by the Education Code and those required to meet admission requirements of institution [sic] of higher learning," admitting that those programs were "adequate."[170] However, the petitioners argued that the Compton district was growing too large and that the multiethnic makeup of its student body was inconsistent with their community identity.

The Lynwood petitioners used the language of difference to distinguish their city from Compton. Largely a community of middle- and working-class homeowners like those that comprised the Southeast Cities, Compton had a much longer history of self-provisioned building and segregated home ownership through racially exclusionary covenants built into property deeds. After restrictive covenants were outlawed, Compton's residents and business interests turned to *de facto* means for excluding black residents and attempting to preserve the city's white spaces. Josh Sides has called Compton's leaders, white residents, real estate agents, and police a

[169] Lynwood Board of Trustees, Letter to the State Board of Education, September 24, 1949, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California, 2.

[170] Lynwood Board of Trustees, Letter to the State Board of Education, Sept. 24, 1949, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California, 2.

"virtual phalanx against racial integration."[171] Yet, despite the efforts of white residents and businesses, many middle class black residents began to move into the city's western half in the 1950s. By 1960, Compton reflected the Greater Southeast Los Angeles area in microcosm, with Alameda bisecting the city and dividing it roughly into an eastern half that was virtually all white, and a western half that was comprised in large part of a racially diverse group of residents that included a significantly growing black population. Compton, in fact, experienced a true population explosion between 1950 and 1960 that was even greater than its Southeast Los Angeles neighbors. Its total population grew from 16,198 in 1940, to 47,991 in 1950, to 71,812 in 1960, including a marked increase in the percentage of children under 15 on the west side in particular.[172] Compared to neighbors like Lynwood, which saw a significant but smaller population increase from 10,982 in 1940, to 25,823 in 1950, to 31,614 in 1960, Compton's growth becomes particularly important for understanding the dynamics of population, schools, and community identity on these shifting grounds.

Comptonites and their neighbors were not able to forge a unification of the five elementary school districts that fed into the high school district, even though the move could have helped alleviate the burden of debt incurred from rebuilding after the Long Beach earthquake.[173] Even after the departure of Lynwood and eventually the Paramount district, the

[171] Sides, "Straight into Compton," 585.

[172] The number of children under 15 in the area ranged from between 20 and 30 percent in 1940; by 1960 it had increased to between 30 and 40-plus percent—in some West Compton neighborhoods it was as high as 48 percent. Data from U.S. Census Bureau, *Total population: Less than 15 Years, Compton, California, 1940 and 1960*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[173] Emily E. Straus, "The Making of the American School Crisis: Compton, California and the Death of the Suburban Dream" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2006), 27-28, 72-73. The elementary districts were the Compton City School District, the Enterprise School District, the Paramount School District, the Willowbrook School District,

remaining three districts stayed separate. This stalemate was caused by the resistance of white residents on the eastside of the city to integration with schools on the city's racially diverse westside.[174] The result, argues historian Emily Straus, was that the local school districts failed to benefit from much-needed administrative efficiencies that would have been gained through timely unification. Combined with the crushing debt that resulted from rebuilding after the Long Beach earthquake, the failure to unify was a key contributor to precipitous declines in available funds and student achievement in Compton in the late 1960s and 1970s.[175]

The Lynwood petitioners in 1949, however, were focused primarily on the differences they saw between their city and Compton—differences endorsed by 9,747 local petitioners. In addition to the specific arguments about size and curriculum leveled against the Compton districts was the assertion that Compton did not reflect what petitioners perceived as Lynwood's community identity. "The diverse natures of the communities which the Compton Union High School attempts to serve," they argued, "impair efforts to keep education close to the needs of pupils and communities." This was essentially an invocation of the neighborhood schools concept. They went on to assert that "Lynwood is a close-knit community which has the desire and the zeal to do this."[176] Despite the fact that the new Lynwood district would have the effect of creating a smaller administrative unit than what existed before and would likely cause a

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and the Lynwood district. I discussed in some detail in Chapter Two the extent to which the Compton schools were devastated as a result of the earthquake and the long-term financial damage it caused.

[174] Ibid., 72-73; Sides, "Straight Into Compton"

[175] Straus, "The Making of the American School Crisis," 28, 72-73; Sides, "Straight Into Compton," 583-605.

[176] Lynwood Board of Trustees, Letter to the State Board of Education, Sept. 24, 1949, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California, 2.

depreciation of the Compton High School District's tax base, the plan was allowed to proceed, and voters approved the new district with 81 percent of Lynwood area voters casting a "yes" vote.[177]

The ways in which school district organization cases like those in Lynwood and the attendance zone changes in the Montebello and Alhambra districts were gradually changing the geography of public schools in the region alarmed local civil rights activists, who recognized an all-too-familiar pattern of gerrymandering in order to fortify segregation. A reorganization effort in the community of Monterey Park, which lay squarely between Alhambra on the north and Montebello on the south, was the first of these SDO cases to garner the significant attention and opposition of civil rights activists. The Monterey Park effort also reveals the importance of class in defining local communities and the complexity involved in the identity and political consciousness of neighborhoods in a growing and changing region in the 1950s and 1960s.

What started in 1957 as a city-wide effort among Monterey Park's residents and business interests to form a unified school district that matched its municipal boundaries became an ultimately successful three year fight by a small number of residents in its Monterey Hills neighborhood to separate from the Los Angeles districts and join the neighboring Alhambra Unified School District. Monterey Park had been split between 10 different elementary and high school districts that included Alhambra, Montebello, and the Los Angeles elementary and high school districts—a rather remarkably fragmented configuration for a city only 7.7 square miles in size. Monterey Hills was the only neighborhood in the city that was part of the Los Angeles

[177] "Voters Approve Lynwood School," *Los Angeles Times*, November, 19, 1949, 9.

districts. Even though the Los Angeles City elementary district had just completed and opened the Brightwood Elementary School to service the area, junior high- and high school-age residents of the majority-white neighborhood were assigned to schools located in the majority Latino neighborhoods of Belvedere and unincorporated East Los Angeles.[178] Petitioners, backed by the City Council of Monterey Park, asserted that "the main community interest of the children of said area . . . is more closely associated with the area under the jurisdiction of the Alhambra Board than the area under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Board of Education."[179] The fact that the move would only expand the majority-white Alhambra district and add to its tax base drew piqued opposition from some area residents, civil rights organizations, and even labor unions, which claimed that race and ethnicity were important motivations for the proposed move, but that class was just as significant.

The fragmented configuration of Monterey Park's schools owes much to the city's hasty creation. It lies east of Los Angeles and a few miles northeast of the Southeast Cities, situated in large part atop the highland areas that constitute a physical border between the San Gabriel Valley and the Los Angeles basin, a kind of borderlands between Los Angeles and the independent cities of the San Gabriel Valley. It was hastily created in 1916 by circumstance,

[178] Data from U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, Puerto Rican or Spanish Surname, Monterey Park, California, and Los Angeles, California, 1960*, Prepared by Social Explorer. Students were assigned to Griffith Junior High School, approximately 1.7 miles from Monterey Hills, and Garfield High School, approximately 1.9 miles from the neighborhood. Los Angeles City Board of Education, Report re: Proposed Annexation of Certain Territory to Alhambra City School Districts, December, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[179] "RESOLUTION NO. 6462: A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MONTEREY PARK ENDORSING A PROPOSED TRANSFER OF THE MONTEREY HILLS AREAS FROM THE LOS ANGELES SCHOOL DISTRICT TO THE ALHAMBRA SCHOOL DISTRICT," city of Monterey Park, California, Office of the City Manager, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

formed as a result of what the Los Angeles Times called the "Sewer War"—an effort by the surrounding cities of Pasadena, South Pasadena, and Alhambra to turn what was then a 600-acre farm into a sewer. Residents of the Montebello and Ramona Acres neighborhoods—the areas directly neighboring the proposed sewer, adamantly opposed the idea, arguing that they would be negatively affected by runoff and foul odors. Their response was to incorporate as a new city—Monterey Park—in order to circumvent the sewer project. The new city included a "narrow strip" of land surrounding the sewer site that effectively blocked it.[180] Once established, the young municipality engaged in a four year court battle with its longer-established neighbors over the proposed sewer, eventually blocking the project permanently.[181] As the city grew, its school functions were annexed out to the ten different districts.

Monterey Park's multiple school district partnerships is an extreme example of how small cities made compromises on public schooling in the first half of the twentieth century. As it grew, the city built alliances with nearby districts, rather than assuming the tax and administrative burden that a new school district would bring. By the mid-1950s, fueled by the belief that the municipality had developed a sufficient tax base to support an independent school system, some city leaders began to advocate for a Monterey Park city district. The "citizen's committee" that recommended that city leaders initiate the feasibility study asserted that Monterey Park was "now financially able to support an elementary school district with about the same tax rate as is now paid in Alhambra."[182] This suggests that residents of Monterey Park in

[180] "New City to Be Born in Sewer War Travail," *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1916, II11.

[181] Timothy P. Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 16.

[182] "Monterey Park Grade School District Asked," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1957, B12.

the late 1950s believed that the city had reached a level of financial solvency and stability that allowed it to assume more of its own city services, like public education—stability that had previously not existed.

The Monterey Park "Citizens School Study Committee," which carried the endorsement of the city council, was formed in 1957 to study the feasibility of creating a Monterey Park School District, independent from the multiplicity of districts that oversaw its schools at the time. However, the idea of a new Monterey Park school district was hampered from early on in the process when a report issued in late 1958 by the office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools concluded that a unified city school district would result in higher taxes for Monterey Park residents and "financial difficulties" for many of the school districts that then oversaw the city's schools.[183] Despite the report's findings, the Monterey Park Citizens School Study Committee continued to push for a new district. In August of 1959, in response to the county superintendent's study, the committee presented its own report to the Monterey Park City Council. It concluded that the city would indeed be able to finance and support its own district—a finding in complete opposition to that of the county superintendent's office.[184] The committee recommended that the city council set a non-binding vote during the next municipal elections to gauge the sentiment of Monterey Park's residents about the city school district

[183] "Monterey Park School District Hopes Jolted," *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 1958, B11.

[184] "SOUTHLAND: Monterey Park School Unit Favored in Study," *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1959, 30. The report was not unanimously backed by the Committee. Two members of the 10-person body filed a minority finding that refuted the majority's report, stating that "they did not believe the city is financially able to have its own district" and "that a professional survey team should be employed to determine whether a district could be supported."

idea.[185] Despite the efforts of the Citizens School Study Committee to move the plan forward, opposition from the county superintendent was apparently too formidable of an obstacle to overcome, and it got no further in the process.

Efforts to reconfigure the city's school districts did not end there, however, and a new coalition formed in a small area of Monterey Park that ultimately was successful in transferring its students and one particularly valuable elementary school from the Los Angeles schools to the neighboring Alhambra district. It was a significant case because it raised the ire of a coalition of activists that charged that the effort was motivated by race, ethnicity, and class. It grew out of the failed attempt to create the stand-alone Monterey Park district when a petition began to circulate in a small section of the city called "Monterey Hills," with residents seeking to have their students and the elementary school that lay within the three-quarters of a square-mile area transferred from the Los Angeles city districts to the nearby Alhambra school district.[186] The effort was led by the Monterey Park Education Committee, a new body formed to guide the plan through the approvals process. Monterey Hills shared a border with unincorporated East Los Angeles, and in particular its Belvedere section, which contained one of the largest concentrations of Latinos in Los Angeles.[187] The Monterey Park Education Committee cited "socio-economic factors" and more "community identity" with Alhambra as the reasons for its

[185] "SOUTHLAND: Monterey Park School Unit Favored in Study," *Los Angeles Times,* August 27, 1959, 30; "City Calls Parley On Schools Issue," *Los Angeles Times,* September 6, 1959.

[186] "Petitions Seek Annexation of Schools," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1960, G4.

[187] George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 73-77.

request to withdraw from the proposed LAUSD and join the Alhambra school district—which happened to have a majority white student body, according to opponents.[188]

The Monterey Hills committee's initial strategy was to get permission for the transfer from the Los Angeles Board of Education, which would have significantly cut down on the steps involved in secession. It collected signatures from area residents on a petition asking for approval for a transfer, and presented it to the Los Angeles board in late 1960.[189] Approximately 550 elementary and junior high school students and approximately 75 high school students would be affected by the proposed transfer,[190] and the Alhambra district had already agreed to accept the new students if permission was granted.[191] The request, however, was denied by the Los Angeles Board of Education, which had a very tangible reason for rejecting the plan in the form of the a school in the neighborhood that had cost the elementary school district more than $500,000 to build.[192] The Alhambra district had offered to reimburse the Los Angeles City Elementary District for the brand-new Brightwood Street Elementary School, and it would be the only facility lost by the Los Angeles Schools in the proposed transfer. Although Los Angeles

[188] "Monterey Park School Area Transfer Denied," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1960, 14; Ray Zeman, "School Shift Approved by Supervisors," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1961, B1.

[189] "Supervisors Slate School Annex Hearing," *Los Angeles Times*, December 25, 1960, SG7. The signatures of 1,603 registered voters out of 2,216 residing in Monterey Hills were collected by the committee. Gordon T. Nesvig, Clerk of the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, PRELIMINARY HEARING Re: Transfer of certain territory from the Los Angeles Unified School District to the Alhambra City School District (Education Code Section 1791-1795), December 20, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[190] "School Transfer Hearing Slated," *Los Angeles Times*, January 12, 1961, F12.

[191] "Monterey Park Area Schools Transfer Asked," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1960, B14.

[192] "Monterey Park School Area Transfer Denied," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1960, 14; "Monterey Park Area Schools Transfer Asked," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1960, B14.

City Schools Superintendent Ellis A. Jarvis alleged that the reasoning for the proposed withdrawal—"socio-economic reasons"—was against board policy, he also expressed dismay at the idea that a school campus that was just built might be left "unused to capacity" if Monterey Hills withdrew from the Los Angeles City schools. The property tax revenue generated by the area, however, was also significant—it carried an assessed value of more than $10 million.[193] But Jarvis also expressed concern that "piecemeal withdrawal of segments" of the district "frustrates and distorts orderly planning."[194]

Having been denied by the Los Angeles Board of Education, in December of 1960 the Monterey Park Education Committee took its case to the LACCSDO, which approved the petition by a vote of 9-1 and asked the county board of supervisors to hold a public hearing and vote on whether to approve or deny the petition.[195] The LACCSDO justified its nearly unanimous approval of the petition based on the overwhelming support for the transfer among Monterey Hills residents.[196] The county supervisors, at that point still the ultimate arbiter of changes to school district organization, heard the case in January of 1961. The hearing at the

[193] "Assessed value" is the basis for determining the amount of property taxes paid by residents. According to the Los Angeles Times, the actual assessed value of the Monterey Hills neighborhood was $10,327, 320. "School Transfer Hearing Slated," *Los Angeles Times*, January 12, 1961.

[194] "Group to Weigh School Bid After L.A. Rejection," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1960, SG16; Ellis A. Jarvis, Los Angeles Superintendent of Schools to Dr. C.C. Trillingham, County Superintendent of Schools, Re: Proposed Annexation of Certain Territory to Alhambra City School Districts, December 2, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[195] "Monterey Park Area Schools Transfer Asked," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1960, B14.; "Supervisors Slate School Annex Hearing," *Los Angeles Times*, December 25, 1960, SG7.

[196] Letter from Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools C.C. Trillingham to Los Angeles County Supervisor Frank G. Bonelli, March 7, 1962, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

Board of Supervisors chambers was contentious, and revealed the growing recognition among civil rights activists that the legal mechanisms set up by the state to effect consolidation were, in their estimation, being used to strengthen segregation. Monterey Park had a long history of racial exclusion. In the 1920s it was considered one of the most exclusively white areas in the region, and in 1924 hosted a massive Ku Klux Klan rally that reportedly drew 25,000 people to its streets. The Monterey Park Chamber of Commerce at the time actively sought to keep non-white people from settling in the town, going so far as to admonish real estate agents to avoid selling to anyone but white buyers.[197]

Like all of Southern California, World War II and its effects on the home front transformed Monterey Park. Housing developments catering to middle class homebuyers, especially veterans, were built throughout the 1950s. Restrictions on some non-white people began to loosen as well, and Latinos and Asian Americans began to settle in the city.[198] By 1960, the city's population was still about 85 percent white, but it was also nearly 12 percent Latino and about three percent Asian American.[199] What united Monterey Park residents by the late 1950s was class—residents were, for the most part, solidly middle class. Timothy Fong, in his study of Monterey Park, found that the view of the city as a relatively affluent community was particularly strong when compared to its neighbor, East Los Angeles.[200] Income and home

[197] Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown*, 18.

[198] Ibid., 21-22; Leland T. Saito, *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 25.

[199] U.S. Census Bureau, *1960 Census, Monterey Park, California*; Saito, *Race and Politics*, 23.

[200] Fong, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 22.

ownership as a whole in Monterey Park was indeed markedly higher than in East Los Angeles.[201] Compared to communities like the Southeast Cities, Monterey Park was a far more ethnically diverse neighborhood, but it still included very few African American residents—fewer than 10 resided in the entire city in 1960.[202]

The hearing over the Monterey Hills petition before the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors was framed by some attendees as a reflection of distinct class divisions that were tied to Monterey Park's legacy of racial restriction. According to a newspaper account of the meeting: "Neighbors who no longer speak to each other appeared before the supervisors in the tense fight over transfer of the students."[203] The account also noted that: "Underlying the hearing was a bitter hint of racial discrimination."[204] About 300 protesters appeared, many carrying placards. It was a diverse group, including "whites, Negroes, Japanese, Chinese and representatives of Mexican and other minority groups," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Robert Carbjal [sic], spokesperson for the Los Angeles County Democratic Central Committee, called the proposed transfer "a 'discriminatory' move and asked for unanimous vote against it."[205] Richard Cartwright, a spokesman for the United Auto Workers and the County AFL-CIO, alleged that the controversy was about "people who live on the hill against people who live in the

[201] In 1960, about 64 percent of households in the area of Monterey Park that included Monterey Hills made over $8,000 a year, compared with between 13 and 30 percent (depending upon neighborhood) in East Los Angeles. The same census reveals that more than 75 percent of residents of the Monterey Hills area lived in a home that they owned. This varied between about 30 and 50 percent in East Los Angeles.

[202] U.S. Census Bureau, *Black population, Monterey Park, California, 1960*.

[203] Ray Zeman, "School Shift Approved by Supervisors," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1961, B1.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid.

valley." He also pledged that the labor movement would "fight this kind of practice and carry the battle to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary."[206] Despite the protests and the strong ongoing objections of the Los Angeles Board of Education, the supervisors approved the transfer by a vote of 3 to 2.[207] With the authorization, the transfer of students within Monterey Hills and the change of ownership of Brightwood Elementary School proceeded as planned.

The intensely debated move to the Alhambra district was a prelude to another incident less than a year later involving accusations of racial discrimination in Monterey Hills. This time the controversy was over allegations that real estate agents were refusing to sell to African American home buyers—a demonstration of the particular limits to opportunity in the Los Angeles area for African Americans, even in a relatively diverse neighborhood. In February of 1962, picketers from the local chapter of CORE marched in front of a new housing development in Monterey Hills called "Monterey Highlands." They were protesting the refusal of the tract's developer to sell a home to a black family.[208] Suspecting discriminatory practices, the family appealed to CORE, which, according to an account of the controversy: " . . . sent a white couple to the same tract as prospective buyers. They were told that seven houses were available."[209] Additionally, according to the same account, the developer "supposed the company could be 'compelled to sell to a Negro,' but prophesied that such a sale would cause 'perhaps a hundred

[206] Ibid.

[207] Ibid.

[208] "Pickets Protest Alleged Discrimination at Tract," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1962, 27.

[209] Ibid.

persons to move out.'" He added: "I hope that bridge never has to be crossed."[210] CORE's sit-in demonstration at Monterey Highlands lasted 35 days, until the tract was sold to a new owner, who subsequently approved the sale of a home to 29-year-old African American physicist Bobby Liley and his family.[211]

In September of the same year, a group of speakers addressed the Los Angeles Board of Education's special committee on equal educational opportunity. The speakers represented civil rights organizations that included the NAACP, the ACLU of Southern California, the Los Angeles Urban League, and CORE, and made specific recommendations on steps the board should take to alleviate de facto segregation in the district. A representative of the Community Relations Conference of Southern California charged that the secession of Monterey Hills from the Los Angeles schools was intended to exempt the area from integration.[212] The statement reflected a growing recognition among civil rights activists that they were up against more than just recalcitrant board of education members or school officials in their quest to desegregate L.A.-area schools.

For residents in the Southeast Cities in particular, annexation to the Los Angeles city schools in the early 1930s had been a compromise that solved a number of specific problems, which included allowing local children to attend what were considered neighborhood high schools—Bell High, Huntington Park High, and South Gate High. Because the Los Angeles Board of Education had established Alameda Street as an attendance zone border, this also meant

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[210] Ibid.

[211] "'Tremendous Significance' Seen by Negro in Direct Purchase of Home," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1962, B8.

[212] Dick Turpin, "Education Board Urged to Press Integration," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1962, 15.

that the student bodies of these high schools would remain nearly all white, even as residents benefitted from the relatively low and stable tax rates of the Los Angeles City schools, made possible by its size, and therefore also made possible by its diversity. Although joining the Los Angeles schools served its purpose, annexation was potentially reversible if the compromise became less advantageous.

The changes brought about during World War II and the decades that followed by wartime mobilization had particularly dramatic effects on the majority white and working class cities that surrounded the city of Los Angeles. In many of these independent municipalities, particularly those to the east of its city limits, unprecedented prosperity meant new economic power and the assertion of civic independence. It also meant redefining the meaning of community in an era of constant pressures generated by exponential increases in population and new challenges to the limits that had been placed on the social, economic, and spatial mobility of the region's non-white residents. For some who, for the sake of economy, had made political compromises that left open the possibility of their children attending school with non-white peers, this economic status also represented the political power to endeavor to create their racialized vision of ideal schools.

## Chapter Four – Mobilizing to Preserve Segregated Schools: The case of the San Antonio Unified School District

By the late 1950s the Los Angeles Board of Education moved decisively to consolidate the separate elementary and high school districts it oversaw into a single, unified administrative structure. The process began in 1959 with the submission of a petition, encouraged by the board, to the Los Angeles County Committee for School District Organization (LACCSDO) signed by 14 qualified electors who resided in the Los Angeles districts' service area. The petition requested that the LACCSDO "hold a public hearing and to take such other steps as may be necessary to proceed with a study in the matter of unifying the Los Angeles City School District for elementary and high school purposes."[213] The districts' leadership had a compelling reason to expedite the unification process. The board wanted to affect a quick and uncomplicated consolidation in order to maximize a bond-funded building program that had actually already started, presumably to relieve existing overcrowding and in anticipation of a need for more classroom space in the coming years. In a letter to California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Roy E. Simpson in September of 1959, Los Angeles City Superintendent of Schools Ellis Jarvis emphasized the importance of completing the election and certification of the new

[213] Letter from petitioners to the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, May 5, 1959, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

configuration by July 1, 1960, which would allow for actual unification to take place by July 1, 1961. Jarvis explained that: "If the election is held later, we would be estopped [sic] temporarily from proceeding with bond plans, which would cause our building program to grind to a halt."[214]

For the most part, unification of the two Los Angeles districts garnered public support with one significant exception in the form of a Southeast Cities-based attempt to use the process to secede from the Los Angeles City schools. If successful, secession would result in the creation of a new, Southeast Cities-area school district that would have a nearly all-white student population. The battle waged over this attempt to secede from the proposed Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and to create a new unified elementary/high school district further exacerbated tensions over racial segregation in the area and highlighted the importance of issues of economy, taxation, and redefining notions of community identity in an era of economic growth and dynamic population change. The secession movement also demonstrated that, in a period where the Los Angeles Board of Education was targeted by civil rights activists who demanded that the board take substantive steps to alleviate de facto school segregation, the area's white residents were mounting efforts to counteract the potential for desegregation and preserve the segregated community spaces their school campuses represented.

Even with the objections of Southeast Cities stakeholders and their secession effort, the Los Angeles districts unification plan was given sanction by the LACCSDO in the fall of 1959 with little delay. The plan was then overwhelmingly approved by voters within the geographic footprint of the proposed LAUSD in June of 1960.[215] Election returns demonstrated that it

[214] Letter to California Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Roy E. Simpson from Los Angeles City Schools Superintendent Ellis A. Jarvis, March 18, 1947, Minutes of California State Board of Education, September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

[215] "School Plan Vote Brings Jarvis Pledge," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1960, 25.

garnered significant support among residents within the proposed unified district's overall footprint, passing by more than 360,000 votes.[216] On July 1, 1961 the Los Angeles districts unified, creating the second-largest public school administration in the U.S. with approximately 460,000 students.[217] The Los Angeles Unified School District included elementary schools, high schools, and the six junior colleges that were previously overseen by the Los Angeles High School District.

The pace of consolidation in Los Angeles County had increased by the early-1960s. When the unification of the Los Angeles districts was completed, 75 percent of school children in the region were attending unified districts of various sizes. Despite the growing success rate of consolidations in the area, strong opposition had emerged in some cases. The debate not only reflected the ongoing tug-of-war between those who wanted larger, consolidated districts and those who favored community control, but also that the purposes of and motivations for unification were understood quite differently by residents of different areas of the county. The battles that resulted in communities across the region were closely interconnected with a larger set of tensions exacerbated by the marked population increase in Southern California in the

[216] The ballot was split into three questions with the following results: Unification: Total votes For – 473,924, Total votes Against – 111,065; Assumption of the elementary district's bonded indebtedness: Total votes For – 411,126, Total votes Against – 137,694; Assumption of the high school district's bonded indebtedness: Total votes For – 413,050, Total votes Against – 142,224. Deputy, Los Angeles County Division of Elections to Los Angeles County Assistant Superintendent, memorandum, Division of Business Advisory Services-RBS. 01/01/1950-12/31/1960, Folder: "LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT," Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[217] Louis Fleming, "Seven More Unified School Districts to Join List July 1," *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1960, B1; BASIC DATA Relating to a Study of the School District Organization of the LOS ANGELES CITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT and the COMPONENT ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS September 1959, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

decades immediately after World War II. For example, in the city of Whittier, located south of downtown Los Angeles but far to the east, a plan to unify its schools was rejected twice by voters, and LACCSDO records indicate that a long and contentious battle was fought over unification in that area. In the seaside city of Palos Verdes, three different unification proposals were turned down by voters before one was approved and enacted.[218] A battle over unification in the city of La Cañada, located northeast of Los Angeles, reflected debates over community identity, racial and ethnic integration, and the types of services and curriculum available to students.[219] The city of San Fernando, located more than 20 miles from the downtown core of Los Angeles in the San Fernando Valley and part of the Los Angeles school districts, considered its own unified school district for reasons of civic economy and doubts about the proposed LAUSD's ability to effectively deliver services for school children.[220] It ultimately scrapped the idea and remained within the larger district.

The Southeast Cities, which by the late 1950s included the municipalities of Bell, Huntington Park, South Gate, Vernon, and Maywood, were comprised in large part of a distinct type of resident. The fact that these were independent cities comprised of nearly entirely white residents who were in large part blue collar workers is important to understanding the forces that inspired a movement to secede from the Los Angeles schools with the goal of creating a new school district that proponents argued was more representative of their communities. By the 1950s many blue-collar Southeast Cities residents had achieved middle class status through high-

[218] Louis Fleming, "Seven More Unified School Districts to Join List July 1," *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1960, B1.

[219] "La Canada School Future to Be Aired," *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1960, SG1.

[220] "San Fernando Studies Own School Unit Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1959, SF1.

paying manufacturing jobs that characterized the post-World War II economic boom. As Becky Nicolaides has argued in her work about one of the Southeast Cites, South Gate, residents of these working class municipalities had gained a modicum of financial security as a result of the postwar economic boom and federal largesse that disproportionally benefitted white property owners.[221] The cities had become part of the "industrial corridor" of Los Angeles,[222] with several large industrial manufacturing plants located within their city limits that employed workers from all over the area—including the Southeast Cities and South Central Los Angeles.[223]

The coalition that formed to secede from the Los Angeles districts was originally called the "Four Cities,"[224] and took full advantage of the opportunity presented by the unification process to organize and attempt to create a new district completely separate from Los Angeles. As the effort evolved, the group made clearer its intention to create a new Southeast Cities-only district, the San Antonio Unified School District (SAUSD), named after the original Spanish rancho that encompassed the entirety of the area immediately south and east of Los Angeles.[225] Its area would encompass the majority of the Southeast Cities, all of which was territory previously annexed to the LAUSD, and would also lay contiguous to the Lynwood and

[221] Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 186-187.

[222] Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 74-75.

[223] Including major operations run by General Motors, Goodyear, and Firestone Tire and Rubber.

[224] It was called the "Four Cities" at first by both the county committee that determined school district changes and the local press.

[225] Minutes of the Meeting of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, September 6, 1961, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September 6, 1961-June 19, 1962, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

Montebello districts.[226] According to the petitioners' rhetoric, the efforts of these residents to form their own local school district was a logical response to the drive to create the massive LAUSD. The coalition argued the new Los Angeles district would be too large and disconnected from the local communities to effectively educate their children. Proponents asserted that the new district would allow for "home rule" and "financial stability."[227]

From the beginning, the Los Angeles Board of Education and Los Angeles school administrators vehemently opposed the Four Cities petition, claiming that it would result both in a significant financial loss for their newly unified district, and set a precedent for other previously annexed portions of the district to leave.[228] With a few exceptions the board had generally not opposed the piecemeal redrawing of district borders and the loss of small pieces of territory in the past. But the Four Cities proposal presented a particular problem for the district because it would lose a valuable part of its tax base if the area seceded. The vast majority of money for school districts at the time came from local property taxes, and in that sense school district politics were profoundly influenced by location and property values.[229] A striking measure of the area's dollar value to the LAUSD was the tax income per ADA (average daily attendance), or per pupil based on a specific formula, the proposed district would generate.

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[226] Roy E. Simpson to State Board of Education, memorandum, Subject: Recommendation of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization to Form a "San Antonio Unified School District," Minutes of California State Board of Education, September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

[227] "Arguments for the Formation of the San Antonio Unified School District," August 24, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education, September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

[228] The second part of the argument was less tenable, as the vast majority of the rest of the annexed territory was now part of the city of Los Angeles, making deannexation far less likely.

[229] The state also contributed marginal amounts of funding, dependent upon specific criteria, and school districts could also raise money via bonds.

Taken together, the cities of the proposed Four Cities district generated nearly triple the per pupil income as the rest of the LAUSD.[230] The financial stakes were significant for the Los Angeles school districts, and the importance district officials placed on keeping the Four Cities territory in its boundaries was demonstrated by their consistent and public opposition to the proposal.

Proponents of Four Cities school secession staked out their position early-on in the Los Angeles schools unification process and presented a two-pronged argument based on the size of the proposed LAUSD and on what they saw as important differences between their area and the rest of the Los Angeles districts. During one of the first discussions of Los Angeles schools unification at a meeting of the LACCSDO, Donald Mansfield, city administrator for the city of Bell and self-identified spokesperson for the Four Cities coalition, appeared before the committee and requested that they exclude the municipalities from the LAUSD plan because of what he described as the "magnitude of the Los Angeles City District" and "the multiplicity of the problems of area differences."[231] Public school facilities in the Four Cities area included 11 elementary schools (Kindergarten through sixth or eighth grades), two junior high schools

[230] "Office of the Superintendent of Schools of Los Angeles County, BASIC DATA Relating to a Study of the School District Organization of the LOS ANGELES CITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT and the COMPONENT ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS September 1959, A report of the LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION," Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California. The LAUSD without the Four Cities coalition area would generate approximately $422. in tax income per ADA, compared to the Four Cities area, which generated $1,146 in tax income per ADA.

[231] Minutes of the First Augmented Committee Meeting of the Los Angeles City High School District Area 6-3-59, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September 6, 1958-June 19, 1959, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

(seventh and eighth grades), and two high schools (seventh or eighth grades through twelfth grade).[232]

Suggesting that the Four Cities shared a common community identity that it did not share with the city of Los Angeles, Mansfield asserted that a coalition of residents were exploring a longer-range plan to merge into one city, although that idea was in its very early stages. He was joined by "Mrs. Dan Stephens," who identified herself as the president of the Maywood League of Women Voters and a local PTA member. Stephens cited the "tremendous size of the L.A. City School District and lack of personal contact," and argued that a smaller school district for the cities in question would be advantageous. She proposed that a survey of the needs of the area and the possible courses of action would be appropriate. Mansfield also presented a resolution from the Bell City Council that pledged a sum not to exceed five thousand dollars to defray the cost to the LACCSDO for a survey to be undertaken to determine the feasibility of the proposed breakaway district.[233]

Civic leaders in the area had indeed held initial discussions on shared governance, although it may not have encompassed the entirety of the Four Cities as Mansfield contended. Earlier in 1959, leaders from Bell and Maywood—two of the Four Cities coalition members—had considered a merger. Proposed by Bell Mayor P.A. Yerian, the idea apparently died soon

[232] Office of the Superintendent of Schools of Los Angeles County, BASIC DATA Relating to a Study of the School District Organization of the LOS ANGELES CITY HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT and the COMPONENT ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS, September 1959, A report of the LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[233] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the First Augmented Committee Meeting of the Los Angeles City High School District Area 6-3-59, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

after it was proposed, although the Maywood City Council was serious enough about it to include it as an agenda-item at a mid-October meeting.[234] No serious plan, however, emerged from these discussions, and the cities remained separate, independent municipalities.

The Four Cities coalition sought to take advantage of every possible opportunity to try and convince the committee to allow secession as part of the Los Angeles schools unification plan. Mansfield appeared as the group's spokesperson at numerous LACCSDO meetings in 1959, often accompanied by other officials who touted secession, including Lem Young, the Pro Tem Mayor of Maywood, Vernon Mayor Robert J. Furlong, and Huntington Park Councilman Kermit M. Bill, all of whom expressed support for the Four Cities plan.[235] At one point, in response to a motion that the LACCSDO move forward to prepare tentative plans for unification of the Los Angeles districts, Mansfield made a formal request that there be an amendment to any plan "to exclude the four cities."[236] At another meeting, Mansfield asked the committee if a unification study for the Four Cities as a separate district could be part of the one already underway for the Los Angeles districts, presumably to demonstrate that the area had the means to run its own school system. He went further to inquire whether or not an election to create a new district could happen by the end of the year if secession was approved in a timely manner. In response, LACCSDO member D. Clifford Higgins suggested that the coalition shift tactics away

[234] "Council Will Consider City Merger Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1959, SC1.

[235] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the Second Augmented Committee Meeting of the Los Angeles City High School District Area 6-17-59, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1958-June, 1959, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[236] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the Second Augmented Committee Meeting of the Los Angeles City High School District Area 6-17-59, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1958-June, 1959, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

from attempting to include their proposal in the unification process and instead present a petition signed by Southeast Cities residents for secession and creation of the new district.[237]

There was good reason for Mansfield's persistence in seeking to include the Four Cities proposal in the discussions on L.A. City schools unification in the form of new legislation coming from the state capitol that would add obstacles to the district reorganization process. The bill had been signed into law by Governor Pat Brown in the fall of 1959, and required CCSDOs to submit unification plans and proposals to create new school districts to the state board of education for approval, rather than county supervisors.[238] The LACCSDO discussed the ramifications of the new law at its regular September 1959 meeting and noted that not only would new district proposals and changes need the approval of the state board of education, but that it also mandated that CCSDOs "submit to the State Board of Education, not later than September 15, 1963, plans for the formation of either union or unified school districts in all of the areas of Los Angeles County not now in some unified district."[239] Mansfield and the other Four Cities coalition members likely believed they had a limited window of time for making the new school district a reality.

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[237] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the Second Augmented Committee Meeting of the Los Angeles City High School District Area 9-2-59, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1959-June, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[238] The law exempted cases that involved smaller adjustments or changes to district borders. These case would still be decided by county supervisors. The Monterey Hills case discussed in Chapter Three is an example of this distinction.

[239] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the Second Augmented Committee Meeting of the Los Angeles City High School District Area 9-2-59, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1959-June, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

The plan for unification of the Los Angeles school districts, however, was approved in that same month by the LACCSDO and sent to the state board of education for its approval.[240] Leaders of the Four Cities coalition were left with little choice but to pursue secession through the standard petition process, rather than as part of Los Angeles schools unification. The county committee unanimously carried a motion encouraging the Four Cities coalition to continue its study of the feasibility of secession and the creation of a new district and report back in about three months.[241] The coalition ignored the committee's proposed timeline and presented a petition with 1,146 signatures to the LACCSDO the following month. The efforts of the LACCSDO to affect consolidations in the area was being challenged in new ways by the determination of the Four Cities coalition.

Faced with a petition with more than enough signatures to initiate an official inquiry, the LACCSDO began the process by requesting that the coalition submit the names of three citizens in each community to serve as members of a steering committee.[242] This was the opening the Four Cities proponents had sought for months. After a group of area parents appeared at the LACCSDO's December, 1959 meeting requesting the expedited framing of a tentative plan for the proposed district, committee members formed an augmented committee to examine the

[240] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee 10-7-59, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1959-June, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee November 4, 1959, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1959-June, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

feasibility of creating a Four Cities district.[243] The spokesperson for the group of parents, Mrs. Mary Davis, told the committee that "many parents in the area had been contacted and that her request represented their feelings."[244]

The consistent presence of stakeholders representing both sides at the augmented committee meetings reflected the considerable interest in in the proposed secession. It also signaled the determination of Los Angeles school administrators to keep the Southeast Cities area within the unified district's footprint. Ellis A. Jarvis, the superintendent of the Los Angeles City elementary district, was present at one of the first augmented committee meetings in June of 1960 with three other district administrators, including Associate Superintendent Jack Crowther, a regular attendee. Other high-level district administrators, including Los Angeles Board of Education President Dr. Hugh Willett, were often present. Willet provided the committee and its audience with a dramatic statement of the board of education's position at the September 22, 1960 special "community" meeting held at the Bell High School auditorium.[245] Willett referred to the previous "silence" of the board of about the Four Cities proposal, but said that as a body it felt it was time to express its staunch opposition. He presented a four-pronged argument against the withdrawal, which included an assertion that it "would do substantial, immediate, and lasting damage to the financial support of approximately 45% of the school population, kindergarten through 12th grade, in the County of Los Angeles." Willett's other points reiterated the financial

[243] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee 12-9-59, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1959-June, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Rather than the committee's permanent meeting location in downtown Los Angeles.

damage the board believed would result if the area withdrew from the proposed LAUSD. He argued that it would "materially and adversely affect the educational programs of the Los Angeles Unified School District," and it would "constitute a clear violation of at least two of the criteria set forth in the School District Organization Standards adopted by the State Board of Education." Finally, Willett challenged the accuracy of negative characterizations of the districts' "local support" for the area's school-age children.[246] Not surprisingly, the Los Angeles Board of Education's official position stood in complete and total opposition to the arguments presented by Four Cities petitioners.

The Four Cities coalition also faced opposition early on from a group of residents that favored secession from the Los Angeles City schools, but argued that the Four Cities coalition was unreasonably exclusionary. A group of residents representing the Florence-Firestone Park community, an unincorporated portion of Los Angeles County located just west of the Four Cities, and mainly west of Alameda Street, demanded that their community be part of any new school district in the Southeast portion of the Greater Los Angeles area. By the early 1960s Florence-Firestone was a racially and ethnically diverse area which included a considerable number of African Americans, with some neighborhoods comprised of just over 90 percent black residents. It also included a notable number of Latinos and whites.[247]

The ire of some Florence-Firestone residents was raised because of a belief that they should be included in the proposed new district. They asserted that the community's proximity to

[246] Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, PROCEEDINGS of the MEETING IN THE FOUR CITIES AREA September 22, 1960, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1960-June, 1961, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California, 2-3.

[247] Data from U.S. Census Bureau, *Population by Race, Los Angeles County, 1960*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

Bell, Maywood, Huntington Park, and Vernon and the workplaces they shared with residents of those municipalities was an indication of a common community identity with the Four Cities area. Echoing language used previously by the Monterey Hills coalition, the Four Cities committee asserted in response that "as the Florence-Firestone Park area has nothing cultural or social in common with the Four Cities, there is no reason to include that community in the proposed district."[248] The Florence-Firestone Park Civic League responded to the Four Cities argument with a three-point retort, and demand it be included in the proposed new district if the petition proceeded further:

> 1. A school district created in the Southeast should be for the entire Southeast and not just half. The "Four Cities" have a total enrollment of 5700 students, whereas Florence-Firestone Park has over 6000.
> 2. Some 3000 workers in Vernon are residents of the Florence-Firestone Park area. As these workers contribute to that city's great industrial wealth so are their children entitled to share in the free public educational benefits of that wealth equally with the children of workers resident in the "Four Cities."
> 3. As the proposed school district would be supported in large part by taxes of Vernon's heavy industry (Vernon has a resident school population of 25 students), all children in the area should be able to take advantage of the improved educational facilities that would become available.[249]

The Civic League argued that not only was the neighborhood directly adjacent to Four Cities coalition member Huntington Park, it also shared a number of community and demographic characteristics with the Four Cities, most notably a significant number of residents who contributed to the wealth generated by the local factories that were the economic and employment bedrock of the entire Southeast Los Angeles area. Florence-Firestone residents were clearly concerned that a critical source of funding for local schools would be lost if the Four

[248] Lewis O. Williams, "Civic Loop Opposes New School District," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 12, 1960, B7.

[249] Ibid.

Cities plan were enacted, especially if the plan included the industry-rich city of Vernon. The issues of fairness and equity were also built into the argument. If Florence-Firestone contributed a significant portion of the labor that produced the area's local wealth, Mallard and others believed they should share equally in the benefits. Florence-Firestone Park and the Four Cities did share much in common, including a high percentage of male residents employed in the private sector, and a high percentage of males with blue collar jobs relative to the rest of the population of Los Angeles County.[250]

A group representing the Florence-Firestone Park area appeared at the first meeting of the augmented committee of the LACCSDO considering the Four Cities petition to make its case. Led by a resident named Benjamin F. Mallard, the representatives requested that a future augmented committee meeting be held in the Florence-Firestone neighborhood, presumably in order to force the LACCSDO to recognize its stake in the case and to emphasize its claim for inclusion in the new district. A meeting was never scheduled in the neighborhood, but at the January, 1960 meeting, the augmented committee voted unanimously to at least include Florence-Firestone Park in the Four Cities study.[251] While a high school was not located within the Florence-Firestone Park boundaries, there was one junior high school and six elementary schools within its borders with a considerable student population. Capacity for these seven schools was estimated to be 5,636 in 1959-60, and actual enrollment for that school year was

[250] Data from U.S. Census Bureau, *Males Age 14+: In Labor Force: In Civilian Labor Force: Employed, Los Angeles County, 1960; Employed Male Civilians Age 14+: Craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers, Los Angeles County, 1960; Employed Male Civilians Age 14+: Operatives and kindred workers, including mine*, *Los Angeles County, 1960*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[251] MINUTES of the AUGMENTED COMMITTEE MEETING of the LOS ANGELES SCHOOL DISTRICT, Four Cities 1-6-60, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1959-June, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California, 2-3.

6,066. The vast majority of the students attending those schools, more than 6,000, were residents of Florence-Firestone.[252] In contrast, capacity for the same period for the two high schools, the two junior high schools, and the ten elementary schools in the Four Cities (Bell, Maywood, Huntington Park, Vernon) was estimated at just 5,753 with actual enrollment 6,227—the vast majority of whom were residents of the Four Cities, even though 250 students from the Florence-Firestone area were attending Huntington Park High School at the time.[253] The distribution of the students suggests that the schools in the Florence-Firestone neighborhood were far more crowded than those in the Four Cities area.

Even though Florence-Firestone was included in the LACCSDO's study of the Four Cities proposal, the committee ultimately decided to exclude the neighborhood from the final plan it submitted to the state board of education, making the puzzling and ambiguous statement that the "attendance problems in this area are considerably greater than in the areas east of Alameda Street"—an indication that at the very least the committee recognized Alameda Street as an important marker in the area's urban geography.[254] It also cited some very practical, if not justified, reasons for excluding Florence-Firestone Park, including the possibility that 1,546 high school students living in the neighborhood would have to transfer to a new high school if it was

[252] TABLE II School Enrollments FLORENCE-FIRESTONE PARK, Minutes of California State Board of Education May 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 6.

[253] TABLE I School Enrollments FOUR CITIES AREA, Minutes of California State Board of Education May 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 5. Students enrolled who were residents of the Four Cities area totaled 5,640, while 313 were residents of the city of Los Angeles.

[254] A STUDY OF A PROPOSED UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT Composed of the Cities of BELL, HUNTINGTON PARK, MAYWOOD and VERNON and Adjoining Unincorporated Territory January 1960, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 8.

included. The committee invoked a form of racial innocence[255] when it cited the idea that Alameda Street, along with the railroad tracks that accompanied it along its path, was already set as an attendance border by the Los Angeles Board of Education and that the "density of traffic on both the street and the railroad would indicate that this line is a logical westerly boundary of the proposed district."[256] Without addressing the issue of racial segregation and the significance of Alameda as marking a racial and ethnic divide, the LACCSDO made a case for the practicalities of limiting the SAUSD to the east side of the thoroughfare.

Although excluded by the LACCSDO, the Florence-Firestone Park group continued to advocate for its inclusion in the plan, making clear its primary interest in making claim to a portion of the industrial wealth generated in the Southeast Cities area. Representatives were particularly concerned about what local schools might lose financially if Vernon was a part of the proposal, seeking to ensure that they would benefit from taxes collected from the local industry in which they argued they had a stake. In the end, their protests were limited, and the staunch opposition of Four Cities advocates to creating a more ethnic and racially diverse district based on nothing more than the alleged lack of "cultural or social" commonalities exposed the centrality of race to the secession movement.

At first glance, the protests of the Florence-Firestone Civic League had no discernable effect on the LACCSDO's affirmative vote on the Four Cities plan. However, the committee could not justify keeping Vernon a part of the proposed district. Vernon, of course, was a central part of the Florence-Firestone group's claim for inclusion in the proposal. The industrial wealth

[255] See Introduction for theoretical basis for the concept of racial innocence.

[256] A STUDY OF A PROPOSED SAN ANTONIO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT Revised September 1961, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

Vernon generated made it a coveted piece of the Los Angeles area landscape in an era where school district funding came almost entirely from local taxes and bonds approved by voters within school district boundaries. Vernon's considerable financial clout came from the concentration of industry within its city limits and the tax revenue it generated for local services like public schools. A study of the city conducted in 1952 highlighted its unique position among its neighboring cities in terms of its lack of residential development. Only 0.3 percent of its developed area was categorized as "residential," while nearly 74 percent was categorized as "industrial" (19.2 percent "Wholesale" and 54.7 percent "Manufacturing"). There were no schools, parks, or playgrounds located within its city limits. Vernon was a place where many people went to work and in which few chose to live.[257] A letter received by the CCSDO from the mayor of Vernon, in March of 1962, informed the committee that, although formal sanction had not come from the city council, individual members had indicated support for Vernon's inclusion in the SAUSD.[258] Perhaps the most tangible effect of the Florence-Firestone Park Civic League's protestations was the light it shined on the negative financial effects the loss of Vernon's tax base would have on area schools outside of the Four Cities.

With Vernon excluded from the plan, the city of South Gate became increasingly important to SAUSD proponents. Located just south of the original Four Cities, it had a population of 53,831 in 1960 and wielded considerable political influence in the area, in large

[257] Howard J. Nelson, "The Vernon Area, California-A Study of the Political Factor in Urban Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 42, no. 2 (Jun., 1952): 177-191.

[258] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization April 4, 1962, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September 6, 1961-June 19, 1962, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

part because of its size.[259] It was second only to Vernon among the Southeast Cities in terms of the tax revenue it generated for schools. This was demonstrated in sharp terms by an analysis that concluded that without Vernon and South Gate, tax income per student for the SAUSD at LAUSD's rate would be $495.68, and with South Gate (without Vernon) included, the district's approximate income per student would be $511.82—a significant difference for the fledgling district. By itself, however, South Gate's tax income per student would be $568.10, meaning that South Gaters might actually benefit by forming their own district, separate from the SAUSD—a proposal that was considered.[260]

In fact, at the same time that the Four Cities coalition was vigorously pursuing secession from the LAUSD, a serious movement was afoot to investigate the feasibility of a South Gate-only district. Once the LACCSDO began to consider the Four Cities proposal on its own, rather than as a part of the Los Angeles districts unification process, individual members of the South Gate Coordinating Council, an activist group comprised of the city's citizens, sent letters to the committee requesting that the body initiate studies of whether or not the municipality could create its own school system. Coordinating council president R. Earl Sheehan spoke in front of the LACCSDO in mid-December of 1961 imploring it to study the possibility of a South Gate school district as part of its inquiry into the SAUSD proposal.[261]

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[259] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total population, city of South Gate, California, 1960*.

[260] STATISTICAL DATA RELATING TO THE PROPOSED SAN ANTONIO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, AND COMBINATIONS OF SOME COMPONENT AREAS CONCERNED 1959-60, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

[261] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization December 13, 1961, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September 6, 1961-June 19, 1962, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of

A rag-tag countermovement had emerged by the early sixties comprised of Southeast Cities residents who opposed secession from the Los Angeles districts. Most of the time, it was expressed though letters that conveyed various positions against secession, but occasionally an actual petition was put forward, like the one submitted in January of 1960 by Huntington Park resident Howard A. Webb that would exclude his city from the SAUSD plan.[262] The opposition from inside of the Southeast Cities became louder when South Gate was considering whether or not to secede from the LAUSD. In May of 1962, Virginia Wulfestieg appeared in front of the LACCSDO representing the "Citizen's Committee for Safeguarding Education," and expressed opposition to South Gate secession in particular while alleging that "the proposed San Antonio Unified School District includes an area where children and parents of children in the public schools are in the minority."[263] Seeking to counter the SAUSD coalition's contention that their movement was motivated by a desire to provide better education, she also pointed out that school bond issues had failed in the cities of Bell and Maywood in 1958 and 1960, intimating that taxes and other considerations were paramount to the possible detriment of local schools.[264] The Citizen's Committee for Safeguarding Education's activity was limited, though, and this was its

Education, Downey, California. The other school districts cited by the committee were Downey, Paramount, and Lynwood.

[262] Minutes of the Augmented Committee Meeting of the Los Angeles School District (Four Cities) January 6, 1960, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1959-June 19, 1960, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[263] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization May 2, 1962, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September 6, 1961-June 19, 1962, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[264] Ibid.

only interaction with the LACCSDO about the SAUSD, although it later submitted a statement to the state board of education in opposition to the proposed district. At that same meeting, South Gate resident Grace Shepherd presented a petition representing another group of opponents. It was signed by 437 South Gate citizens that called specifically for the exclusion of the city from the proposed SAUSD. Other letters to the LACCSDO from the Southeast Cities area also expressed support for keeping the area's schools with the LAUSD. Mildred R. Silvis of Maywood wrote of her "satisfaction with Maywood schools," while Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Ferguson of Bell told of their "satisfaction with the Los Angeles school system."[265] There was real opposition to secession, but it ultimately gained little momentum, and therefore had a negligible effect on the movement to create the SAUSD.

By 1962, with Vernon and the Florence-Firestone area already excluded from consideration and South Gate leaders hesitant, the SAUSD as constituted at that point would only merge schools in Huntington Park, Maywood, Bell, and the unincorporated county areas of Cudahy and Walnut Park.[266] Even though the proposal had lost some key parts of its territory, the petitioners had become a well-organized operation, even appointing officials to lead an unofficial district administration. Two letters from "Mrs. Lou Ida Caster, Secretary for the proposed San Antonio Unified School District" were presented at the February, 1962 LACCSDO regular meeting.[267] Caster became a regular attendee of committee meetings for the next year as the

[265] Ibid. Unfortunately, I could not locate the original letters to the committee, and I had to rely on the summaries of these letters in meeting minutes.

[266] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization December 13, 1961, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September 6, 1961-June 19, 1962, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[267] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization February 7, 1962, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September 6, 1961-

"face" of the SAUSD. At the same meeting, the petitioners announced that they had arranged a tour of the SAUSD area for committee members, much to the consternation of LAUSD officials. Richard Lawrence of the LAUSD's Budget Division, one of the district's representatives at the meeting, argued that the LAUSD should host the tour rather than the petitioners, and even offered district buses for the committee and its staff. The LACCSDO, however, decided as a body that, since the SAUSD representatives had proffered the invitation, they should conduct the tour, which happened later that month hosted by the ad-hoc staff of the proposed breakaway district.[268]

In a meeting in early June of 1962, the LACCSDO Augmented Committee accepted and approved the final plan for the area's secession and the establishment of the new school district by a 9-1 vote. The only 'no' vote came, not surprisingly, from the LAUSD representative on the committee. The LACCSDO reiterated that Vernon's rich tax base would take too much of a financial toll on LAUSD if it were to secede, and that the city would remain excluded from the plan.[269] It had also decided that there was sufficient support to include South Gate in the plan that was sent to the state board of education. The San Antonio Unified School District (SAUSD), as approved by the LACCSDO, would include the cities of Bell, Cudahy,[270] Huntington Park,

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June 19, 1962, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[268] Ibid.

[269] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Recommendation of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization to Form a "San Antonio Unified School District" August 30, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 5; At this time, most money for individual school districts came directly from local taxes collected from cities within school district boundaries.

[270] Cudahy was incorporated in November of 1960.

Maywood, South Gate, the unincorporated area of Walnut Park, and five other small unincorporated areas of the County of Los Angeles, all located just southeast of Los Angeles.[271]

Even with tax revenue-rich Vernon now excluded from the proposed district, the LAUSD's staunch opposition to the plan was reaffirmed through a letter sent to California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Roy E. Simpson from LAUSD Superintendent Jack P. Crowther in late August of 1962. Among a list of reasons for the district's continued opposition, Crowther restated the argument that the loss of the territory and its tax revenue would still cause "severe financial loss" for the LAUSD, and added that "it will establish a dangerous precedent that large and efficient unified districts can be divided upon an alleged but unproved basis of community interest and local control." He also cited what he described as the "immense" workload that would be created by the task of dividing assets and liabilities between LAUSD and the new district.[272] In addition to the financial loss, LAUSD administrators were clearly as concerned about the precedent that would be set by the secession of such an important piece of the district.

Crowther also appealed to the state board of education's own goal of achieving larger, more efficient unified school districts, arguing that the SAUSD's proponents sought to use the very process by which it was seeking to encourage unification for its own "community interest," despite the damage it might do to the unification process by setting a precedent for the break-up

[271] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Recommendation of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization to Form a "San Antonio Unified School District" August 30, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

[272] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Recommendation of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization to Form a "San Antonio Unified School District" August 30, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 4.

of newly-created districts.[273] In addition, the board's letter to the state superintendent alleged that many teachers would be "uprooted" from the teaching locations where they had spent the majority of their careers. It cited a survey of teachers in the proposed SAUSD that indicated 93 percent planned on remaining with the LAUSD if the new district were allowed to form. It also cited the administrative burden of having to relocate an estimated 1,200 teachers to new schools.[274]

Finally, Crowther appealed to the fact that in the view of the Los Angeles Board of Education, the LAUSD had complied with the mandate of the state legislature through its unification effort, and essentially asked that the state board of education now honor that effort by keeping the unified district intact. He also pointed out that a recent bond issue for LAUSD had been rejected by voters, which, along with the recent rejection by voters of the raising of the district's tax ceiling, left it scrambling for funds to help alleviate overcrowding.[275] The consequences of Southeast Cities secession for LAUSD could be dire, according to Crowther. He alleged that according to data from the 1959-1960 school year, more than $600,000 in tax revenue would be diverted from the LAUSD to the SAUSD. Crowther wrote that "Actually, current statistics would show that a much greater loss to Los Angeles would result because of the continuing rapid growth of school enrollment in Los Angeles compared with a relatively stable enrollment in the proposed district."[276] According to Crowther and the board of education, the

[273] Letter from LOS ANGELES CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION to Dr. Roy E. Simpson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, August 24, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

[274] Ibid., 2.

[275] Ibid., 3-4.

[276] Ibid., 4-5.

primary motivation for the creation of the SAUSD coalition was political maneuvering by Bell's city administrator, "with the financial backing of some business men in Vernon."[277] While Bell City Administrator Donald Mansfield was indeed integral to the petition process, Crowther's suggestion ignored the considerable support the SAUSD plan garnered among residents.

Proponents of the new district appealed to the state board for an affirmative vote via correspondence that often directly rebutted some of Crowther's key arguments. One of particular note came from LACCSDO member Leonard (Jay) H. Woodward, who laid out in detail the position of the committee and justified its approval of the SAUSD. In endorsing the plan and defending the work of the LACCSDO, Woodward presented a nearly point-by-point retort to Crowther's letter to the state board. In it he alleged that much of the basis for LAUSD's argument that the SAUSD would cause severe financial difficulty for the larger district was based on numbers calculated with the inclusion of Vernon, which, he pointed out, had been excluded in the final proposal. Woodward also argued that even though the financial loss to the LAUSD with the SAUSD's creation seemed significant, Crowther "does not point out that such an amount is less than 2 tenths of one percent of the funds received annually by Los Angeles School District [sic]."[278] To the concern raised by Crowther that the withdrawal of the SAUSD territory may lead to more areas seeking to leave the LAUSD, Woodward defended the ability of his committee to best determine the ideal size and structure of districts in Los Angeles County. "He seems to disregard the function of the County Committee," Woodward wrote, "which safeguards (in this case by 3 years of study) against any proposal being considered by the State

[277] Ibid., 5.

[278] Written statement: To: State Board of Education, From: Leonard H. Woodard, September 15, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

Board of Education which, in the County Committee's opinion, is not in the best interest of better education and which would conflict with over-all [sic] County planning."[279]

In his defense of the LACCSDO as "a competent body," Woodward advocated for the SAUSD in the strongest terms, arguing that it "would be capable of providing better education opportunity." He had clearly become invested in the success of the SAUSD effort, and the argument he made in favor of its approval betrayed the underlying motivation on the part of its proponents to preserve an educational ideal they believed was under threat. This is captured in the conclusion of his statement to the state board, where he situates the SAUSD case in the context of larger national political debates over the nature of representative democracy and the role of the state and federal governments versus "local control":

> It remains for the area's people themselves to decide by their vote as to whether they would prefer their own 17,000 student school district, thus becoming the 18th largest school district among the 99 school districts in the State of California. We urge you to arrange this determination…a determination in keeping with the deepest American tradition…by approving the San Antonio Unified School District for consideration by its voters.[280]

By invoking an "American tradition," Woodward tied the SAUSD effort to the exceedingly vague Common Schools ideal of locally administered schools. As the Los Angeles schools merged into a single unified district and as the population of the Los Angeles area continued to grow exponentially, the local control over schools that SAUSD proponents had conceptualized

[279] Ibid.

[280] Ibid.

as part of a set of traditional American rights assigned to white Americans began to seem less-and-less plausible.[281]

Woodward's statement also served as a response to a larger group of critics of both the committee and the SAUSD effort. A representative of a group called the Citizen's Committee for Safeguarding Public Education offered vocal denunciation of some key aspects of the committee's reasoning in its approval of the SAUSD proposal, particularly the assertion that an indication of community unity or identity was that "one could not determine where one community left off and another began in this area."[282] In retort, the Citizen's Committee argued that "It is very doubtful if anyone can clearly tell where one community leaves off and another begins in all of Los Angeles County, or even of Southern California."[283] It also criticized the way in which the final plans for the SAUSD were prepared, with the inclusion of South Gate a particular point of contention, along with the allegation that the county committee did not seriously consider the opinions or arguments of those who opposed the plan at public hearings.[284]

While opposition to the Southeast Cities secession plan was limited and diffuse during the CCSDO process, an opposition platform was presented to the state board of education in advance of the SAUSD hearing via a joint statement from both the Citizen's Committee for Safeguarding Public Education and a group called the South Gate Citizens Committee. It

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[281] This is part of what George Lipsitz has referred to as the "possessive investment in whiteness." George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

[282] CITIZEN'S COMMITTEE FOR SAFEGUARDING PUBLIC EDUCATION, STATEMENT IN OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED SAN ANTONIO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

[283] Ibid.

[284] Ibid.

reiterated many points made in earlier public statements, citing the idea that "not one specific recommendation for improvement of the educational opportunities offered children has been made by the proponents," and that the LAUSD was already "nationally recognized as an outstanding school system." They also disputed proponents' claims that the new district would lead to lower property taxes in the area, asserting that the Southeast Cities already had "one of the lowest school tax rates in Los Angeles County," that more funds had been spent in the operation of local schools than had been collected in taxes from the area, and that if the new district were to be created, taxes would not go down and, in fact, might increase. In reality, both sides had likely overstated the effect the creation of the SAUSD would have on the tax rate. According to the LACCSDO's analysis, the maximum tax rate for the SAUSD "may be the maximum rate existing" in the LAUSD, meaning that while it was unlikely that the tax rate would decrease, it was equally unlikely to increase—in the short-term at least.[285] The statement also challenged the SAUSD petitioners' argument that a smaller district could better serve local students, arguing that "bond elections have not carried in this area since 1955. Over two and one half million dollars of improvements have been made in LOCAL SCHOOLS because the rest of Los Angeles District [sic] carried the election!"[286]

While opponents leveled a number of compelling arguments against the SAUSD proposal, the issue of defining "community identity" was most significant hurdle for its proponents. Although they argued that theirs was a unified front and that the similarities between

[285] BASIC DATA on the Proposed SAN ANTONIO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT 3/30/62, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

[286] ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE FORMATION of the SAN ANTONIO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1-2.

the municipalities that constituted the coalition demonstrated a cohesive local identity, the state superintendent of public education's office did not agree. As a report about the case in 1962 from the superintendent to the California Board of Education asserted: "This statement of existence of a community identity in the area is not universally accepted." [287] The report went further in substantiating this claim, stating that: "There is not unanimous agreement among people in the area, or those familiar with the area, that there is any great degree of identity with the total area as a community." The state superintendent's conclusion directly challenged the LACCSDO, which contended in its recommendation for approval that: "A report of the Citizens Study Committee (Status and Identity Committee to study the formation of the San Antonio Unified School District) indicates the existence of good community identity. This seems to be true despite a complex of municipalities in the area."[288] More specifically, the county committee cited "common interests in their churches, service and fraternal organizations, shopping, newspaper reading, and other such factors."[289] The disagreement on the degree of shared community identity did not bode well for the Southeast Cities petitioners.

Accompanying the push by state policymakers to affect unification and consolidation was a growing concern with the problems of race, ethnicity, and taking action to end *de facto* segregation in schools. The state board of education became concerned enough with the issue that in early 1962 it directed its staff to "provide information concerning authorizations for action

[287] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Recommendation of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization to Form a 'San Antonio Unified School District' August 30, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 2.

[288] Ibid., 5.

[289] A STUDY OF THE PROPOSED SAN ANTONIO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT Revised September 1961, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

that the Board may use to implement policy with respect to integration in the public schools." The resulting report recommended that the department of education focus on three specific areas: district organization proposals, school site approval, and "establishment of school attendance areas in school districts."[290] The most direct influence the state department of education had on effecting desegregation was through the school district organization process.

Emphasizing the impact a change in district configuration might have on the racial distribution of pupils in schools, the authors of the report cited specific problematic provisions in the California Administrative Code that dealt with board of education regulations for school district organization. They found the "standard for community identity" contained in the code to be particularly problematic.[291] The authors were quick to point out that the standard "seems to be inclusive of all aspects of community and community life and may be interpreted to prohibit exclusion of a part of a community from a district or the inclusion of only part of a community in a proposed district." However, they also emphasized that a strict definition of "community" does not exist, and the term "community identity" is only loosely described by state statute.[292] Thus, a key standard for determining what it meant for a school to belong to or in a "community" was left wide open for interpretation.

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[290] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Ethnic Problems, Minutes of California State Board of Education May 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 1.

[291] Ibid. The standard, as quoted from the report, included the following: "The school district should include all of the area embraced within the community. The community as used here includes one or more towns or cities and the surrounding territory from which people come for business, social, recreational, fraternal, or similar reasons."

[292] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Ethnic Problems, Minutes of California State Board of Education May 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 2.

With these issues top-of-mind, approval from the state board of education was the final obstacle to allow Southeast Cities residents to vote on whether or not to make the SAUSD a reality. The process for all involved had been long and, presumably, grueling to this point. It had involved discussion and debate at numerous CCSDO regular meetings, nine augmented committee meetings for the Four Cities/SAUSD case specifically, two public hearings, and more than 20 additional community meetings outside of the official SDO process. The LACCSDO's final proposal for the formation of the SAUSD included the unequivocal statement that "The proposed San Antonio Unified School District meets all the criteria of adequacy established by the State Board of Education."[293] With that, the fate of the SAUSD was in the hands of the state board.

For the first time, the California State Board of Education was faced with a case that might result in the partition of an already unified district.[294] Despite the LACCSDO's confident pronouncement that all of the state board's prerequisites for approval had been met, the state superintendent's office did not agree. It recommended that the board reject the proposal. In addition to finding fault with several specific parts of the plan, the report echoed the Los Angeles Board of Education in expressing concern that this could be the first of a number of future proposed partitions of a district that was just recently unified. It also argued that action on a proposal like the SAUSD would be more appropriate in the context of a countywide master plan, presumably to ensure that the size and configuration of the new district fit a larger and longer

[293] Proposal for the Formation of the San Antonio Unified School District, August 1, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 2.

[294] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Recommendation of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization to Form a 'San Antonio Unified School District' August 30, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 5.

term scheme for district organization. Taking all of these factors into account, the superintendent's official recommendation to the board of education was to deny the proposal.[295] The state board agreed with the superintendent's report and, at its September, 1962 meeting, voted unanimously to reject the SAUSD proposal.[296]

The debate over the SAUSD at the state board meeting, held in downtown Los Angeles, revealed the disconnect between the decision-making criteria of the LACCSDO and the state board of education. Despite the claims of SAUSD coalition members and supporters that the LAUSD was too big to provide quality education and meet the needs of local communities, the debate at the state board meeting quickly shifted to the effects of Southeast Cities secession on racial integration efforts in the area and whether or not the breakaway district would violate the principles of unification that the state board sought to implement. One board member based their opposition to the SAUSD proposal on the idea that "the state board would be violating its own policy, which recommends solidification rather than fragmentation of school areas."[297] Another stated that "I listened in vain for a word concerning the betterment of the educational program under such a unified district and heard none."[298]

From the beginning, race and *de facto* segregation were underlying, but often unspoken and rarely emphasized, factors at play in the SAUSD debate. However, these issues were front-and-center at the state board meeting, and dominated the discussion. Speakers who opposed the proposal told the board that "an underlying reason [for seeking withdrawal from LAUSD] was a

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[295] Ibid, 5.

[296] Dick Turpin, "Plan for School District Rejected," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1962, D22.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Ibid.

desire to escape integration in area schools."[299] Theodore Wright, Chairman of the NAACP's Project Integration Education wrote to the state board in advance of the meeting that the creation of the SAUSD "will create problems of social unrest and racial unrest." He further commented that: "The formation of a San Antonio Unified School District will seriously handicap the program of racial integration throughout the Los Angeles school system, particularly as it applies to Huntington Park High School and South Gate High School.[300]

Some opponents came armed with evidence that had never been cited during the county committee phase of the case. Zane Meckler, a member of the Education Committee of the Community Relations Conference of Southern California, argued that the San Antonio district would be "'lily white' and not in the best interest of the state board's expressed policy to promote integration." He also criticized the unification proponents' "desire for local autonomy and community pride," calling it "fiction," and argued that "formation of the district would perpetuate *de facto* segregation."[301] Additionally, Meckler alleged that segregation had been an issue in the recent Monterey Hills and La Cañada secession cases.[302] A representative of the LACCSDO retorted that figures presented by Meckler that demonstrated the racial homogeneity of the proposed San Antonio district "had never been presented to the committee," and issued a

[299] Ibid.

[300] Ibid.

[301] Ibid.

[302] Statement before the State Board of Education re Proposed San Antonio School District by Community Relations Conference of Southern California September 15, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

denial to the charge that racial segregation was a factor that drove the Monterey Hills secession decision.[303]

Meckler presented the results of a review of census data of the area prepared by a sub-committee of his organization. Using a map prepared by the group and presented to the board of education, Meckler argued that the new district would be 'lily white' and revealed the "dominantly Caucasian character of the proposed San Antonio School District in contrast to the heavy Negro residence west of Alameda Boulevard, which under this proposal would stay within the Los Angeles City School District." He also pointed out that three census tracts immediately adjacent to the proposed SAUSD were heavily Mexican-American.[304] In its analysis, the Community Relations Conference demonstrated to the state board of education that the cities within the SAUSD area were comprised of between 98 and 99 percent "Caucasian" residents. It separated out the number of black residents from the populations of each city, in addition to those with Spanish surnames, to come up with this measure.[305] In his critique of the SAUSD proposal, Meckler complimented the efforts of the LAUSD to "set up specific machinery to consider ways of avoiding or eliminating de facto segregated schools," creating a sense that SAUSD backers were isolated in their support for a district that would ultimately serve to exacerbate segregation.[306]

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[303] Dick Turpin, "Plan for School District Rejected," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1962, D22.

[304] Statement before the State Board of Education re Proposed San Antonio School District by Community Relations Conference of Southern California September 15, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

[305] Ibid.

[306] Ibid.

That basic argument of exclusion was reiterated by Benjamin F. Mallard of the Florence-Firestone Park Civic League, this time representing his community in front of the state board of education rather than the Los Angeles LACCSDO. Similar to the argument he made to the county committee, Mallard requested that should "Vernon or any portion of Vernon be included" in the SAUSD, the Florence-Firestone area should also be included.[307] While reiterating his earlier points about residents of Florence-Firestone Park helping to create the area's industrial wealth through their labor and that, therefore, their children should be entitled to share in that wealth, Mallard also attached some more specifics, including the claim that around 3,000 workers in the city of Vernon were residents of Florence-Firestone. He also revealed a particular concern with overcrowding if the SAUSD was given sanction, stating that based on a prediction of growth in central Los Angeles of 35 percent, the LAUSD's existing classroom deficit would increase.[308]

The relatively smooth path to approval of the SAUSD plan at the county level had become a dead end at the state level for SAUSD proponents. Petitioners had the right to resubmit, and the SAUSD coalition was determined to do so. With the support of the majority of the county committee, SAUSD representatives made clear their intent to resubmit the plan. At the same time, the LACCSDO as a body expressed confusion about the reasons the plan was rejected by the state board.[309]

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[307] FLORENCE-FIRESTONE CIVIC LEAGUE Sept. 15, 1962, Minutes of California State Board of Education September 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California.

[308] Ibid.

[309] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization November 7, 1962, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1962-June, 1963, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California, 11.

Less than a year after the SAUSD plan was first rejected, the Southeast Cities petitioners and the LACCSDO submitted a new version to the state board of education that was nearly identical to the original. The board denied the proposal a second time, based once again almost exclusively on the grounds that the plan would exacerbate segregation. According to an account of the meeting, which happened in late April of 1963, just over seven months after the board ruled on the original SAUSD plan, the majority maintained "that the proposed San Antonio Unified School District would have set up a barrier along Alameda St. [sic] between whites on the east and Negroes on the west." Eight of the nine board of education members voted "no" on the proposal, and the ninth abstained.[310]

The SAUSD coalition had changed its basic argument for the need for withdrawal in some strategic ways the second time around. It now contended that the LAUSD had "slighted them in its building program in an effort to keep pace with newer areas." The coalition also charged "that the existing district has not recognized that, because of their nearness to the Vernon industrial area, they need more vocational emphasis in schools."[311] In response to the state board of education's charge that the new school district would "set up" a racial barrier along Alameda Street, representatives of the SAUSD coalition contended that the barrier had actually "existed for years and shouldn't prevent them from gaining local autonomy to improve education"—an argument given heft by the area's history of racial segregation.[312] It was not a

[310] Daryl Lembke, "Huntington Park Area Loses Bid to Form School District," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1963, A1.

[311] Ibid. The charge that more vocational education was needed for local students was also raised by the residents of Lynwood in 1949 when they broke away from the Compton school districts and created their own unified district.

[312] Daryl Lembke, "Huntington Park Area Loses Bid to Form School District," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1963, A1.

denial that local schools were segregated, but an assertion of racial innocence and a denial that their work to create the SAUSD was motivated in any way by racial prejudice. The state board meeting this time featured the testimony of the manager of the Maywood Chamber of Commerce and the former mayor of the city of Bell, who alleged in no uncertain terms that racial segregation was the driving force behind the SAUSD plan. "When they set up the boundaries," stated P.A. Yeria, "they didn't include the Florence-Firestone Park area because it was black."

The result of the second board of education hearing led another member of the LACCSDO to publicly express frustration at the decisions in the Southeast Cities case and mount a defense of the committee's position—much like Leonard H. Woodward had in response to the Los Angeles Board of Education's criticisms. While presenting the LACCSDO's position at the meeting, Ross Amspoker, speaking on behalf of the committee, said that "there have been tendencies in recent board actions that make me wonder if I'm wasting my time on the county committee," and charged that the state board of education was "'trying this case over again' after it had already been studied by the committee for four years."[313] The tension between county committees and the state board of education, which had existed since their establishment in the mid-1940s, had clearly increased over time and reflected the ways in which the priorities of state education officials had diverged from those of county administrators.

Encouraged by the SAUSD coalition to resubmit the plan, the LACCSDO decided in late 1963 to try one more time, again with few changes. In November, committee staff consulted with the state department of education to ensure that resubmitting such a similar plan would not

[313] Ibid.

violate some specific portions of the California Education Code.[314] After receiving assurance from California Department of Education Bureau of School District Organization Chief Robert Clemo that resubmitting the SAUSD plan would likely not be hampered by education code or legislative provisions, the LACCSDO decided to move forward. Clemo also indicated to the committee "that it would be well to resubmit the plan in accordance with the usual procedures in order to completely dispose of the matter."[315] The SAUSD proposal was once again slated to appear on the state board of education's meeting agenda. However, in May of 1964 the LACCSDO was informed that it had been removed from the schedule due to a technicality. The state board had sought the opinion of the California Attorney General as to whether or not it could consider the SAUSD issue again. In contrast to the opinion of Clemo, Attorney General Stanley Mosk's official conclusion was that a CCSDO "may neither approve nor submit to the State Board of Education a plan that proposes to remove territory from a Chapter 10 unified district (Los Angeles Unified) within five years from the date of its formation unless the governing board of that district consents."[316] The Los Angeles Board of Education, of course, did

[314] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization November 6, 1963, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1963-June, 1964, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California. According to committee meeting minutes, the specific sections of the education code in question were 3009 and 2309.

[315] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization June 3, 1964, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1963-June, 1964, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[316] Minutes of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization November 6, 1963, Minutes of the Meetings of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization September, 1963-June, 1964, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

not consent, and the efforts of the SAUSD coalition to use the CCSDO process to secede from the LAUSD had officially failed.

The debates over the SAUSD case at the state board of education meetings reflected a growing ideological battle taking place in California during the 1960s, when the push by state legislators and the department of education for unification of the state's school districts was most intense. This conflict pitted state policymakers, who increasingly practiced racial liberalism—which merged a belief in government intervention as a solution to social and political problems with the conviction that racial inequality was "fundamentally incompatible with the emancipatory tenets of the American Creed," against those who opposed the liberal state in favor of "local control" of services like schools.[317] The language of the SAUSD petitioners and the LACCSDO, which often invoked notions of "local" and "neighborhood" control of schools, and the focus of state board members on segregation reflected this political division.

While the SAUSD petitioners worked to gain approval to bring the proposal to the ballot, another battle was being waged by residents on the west side of Alameda Boulevard. The 1963-1964 school year saw a ramping up of the NAACP/CORE/UCRC efforts to attack *de facto* segregation in housing, employment, and education in South Central Los Angeles. In public education, the effort moved from registration drives to more focused direct action against the LAUSD. In response to civil rights activists' demands that the district take action to alleviate *de facto* segregation, the Los Angeles Board of Education considered a proposal to make boundary changes to some high schools and junior high schools to ease segregation through voluntary student transfers. This idea, however, was derided by both residents of the SAUSD coalition and

[317] Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010) 14-16.

civil rights activists. Civil rights leaders in particular described the proposal as "unsatisfactory" and "tokenism at its worst."[318] The LAUSD's attempt to strike a compromise only seemed to aggravate all sides.

The debate over "local control" of public schools had manifest itself in the Greater Southeast Los Angeles area as a struggle that involved civil rights activists, the California State Board of Education, the Los Angeles Board of Education, and residents of the majority-white Southeast Cities. The battle lines and they loyalties of the different parties were not always clear. While the Los Angeles Board of Education fought against the SAUSD petition, they also resisted the calls by civil rights activists to take serious steps to alleviate *de facto* segregation. As Becky Nicolaides has described it, "A recurring pattern soon emerged: civil rights groups engaged in nonviolent protests, the board responded slowly and ineffectively, and the white suburbs mobilized ideologically and organizationally against civil rights."[319] When the LAUSD announced that it was planning an expansion and renovation of Jordan High, civil rights activists moved beyond protest and filed suit against the Los Angeles Board of Education.[320] The lawsuit contended that there was space for more students at South Gate High School, and that expanding Jordan High in the face of this fact would only exacerbate segregation.[321] The case brought by the ACLU against the district, *Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education*, was stuck in

[318] Dick Turpin, "Boundary Changes Proposed To Ease School Segregation," *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1963, B1.

[319] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 289.

[320] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 166-167. The lawsuit, with the support of CORE, the NAACP, and the UCRC, was actually filed by the ACLU.

[321] The lawsuit was *Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education*, and was litigated for nearly twenty years, between 1963 and 1982.

litigation until 1968 when it was revised and re-filed, this time by both the ACLU and the NAACP, alleged that de facto segregation existed throughout the entire LAUSD, not just in the Southeastern section of the district.

Meanwhile, the backers of the SAUSD were not willing to wait for the five-year embargo on changes to LAUSD borders to expire before taking further action. They were already organized, and they found increasing motivation to take action to preserve the all-white schools they had fought for decades to maintain. While the CCSDO process had failed to yield the results many desired, the SAUSD coalition would find new ways to fight for their "ideal schools."

## Chapter Five – From Local Fight to Statewide Battle

The California State Board of Education's rejection of the San Antonio Unified School District (SAUSD) plan added to the growing sense in the Southeast Cities that neighborhood schools and local community identity were being undermined by government regulations.[322] The state board had created policies for school district organization and consolidation that prioritized desegregation wherever and whenever possible. These policies were reflected in its decisions in the SAUSD case. At the same time, the filing and long litigation of the *Crawford* case also joined the LAUSD and the communities it served with those across the country that had either been mandated to devise and implement desegregation programs or were involved in lawsuits that alleged *de facto* segregation. But despite the pressure put on the Los Angeles Board of Education by civil rights activists and the *Crawford* case, by the mid-1960s integration efforts in LAUSD remained halting, at best, creating an opportunity for residents of the Southeast Cities to regroup and devise new ways to fight to preserve their segregated schools.[323]

Efforts to desegregate the LAUSD were slowed both by a board of education that refused to enact substantive policies that would encourage or incentivize integration, and opposition

[322] Race and ethnicity were central to how proponents of the SAUSD conceived of "neighborhood schools."

[323] Memo to State Board, SUBJECT: Ethnic Problems, Minutes of California State Board of Education May 1962, California State Archives, Sacramento, California, 3. By the early 1960s, the California Board of Education had included the "racial composition of the neighborhood" and "the concomitant racial complexion of the potential student body" when considering school site approvals. For attendance area decisions, the board had not specifically adopted rules relating to ethnicity or race but asserted its authority to do so.

from groups like the SAUSD proponents. However, a larger resistance movement to court-ordered mandatory busing of students between schools, which gradually became the preferred means for attempting to effect integration in public school districts nationwide, provided segregationists with an issue that would draw a larger base of political support and further hamper the implementation of an effective integration program. Busing generated significant opposition from white parents in particular in places like Boston and Detroit—resistance that by the late 1960s and early-1970s was often punctuated by intense demonstrations and racist rhetoric.[324] In February of 1971, almost one-third of Denver's school buses were dynamited while they were parked overnight.[325] Pontiac, Michigan saw some of the most intense resistance to busing implementation in fall of that same year, when violent protests that left nine students injured—eight black and one white—were followed by the firebombing of ten parked school buses.[326]

Busing became such a controversial topic that it garnered presidential attention, turning the school bus into a symbol of the overreach of government and the growing perception of a loss of local political autonomy on a nationwide scale. The position of the executive branch was made clear in 1970 by President Nixon's Attorney General, John Mitchell, who stated that all citizens had "the right to reject unreasonable requirements of busing and to send their children to

[324] Two of the best sources on the attempts to implement mandatory busing in Boston are: Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985). Formisano in particular calls this backlash against busing "reactionary populism," where residents of Boston's white areas assumed a defensive posture against the perception that their neighborhood autonomy was threatened.

[325] Judith F. Buncher, ed., *The School Busing Controversy: 1970-75* (New York, Facts on File, 1975), 207.

[326] Ibid., 210.

neighborhood schools."[327] This position put the Nixon administration in direct opposition to the mandates of courts across the country that called on districts to devise desegregation plans. Nixon made his opposition to busing an important tenet of the brand of conservatism he advanced during his administration, going as far as expressing his support for the drafting of an amendment to the United States Constitution that would bar busing for desegregation purposes. "Busing" gradually became a term that represented in a tangible way the threat neighborhood schools faced. It began to be used by opponents of desegregation both as a way to appeal to a larger group of potential allies and as a way to reassert racial innocence by focusing on the possible deleterious effects of busing students away from their "home" schools rather than the intent of the programs to alleviate segregation.

In the mid-1960s, however, opponents of desegregation were fighting momentum that had been growing in localities across the country for government intervention to alleviate the problem of *de facto* segregation in public schools. In the Los Angeles area, the protests of civil rights activists and the filing of the *Crawford* case, with its initial focus on the racial imbalance between South Gate and Jordan High Schools, placed particular emphasis on the problem of segregation in Greater Southeast Los Angeles. In time, advocates for the creation of the SAUSD responded to *Crawford* and the increasing attention given to segregation in their neighborhoods by linking their cause to the growing opposition movement to mandatory student reassignment, one increasingly led by a state assemblyman and South Gate business owner named Floyd Wakefield.

[327] Ibid., 102.

Even before the original filing of *Crawford*, changes to the leadership of the Los Angeles Board of Education likely contributed to a sense among residents of the Southeast Cities that the segregation they fought to preserve in local schools would be subject to desegregation efforts of some type—no doubt a motivating factor behind the movement to create the SAUSD. The election of Mary Tinglof to board president in mid-1962 marked the end of an era of conservative dominance in district administration that was characterized by anti-communism and opposition to accepting federal or state funding. Tinglof's ascent to board leadership meant a shift toward a willingness to consider initial efforts to evaluate and address segregation in the district—a step the board had been unwilling to take for at least the last decade. She also advocated for accepting federal funding—another proposition the board had resisted, based on the argument that it might interfere with local—meaning LAUSD—control of the district.[328]

The Los Angeles board's conservatism up to this point was consistent with a larger postwar political turn in the late 1940s and the early years of the Cold War that equated agitation for civil rights with communism. There was particular concern among board members during the era with the political leanings of teachers and teacher unions, including a demand by the board of education that its employees sign a loyalty oath as part of its efforts to eliminate communism from the schools.[329] The pressure generated by investigations by the Tenney and Burns committees—joint bodies of the California legislature tasked in the late 1940s and early 1950s with identifying and exposing subversive public employees in the state contributed in large part

[328] This was part of a larger, national debate over federal funding and the extent to which the federal government should be involved in public education. The signing into law of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in September of 1958 was critical to this debate. While the total amount of money the federal government contributed through the NDEA was not enormous, it legitimized for the first time federal aid to education at all levels.

[329] "Turbulent School Session Debates Loyalty, Textbooks," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1952.

to the firing and blacklisting of a number of teachers in the Los Angeles districts.[330] It also led the national office of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to revoke the charter of its Los Angeles-based AFT Local 430, which represented teachers in the Los Angeles Schools, in 1948. The next year, the AFT replaced the local with a new one which was to be led by a group of more "conservative" teachers who had called for the investigation into Local 430 in the first place.[331]

The Los Angeles Board of Education's rejection of outside funding reflected its concern at the time with maintaining "local control" of its schools. In the mid-1950s, when the federal government began to offer limited direct funding to public school districts across the country, the Los Angeles board refused to participate, a position conveyed by a member who asserted that his opposition to federal funding was based on the idea that the "helping hand becomes the ruling hand" and that Los Angeles needed to preserve "home rule for public schools."[332] In 1956, the newly-elected school board president went so far as to assert that the districts should also reject aid from private outside sources, "on the principle that control of the educational program here would be lost in time to groups outside the school system."[333] The board's positioning on funding reflected the thinking of those in areas like the Southeast Cities who held the local administration of neighborhood schools as sacred. However, the irony in the fact that the

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[330] Brian Kovalesky, "The Red Scare Goes to High School: Jack B. Tenney, Communism, and Canoga Park High School, 1946" (MA thesis, California State University, Northridge, 2008); California State Legislature, Senate, *Journal of the Senate, Legislature of the State of California, 1955 Regular Session*, January3-June 8, 1955, 423-431.

[331] Sara R. Smith, "Organizing for Social Justice: Rank-and-File Teachers' Activism and Social Unionism in California, 1948-1978" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2014), 1.

[332] "School Board Opposes Federal Aid in Building," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1956, 5.

[333] "Mrs. Stafford Elected School Board President: Outspoken Foe of Federal Aid to Education and Former Teacher Chosen Unanimously," *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1956, A1.

SAUSD coalition would seek to secede based on the same principle of local control invoked by members of the Los Angeles Board of Education demonstrated that the concept of "local control" was subject to different interpretations based on political interest.

The dominance of this conservative coalition over the board, however, gradually began to diminish in the mid-1950s. While Tinglof's board presidency marked its end, her path to power was paved by Georgiana Hardy, another member who challenged the conservative leanings of the board. Since the beginning of her first term in 1955, Hardy openly supported federal funding, increased teacher pay, and more investment in guidance and counseling programs—positions that stood in marked contrast to the majority until Tinglof joined her on the board in 1957. With a political ally now in the mix, Hardy was elected president in 1958—a strong affirmation of her increasing clout and the growing willingness to consider ideas that were previously marginalized. Although a group of conservative members held on to considerable influence on the board, by the early 1960s its political makeup was far more balanced than it had been since at least the late 1940s.

When Tinglof was elected Los Angeles Board of Education president in July of 1962, she appointed Hardy to chair a committee tasked with examining equal educational opportunity in the district, which included the possibility of redrawing attendance boundaries and student transfers to effect integration. The board credited "community groups" with the idea for the special committee that were motivated by a shared concern that "because of prevailing residential patterns many schools are attended primarily by children of one or more minority races."[334] Hardy's committee was clearly under pressure to address the issue of *de facto*

[334] "Mrs. Tinglof New School Board Head," *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1962; "Public Meeting Slated on Transfer of Pupils," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1962.

segregation in some way, but it ultimately failed to articulate a clear strategy for surmounting it, either in the short or long term.

Despite the lack of tangible action on school desegregation by the LAUSD, the trajectory of court decisions in lawsuits over school desegregation suggested that some type of integration program would be mandated for the district eventually. *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947), which outlawed separate schools for Mexican students in California, and the first *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, which outlawed *de jure* segregation in schools and other public accommodations nationwide, had set a precedent for court mandates that would require action by school districts to alleviate segregation. The direct precedent for *Crawford*, however, in terms of proximity and relevance, was *Jackson v. Pasadena City School District*, a case that played out in the city of Pasadena—just under 11 miles from LAUSD headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. In late June of 1963, just a couple of months before the original filing of *Crawford*, the California Supreme Court upheld a lower court decision in *Jackson* that broadened the *Brown v. Board of Education* mandate to include *de facto* segregation, meaning that school districts could be held accountable for its remedy, regardless of the root cause. This decision bolstered the argument made against the LAUSD in *Crawford*, and challenged the Los Angeles Board of Education's ability to claim that it had little-to-no control over attendance zones because of housing patterns. The *Jackson* case involved a 13-year-old African American boy named Jay Jackson who was prevented from transferring from his majority black junior high school to a majority white school. The courts upheld the plaintiffs' claim that the Pasadena City district had gerrymandered attendance zones to reinforce segregation. The attorneys for the plaintiffs, A.L.

Wirin, representing the ACLU, and local civil rights activist Loren Miller, representing the NAACP, were the same that filed the original *Crawford* case.[335]

The original filing of *Crawford* later that same year was specifically aimed at blocking a planned $1 million renovation of Jordan High, an indication of the nuanced arguments necessary to demonstrate *de facto* segregation. The plaintiffs contended that rather than move black students into South Gate High, the expansion of Jordan would simply reinforce racial segregation. This first filing was withdrawn by the end of August, however, by the plaintiffs, with Wirin stating that they cancelled the action because they "thought it would be wiser to let Jordan be improved physically." His comment is revealing about the kind of dance the *Crawford* litigants engaged in with the district because of the need to acknowledge the benefits of the small steps the school board and administration were taking to improve the plight of the district's non-white students while still pressing for a larger program of integration. Wirin and Miller continued their pressure on the board of education in the meantime, taking depositions from board members, and warning that if questions remained about the district administration's seriousness about alleviating segregation they would file a request with the California Superior Court to issue a desegregation order for the two high schools.[336]

While it took some initial steps to address the segregation problem after the first filing of *Crawford*, the Los Angeles board maintained its position that school segregation resulted from settlement and housing patterns, and not its policies. Even with its gradual turn away from the

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[335] *Jay R. Jackson v. Pasadena City School District et. al.,* 59 California Reports 876-882 (1963). The *Jackson* decision expanded the mandate beyond just legally-sanctioned segregation and places responsibility for de facto segregation on school boards, who now could not blame it entirely on segregated residential settlement. The extent to which individual school districts had to take steps to alleviate de facto segregation, however, was left up to future courts and school districts to determine. This was a major point of contention in *Crawford.*

[336] "2 NEGROES DROP JORDAN HIGH SUIT," *Los Angeles Times,* August 31, 1963, 7.

staunch conservatism that characterized it in the mid-1940s and early 1950s and the election of the second African American member in its history in 1965—the board's official policies reflected the same form of racial innocence that the SAUSD coalition invoked to deny that their actions were motivated by prejudice.[337] The school board's position was encapsulated by a member of the district's legal team which argued, in response to the *Crawford* case, that while it would continue to work "toward school integration as it has in the past … " it would " … oppose efforts such as those in [sic] Crawford case to uproot masses of children just because of the color of their skin."[338] Clearly, LAUSD administration was concerned with balancing interests like the increasingly vocal civil rights activists, and not alienating powerful constituencies like residents in the Southeast Cities, who were fully engaged in pursuing the SAUSD plan via the Los Angeles County Committee for School District Organization (LACCSDO) at this point.

Civil rights advocates, however, recognized that segregation was holding firm and possibly even increasing, and that as a result the concomitant inequality in the distribution of resource and classroom space, even with renovations and expansion at Jordan High, was also not changing. *Crawford* was then refiled in 1968, and progress in the case was delayed again by appeals until 1970, when Superior Court Judge Alfred Gittelson ruled that segregation did exist in the district and ordered the LAUSD to devise a plan to desegregate its schools. The board of

[337] Rev. James Jones, elected in 1965 served on the board until 1969. Jones was also the first African American elected as president of the Board of Education in 1968. The first black school board member was Fay E. Allen, elected in 1939. Jones' election in the larger context of racial and ideological alliances is discussed briefly in Raphael J. Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993). In his memoir, Julian Nava, the first Latino elected to the Board of Education, argues that the same coalition that got Jones elected propelled him to victory two years later. Julian Nava, *Julian Nava: My Mexican-American Journey* (Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 2002), 70.

[338] "Integrationists Here Unshaken by Court Action," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1964, 31.

education appealed the decision to the California Supreme Court, which upheld the order.[339] Devising a plan for desegregating the massive district proved difficult, however, and the process would drag on for another nine years.

Around the same time the SAUSD petitioners were finding their path blocked by the state board of education and *Crawford* was emerging as a direct legal challenge to the segregated geography of the LAUSD, a group called the South Gate Education Committee emerged, based in the city of South Gate but representative of the entirety of the Southeast Cities. It began to advance a singular cause: opposition to any and all potential programs of desegregation. This was the beginning of a significant shift in school district politics in the Southeast Cities from an argument over segregation based on a loosely-defined community identity and a newly-robust civic economy that could presumably support a separate district, to direct opposition to mandatory desegregation—now characterized as a challenge to the basic rights of residents and merchants. The founder and chairman of the South Gate Education Committee was Floyd Wakefield, a firebrand who rode his ardent resistance to desegregation to the California State Assembly. Like many of his neighbors in the Southeast Cities, Wakefield was a migrant to California. Born in Oklahoma in 1919, he moved to Maywood with his family as a child. He graduated from Bell High School, fought in World War II, and then returned to the Southeast Cities, settling in South Gate to raise his own family. He leveraged a GI loan first to open and operate a Goodyear tire store and later a sporting goods store in the area. As he became

[339] The Superior Court judge actually ruled that the district had engaged in *de jure* (by legal sanction) segregation, but the California Supreme Court ruled that the LAUSD had violated the Equal Protection Clause of the California Constitution, which bars both *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, therefore expanding the definition of segregation in the process of devising a desegregation plan. *Crawford v. Board of Education* (https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/458/527/).

increasingly successful in his business ventures, Wakefield also became more involved in the area's civic and political life—including memberships in clubs and organizations like the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the United Republicans of California.[340]

Opposition to mandatory school desegregation programs was the focus of Wakefield's political activism. He had first appeared in a public forum in a leadership role in September of 1963 when he presented a petition on behalf of his committee to the Los Angeles Board of Education opposing any changes in school boundaries to alleviate segregation, even though nothing had actually been proposed yet by the board. His opposition to desegregation typified the fact that until the early 1970s, the movement was opposed to an idea, rather than any official integration program. At one point, Wakefield admitted that no districts in California had enacted programs involving significant student reassignment, but argued that many "have it in the back of their minds."[341] The petition he presented that September, he claimed, was signed by 12,302 local residents. Wakefield also submitted a separate petition signed by 4,941 white parents stating that they would refuse to send their children to new schools under reworked attendance zones.[342] It was an appropriate way for Wakefield to start his public life because it reflected the rhetoric about public education and resistance to desegregation upon which he would build a seven-year stint in the California State Legislature.

The rise of Wakefield to political prominence in the Southeast Cities reflected a change of focus for many of the anti-desegregation activists who lived east of Alameda Street. Missing

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[340] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 273. Floyd Wakefield has garnered a fair amount of attention among scholars for his virulent opposition to both fair housing legislation and busing for desegregation.

[341] Richard Bergholz, "Initiative Drive Gaining, Says Busing Foe," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1969, 32.

[342] "School Told to Resist Racial Realignment," *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1963, 6.

in large part from the arguments of the South Gate Education committee under Wakefield's leadership was any hint of the varied arguments employed during the fight over the SAUSD. These included taxes, the percentage of tax revenue spent on local schools, and the possible detrimental effects of the LAUSD's size and massive geographic footprint. The new focus was desegregation programs, and the pro-segregation arguments that emerged were often racially charged with little subtlety. The comment of a "South Gate mother" who expressed a fear that mixing the populations of South Gate High and Jordan High "might result in white girls being criminally attacked by Negro students"[343] was indicative of the sharp rhetoric of racial animus that surrounded Wakefield's opposition to desegregation.

The tide of sentiment growing around opposing desegregation as a rhetorical political tool to galvanize white voters in the mid-sixties propelled Wakefield to his first term in the California State Assembly. This effort was undergirded by the idea that integration programs threatened the ideal of neighborhood schools and invoked a defense of what political scientist Daniel Martinez HoSang has termed "white rights" hidden behind the rhetoric of racial innocence.[344] Race as a politically auspicious issue had been bolstered by the successful campaign for Proposition 14, a ballot initiative on the November 1964 ballot that would amend the California Constitution to prevent state or local governments from "denying, limiting, or abridging" the right of property owners to "decline to sell, lease, or rent residential real property to any person as he chooses."[345] The initiative, which was sponsored by a coalition that included

[343] L.M. Meriwether, "White Mother Fears Rape If Boundaries Change," *Los Angeles Sentinel,* September 26, 1963, B1.

[344] HoSang, *Racial Propositions,* 91-92, 95-96.

[345] SALES AND RENTALS OF RESIDENTIAL REAL PROPERTY California Proposition 14 (1964). http://repository.uchastings.edu/ca_ballot_props/672

the California Real Estate Association (CREA) and the California Apartment Owners Association, passed with more than 65 percent voter approval and was a direct response to fair housing legislation that had been enacted in California over the previous five years, the most prominent being the Rumford Fair Housing Act of 1963, which created an enforcement mechanism to dismantle discrimination in home sales and rentals.[346] Proponents invoked racial innocence and asserted that property owners' rights were in peril in advocating for the initiative, characterizing the color-blind "right" of a property owner to decline to sell or rent to anyone they wanted as "lost" through the Rumford Act. Supporters of Proposition 14 deployed the term "tyranny" to describe the effect of the law on property owners, and accused the measure's opponents of showing a "complete lack of confidence in the fairness of Californians in dealing with members of minority groups," a pointed expression of both white hegemony and racial innocence.[347] Although Proposition 14 was overturned by the California Supreme Court in 1966, a decision affirmed by the United States Supreme Court the following year, it was part of a larger movement against government-mandated desegregation programs in various aspects of California's public institutions, including education.[348] The campaign that grew in support of the initiative demonstrated the effectiveness of the rhetoric of white rights in uniting a cross-section

[346] These included the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (1959), the Unruh Civil Rights Act (focused on discrimination in businesses), and the Hawkins Act (public housing and urban renewal projects).

[347] SALES AND RENTALS OF RESIDENTIAL REAL PROPERTY California Proposition 14 (1964). http://repository.uchastings.edu/ca_ballot_props/672

[348] This opposition to desegregation has often been characterized as a "backlash," but more recent scholarship, like that of HoSang, has pointed out the persistence of white hegemony over time. According to this interpretation, ballot initiatives like Proposition 14 were consistent with the longer history of California that reveals a constant focus on defending white rights bolstered by racial innocence.

of Democrats and Republicans, union members and managers, and other groups that typically stood on opposite sides of political debates.

Tapping into this sentiment of white rights to his political advantage, Wakefield was elected to the California State Assembly in 1966. There he proved himself a true believer in maintaining and extending *de facto* segregation, especially in public education. To this end, he attempted a familiar strategy early in his legislative tenure—breaking up the LAUSD in a way that would allow for the creation of the SAUSD. He authored a bill that very nearly passed the assembly in 1968 that would have dismantled the LAUSD and created the SAUSD out of a part of its remnants with essentially the same borders that were proposed by the earlier petitions.[349] The bill would not only subvert the SDO process and the state board of education, but also challenge the perceived overreach of state government in local affairs. Wakefield's bill garnered overwhelming support in the California Assembly, gaining approval by a 60-1 vote. Passage of the bill, however, was blocked by Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh, who managed to set up a "reconsideration" vote on the legislation and then convince a majority of Democrats to vote to send it back to committee, where it died.[350] Unruh was part of a Democratic majority that was in large part brought to state office by a coalition that included labor organizations and civil rights groups. This majority coalesced after the election of Pat Brown to the governorship in 1958 and was the start of an alliance between Brown, Unruh, and African American assemblymen Augustus Hawkins and William Byron Rumford which worked to enact legislation that would

[349] Robert Fairbanks, "Unruh Blocks Breakup of L.A. School District," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1968, A2. The other bill was authored by State Senator John Harmer of Glendale—an independent city just northeast of the city of Los Angeles. Harmer's bill would have broken up the LAUSD without also creating the SAUSD as part of the legislation.

[350] Ibid.

chip away at the persistent structures of racial and ethnic exclusion in the state.[351] While the governorship shifted when conservative Republican Ronald Reagan was elected in 1966, the racial liberalism ushered in by this coalition was very much alive in the assembly, and it proved to be a significant stumbling block for anti-integrationists like Wakefield.[352]

After the defeat of yet another attempt to create the SAUSD, this time through legislative fiat, Wakefield turned his attention to crafting legislation that would block mandatory desegregation programs in the state's' public schools. By 1970, he had authored another bill—Assembly Bill 551—which prohibited public schools in the state from transporting children for any reason without the consent of parents, effectively preventing districts from instituting any meaningful mandatory student reassignment program. The bill passed the assembly in late June by a 49-18 vote and moved to the California Senate's Education Committee for a hearing to determine whether or not it would proceed to the senate floor.[353] The vote was taken in early August after a hearing that was characterized as "emotional" and "highlighted by charges of racism and counterclaims of Americanism."[354] There, the debate over the bill reflected the white rights position that characterized Wakefield's terms in the assembly. In response to charges that the bill was motivated by racism, Republican Senator Donald Gransky of Watsonville said that

[351] HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 61. Hawkins, from Southern California, and Rumford, from the northern part of the state, were among the first African Americans to serve in the state legislature.

[352] Another bill that would have broken up the LAUSD, authored by State Senator John Harmer (R-Glendale), passed the assembly and senate in 1970 but was vetoed by Reagan "because it would have hampered local efforts already under way to split up the district." Jerry Gillam, "Reagan Vetoes Bill to Decentralize L.A. School District," *Los Angeles Times,* September 21, 1970, A1.

[353] "Doubts Raised on Constitutionality of Antibussing Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1970, 3

[354] "Controversial Plan to Restrict Bussing Passes Senate Test," *Los Angeles Times,* August 1, 1970, B1; "NAACP Labels Bill's Passage Another Victory for Racists," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 2, 1970, A5.

"When parents buy a house ... they are more interested in what the school is like than the house, and that's America."[355] The arguments in support of the bill proved strong enough to ensure its passage in the senate by a 21 to 12 vote.[356] The bill was signed into law by Governor Reagan but challenged by opponents and subsequently invalidated as a means for preventing school districts from mandating student transfers for integration by both the California Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court.[357]

Wakefield then turned to the state's initiative process in his fight to ban integration programs. As a result, his legacy became associated most prominently with Proposition 21, a ballot initiative he authored that appeared on the California state ballot in 1972.[358] It would bar all student assignments in public schools based on race, effectively outlawing any official desegregation efforts. It also would overturn the Bagley Act, a law that took effect in 1971 that made school desegregation an official policy goal of the State of California. While the Bagley Act was very broadly constructed so that it did not include any specific mandates or penalties, it did require the collection of data on race and ethnicity in the state's public schools. Wakefield was vocal in his opposition to the act, arguing that "the bill could be used later on as a method of forcing the additional bussing [sic] of school children to achieve an arbitrary racial or ethnic balance in the schools."[359] By signing the Bagley Act into law, Governor Reagan distanced himself from Wakefield's position of staunch opposition to desegregation programs, based in

[355] "Controversial Plan to Restrict Bussing Passes Senate Test," *Los Angeles Times,* August 1, 1970, B1.

[356] "Parental Choice on Bussing: The State," *Los Angeles Times,* August 16, 1970, F5.

[357] Tom Goff, "Bill in Assembly Seeks Limit on Student Shifts," *Los Angeles Times,* April 15, 1971, 3.

[358] Wakefield had tried unsuccessfully to get a similar initiative on the California ballot in 1970.

[359] "WAKEFIELD REQUESTS VETO ON RACIAL BILL," *Los Angeles Times,* December 12, 1971, SE2.

large part on a desire to avoid, if possible, further court mandates for implementing integration programs.[360]

Wakefield's position proved popular with voters, however, and the "Wakefield Amendment," as Proposition 21 became known in the vernacular of California politics, was approved by nearly 60 percent of the state's voters on the November, 1972 ballot. It was immediately subjected to legal challenge, however, and was ultimately invalidated by the California Supreme Court in 1976.[361] Because busing students between schools had become the preferred method of implementing desegregation mandates in districts across the country, Proposition 21 became known as an "anti-busing" initiative and Wakefield as an "anti-busing" leader. However, the initiative was, as its text described, a broad attack on "establishing policy that racial and ethnic imbalance in pupil enrollment in public schools shall be prevented and eliminated." It went further to eliminate any requirement that districts report numbers and percentages of racial and ethnic groups, and repealed any requirement that districts develop desegregation plans.[362] The amendment also challenged the power of courts to mandate desegregation. Proposition 21 was the culmination of the extended effort on Wakefield's part both to break up the LAUSD and to prevent desegregation programs across the state. It was supported by Republicans and Democrats alike and, perhaps most significantly, demonstrated the efficacy of opposition to busing as a political issue.[363]

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[360] HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 99-100.

[361] Ibid, 91-92; "NAACP Begins Challenge Of Anti-School Measure," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 7, 1972.

[362] ASSIGNMENT OF STUDENTS TO SCHOOLS California Proposition 21 (1972). http://repository.uchastings.edu/ca_ballot_props/772

[363] Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 274. Nicolaides also points out that Wakefield was able to garner support from Republicans and Democrats alike because his opposition to government-mandated integration appealed to such

Meanwhile, a new attempt to create an equivalent of the SAUSD had gained momentum, and, in August of 1971, the mayors of South Gate and Huntington Park sent letters to the Los Angeles Board of Education requesting financial information necessary to build a case for secession. Wakefield took credit publicly for "setting the stage" for the new effort to forge a Southeast Cities district. In the typical language of white rights, Wakefield asserted that "These five cities are in my district, and I'm determined in every way to give them the opportunity to exercise their rights of self-determination."[364] From the beginning, however, it lacked the public support of the previous attempt to create the SAUSD, and never gained the momentum needed to take it further.[365]

Two factors marked the end of the Southeast Cities secession movement for good. The first was that the energies of local activists, like Wakefield, were now primarily directed at specifically opposing integration programs. If seceding from the LAUSD was a lost cause, opposition to "forced" pupil reassignment had increasing momentum behind it, on a nationwide level. The second involved the changing demographics of the Southeast Cities. By the early seventies, an increasing number of Latinos had moved into the area, a trend those still pursuing the SAUSD plan used initially to reassert their racial innocence. Data from the 1970 census, however, shows that while the number of Latinos in the area was increasing, the Alameda Street barrier held firm for African Americans. The number of residents with Spanish surnames had

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a broad range of white voters. California Assembly members are elected to two-year terms, and Wakefield was elected four times. His fourth term was cut short by reapportionment of assembly districts.

[364] Steven C. Smith, "Wakefield Backs Cities' Move to Form Own School District," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1971.

[365] In 1962, led by Jesse Unruh, the state legislature had passed a moratorium on any changes to LAUSD's footprint for ten years. This new effort to create the SAUSD anticipated the expiration of that restriction.

climbed as high as 47 percent in Vernon and up to 45 percent in a section of Huntington Park. In 1960, few residents of those areas had Spanish surnames. Meanwhile, the black population of the Southeast Cities remained steady at less than one percent.[366]

Even Floyd Wakefield's hometown, South Gate, had significant numbers of Latino residents by 1970. The city's mayor, Frank Gafkowski, offered this fact as proof that the new SAUSD plan was not motivated by racism or an attempt to avoid desegregation. "I don't want this to start being termed a desegregation movement," he told the *Los Angeles Times*. "Why, we have over half of Huntington Park and almost a third of South Gate populated by Mexican-Americans."[367] Judging by the increasing presence of Latinos in the Southeast Cities, the continued absence of African American residents suggests that the presence of Latino residents, and their children in local schools, especially if they were still in the minority, was acceptable, while the presence of black residents was not. Those considered "Mexican American" in the right context—those considered middle class—were welcomed conditionally in places like the Southeast Cities.[368]

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[366] Ranging from about 28 percent in Vernon to less than one percent. Throughout most of the Southeast Cities, it ranged from two-to-five percent. U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, Puerto Rican or Spanish Surname, South Gate, CA and surrounding areas, 1960*, Prepared by Social Explorer.

[367] Steven C. Smith, "Wakefield Backs Cities' Move to Form Own School District," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1971, M1.

[368] U.S. Census Bureau, *Total Population, Puerto Rican or Spanish Surname, South Gate, CA and surrounding areas, 1960*, Prepared by Social Explorer. The successful movement by residents of Monterey Hills to secede from the Los Angeles schools and join the Alhambra district is illustrative of the conditional acceptance of Mexican-Americans in predominantly white areas. The differences in household income between the residents of the Monterey Hills and those of East Los Angeles and Belvedere, comprised of between 54 percent and 94 percent residents with Spanish surnames, is striking, and highlights the intersectionality of ethnicity and class in public school politics. (See Chapter Four). Also see George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) as a starting point for understanding the history of Mexican American identity, culture, and politics in Los Angeles in particular.

Although Latino activists had declined to participate in the original *Crawford* case and remained relatively absent from the debate even when the case was refiled on behalf of both African American and "Mexican American" students, the late 1960s and early 1970s were a period of increased Latino political power and influence in public education. This was fueled primarily by Chicanos residing east of the Los Angeles River in solidly working class communities. In addition, the election in 1967 of Julian Nava, the first Latino member of the Los Angeles Board of Education and a native of East Los Angeles, was a demonstration of the increasing influence of Latinos in district administration. Nava was elected to three consecutive terms on the board.

But the most visible demonstration of the growing political power of Latinos in the area's schools was a series of student protests in 1968 known as the East Los Angeles Walkouts, or "Blowouts." Originating in majority Latino Eastside high schools, the blowouts complicated the debate over desegregation in the LAUSD by exposing some of the significant problems the district and the courts were to confront in the next decade while attempting to implement integration programs. One of these was in defining what constituted a "segregated" school and the uneven support for desegregation programs across the region's many constituencies. Where *Crawford* demanded integration as a solution to the ills of education in majority-minority schools, Chicano students in the late sixties and early seventies placed more emphasis on the gaps in compensatory and bilingual education in their own schools, as well as the lack of access to college preparatory classes and teachers and counselors who provided guidance and encouragement for non-vocational paths after high school. The Blowouts, which involved upwards of 20,000 students walking out of classes and marching to demonstrate their dissatisfaction, was a shock to the board of education and LAUSD administration. As Mario T.

García argues, until the Blowouts, "no one had seriously considered Chicano issues and few had thought of Chicanos as part of the civil rights struggles in the country, outside of César Chavéz and the farmworkers movement."[369] The Blowouts complicated the white/black binary of the desegregation debate, and challenged the goals of integration programs that were becoming increasingly muddled as the Crawford case was litigated for nearly the entirety of the 1970s.[370]

The overturning of most of Proposition 21, with the exception of its nullification of some provisions of the Bagley Act, by the California State Supreme Court in 1975 marked the end of legislation that targeted desegregation programs in a broad sense in public school districts.[371] As a result, the language employed by opponents of integration from that point forward focused specifically on busing and mandatory student reassignment. "Busing" became an all-encompassing, coded term for programs of mandatory desegregation. It became a rallying cry that appealed to a broad range of constituents, from anti-integrationists to parents with much more personal concerns about their children's well-being.

The ultimate defeat of the Wakefield Amendment via the courts paralleled the dimming of Floyd Wakefield's political star. In late 1973, his assembly district was redistricted out of

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[369] Mario T. García and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro & the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 5. While *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947) has become recognized as an early victory in the fight over segregated schools, Latino activists opted out of official participation in *Crawford* when it was filed. As Herbert R. Sosa has argued, while this changed over the long duration of *Crawford's* ligation, "The origins of *Crawford* mirrored the broader and recognizable civil rights discourse in school desegregation cases in the North and South based on a black-white racial binary." Herbert R. Sosa, "Fragmented Diversity: School Desegregation, Student Activism, and Busing in Los Angeles, 1963-1982" (PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 2013), 1.

[370] Sosa, "Fragmented Diversity."

[371] Legal challenges against the initiative were filed by the ACLU and NAACP and became attached to other litigation that had been appealed from various jurisdictions around the state. The court ultimately ruled that the Wakefield Amendment and similar legislation violated the Equal Protection Clause of both the state and federal constitutions.

existence in a controversial reorganization of the political landscape of the Southeast Cities.[372] He attempted to revive his political career by moving to Orange County, a bastion of conservatism in Southern California, running unsuccessfully for a newly-apportioned assembly seat.[373] For those who still opposed mandatory integration programs because of the perception that they threatened the ideal of neighborhood schools, the battlefield was now nationwide and the fight was over busing.

Meanwhile, the politics of education in the Southeast Cities was changing, and enthusiasm for pursuing the long-sought goal of creating the SAUSD had waned. In June of 1974, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "signs of balmier weather" between South Gate and the LAUSD "appear [sic] to be in the offing after 12 years of mistrust and bitterness." The author noted that even though local voters had given sanction to move forward on conducting a feasibility study in 1972 on the rehashed plan to create the SAUSD, the political environment had changed in the city, and presumably neighboring municipalities as well, and "what may have been certain about withdrawal last fall is no longer certain today." Citing the election of two new members to the South Gate City Council, the piece described a move away from the conservatism that had characterized it for at least the last decade, leading to it becoming "less

[372] Steven C. Smith, "Wakefield Presses for High Court Test of Remap Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1973, SSE1; Steven C. Smith, "Support of Redistricting Appeal Efforts on Wane," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1973, SE1; Steven C. Smith, "REDISTRICTING EFFECTS MANIFOLD: Southeast Political Scene to Shift," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1973, SE1.

[373] HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 104-105. For more on how Orange County became a politically conservative stronghold, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

adverse to 'big government' than the old council."[374] It was indicative of the ways in which politics and demographics began to shift dramatically in the area in the mid-1970s.

Wakefield and like-minded colleagues in the California Legislature nearly succeeded in breaking up the LAUSD, the largest public school district in the state and second largest in the nation. It would have been a devastating blow to the state educational bureaucracy's long-standing goal of creating larger, unified districts. These efforts were ultimately blocked, both by Unruh and later by Governor Reagan—who both recognized the advantages of keeping the LAUSD intact, albeit for different reasons and from divergent ideological perspectives. In the meantime, the use of mandatory pupil reassignment and school buses to transport students between schools had become the preferred means of meeting court mandates for addressing *de facto* segregation in public school districts nationwide, and had become representative to a significant number of Americans as government overreach and a threat to local autonomy and control of schools.

By the mid-1970s, the LAUSD had withstood significant challenges to its size and structure. Despite those challenges, it maintained the geographic footprint it had gained through the era of annexation and unification. Demographic changes and public policy had made it impossible for opponents of desegregation in the Southeast Cities to maintain the area's nearly all-white schools, but at the same time civil rights activists were not able to solve the problem of *de facto* segregation. The battle over desegregation in the LAUSD did not disappear with the changing politics of the Southeast Cities. Instead, the focus of the fight shifted to outlying suburbs further from the city center, in locations like the San Fernando Valley.

[374] Steven C. Smith, "CHANGE ON COUNCIL CREDITED: South Gate-Schools Rift Lessens," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1974.

## Conclusion

The fact that the attempts to break up the LAUSD in the 1960s and 1970s failed meant that the giant district would survive, but the challenges to its very existence have persisted over time. Busing, and along with it substantive, large-scale desegregation programs in the LAUSD, ultimately failed. These programs were the victim of protests of parents, the logistical challenges that came with transporting students over large distances, and a new ballot initiative and U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed mandatory integration programs in California for good by giving judicial sanction to the neighborhood schools ideal. While the threat of mandatory integration programs diminished, attempts to break apart LAUSD continued. Groups that sought either secession from the district or a large-scale break-up employed the argument that the district was too large to be responsive to local students' needs, a rationalization that has persisted over time. In the meantime, the LAUSD and other large urban districts increasingly became a metonym for a failing public school system. This view coalesced on a national level behind a controversial report issued by the Reagan administration's U.S. Department of Education in 1983 that issued a scathing indictment of the country's public schools. The report asserted that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people."[375] The title of the report, *A Nation At*

[375] U.S. Department of Education, *A Nation At Risk: The imperative for educational reform*, National Commission on Excellence in Education, Washington, D.C. (Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O. distributor, 1983), 1.

*Risk*, was a reflection of its main argument: that public schools throughout the country were not only failing individual students but jeopardizing national interests as well.

For some residents of the Los Angeles area, the LAUSD had always represented a kind of erosion, but it had more to do with politics and conflicting views on public schools than any measure of student success or effective education. The last major effort to break up the LAUSD happened in the San Fernando Valley during the late 1990s. It ended in late 2001 with a denial of from the state board of education, less than two years before the failure of a nearly successful attempt of residents of the area to secede from the city of Los Angeles itself.[376] The "Valley," as it is often described in the parlance of Angelenos, is an approximately 260 square mile area just north of the Los Angeles basin. More than two-thirds of the Valley is part of the city of Los Angeles. It joined the burgeoning metropolis as part of the successful effort of city leaders to bring water to Los Angeles from the Owens Valley in Northeastern California in the early decades of the twentieth century. Initially a prosperous agricultural community, the Valley transformed after World War II into an urban extension of Los Angeles, a change that was fueled by returning veterans who utilized G.I. Bill benefits to purchase single-family homes. For much of its history the Valley "was not a place where African Americans felt welcome."[377] The area's

[376] Julie Tamaki and Massie Ritsch, "State Rejects Valley School Secession Bid," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 2001, B1.

[377] Raphael J. Sonenshein, *The City at Stake: Secession, Reform and the Battle for Los Angeles* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 73. Another excellent source for a larger history of the San Fernando Valley, including the secession movement of the late-1990s and early-2000s is Jean-Paul deGuzman, "'And Make the San Fernando Valley My Home:' Contested Spaces, Identities, and Activism on the Edge of Los Angeles" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2014).

urban transformation generally limited black settlement to the relatively small Pacoima neighborhood in its northeastern reaches.

The Valley school district secession proposal that arose in the waning years of the twentieth century would have created two districts, one comprising the northern portion and one covering its southern half.[378] Led by a coalition that called itself Finally Restoring Excellence in Education (FREE), the effort drew particular criticism from Latino residents of the Valley who asserted that the plan's proposed north/south district configuration would have gerrymandered attendance zones along already existing racial, ethnic, and class lines.[379] FREE also invoked the rhetoric employed by the SAUSD coalition that emphasized the detriment LAUSD's size might pose for parents and children and the notion that local control of schools was inherently superior to a larger administration and size. As FREE member Stephanie Carter stated in the organization's official statement to the LACCSDO:

> The larger the school district, the more disconnected it becomes from the classroom, from parents, and community. There is no way to hold this second largest school district in the nation, accountable. It is painfully obvious, the district is so huge and far removed from the people it's supposed to serve, that there is really no remedy that will demand the kind of fiscal and moral accountability that our children, parents, and communities deserve… [sic] that exists in smaller school districts.[380]

[378] Maps of Proposed NORTH-San Fernando Valley U.S.D. and SOUTH-San Fernando Valley U.S.D., Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

[379] Tom Hogen-Esch and Martin Saiz, "An Anatomy of Defeat: Why San Fernando Valley Failed to Secede From Los Angeles," *California Policy Issues* (November 2001): 54.

[380] Stephanie Carter to Board Members, letter, February 16, 2000, Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization, Los Angeles County Office of Education, Downey, California.

Unlike the SAUSD proposals of the past, this secession movement did not garner the favor of the LACCSDO, which recommended against the creation of the North and South San Fernando Valley school districts.[381]

Proposed at various times since the 1920s, secession movements that sought a break from the city of Los Angeles were not a new phenomenon in the Valley.[382] Agitation against the LAUSD also had a precedent in the area, as the Valley inherited the fight against integration programs that defined politics in the Southeast Cities in the 1960s. FREE's effort, however, was part of a larger secession scheme to make the Valley its own city, independent from Los Angeles.[383] A group affiliated with FREE, Valley VOTE (Voters Organized Toward Empowerment), led an effort that brought a secession proposal to the November 2001 ballot.[384] The controversial measure, which needed the approval of the entirety of Los Angeles to pass, lacked the requisite support at the ballot box and was defeated 67 percent to 33 percent. While the Valley was the stronghold of its support, it barely passed even there.[385] Neither school secession nor civic independence garnered enough support from key constituencies to succeed.

[381] The state law that determined the process for SDO changes had been amended by this point in time. The updated process specified that a proposal be considered by the local CCSDO which would make a recommendation on whether or not to proceed, and send it to the state board of education for the final decision.

[382] Sonenshein, *The City at Stake*, 74;

[383] Caroline Hendrie, "Plan To Lop Off 200,000 Students From L.A. Unveiled," *Education Week*, April 16, 1997.

[384] Hogen-Esch and Saiz, "An Anatomy of Defeat: Why San Fernando Valley Failed to Secede From Los Angeles," *California Policy Issues* (November 2001): 39.

[385] Ibid.

In 1970, when Superior Court Judge Alfred Gitelson issued the mandate to desegregate the schools in LAUSD through a "reasonably feasible" plan, many residents of the Los Angeles area interpreted it to mean a mandatory integration plan that included busing was a distinct possibility, if not inevitable. From a very early stage in civil rights activists' efforts to pressure school officials to remediate segregation, the Los Angeles Board of Education and district administration held larger social and political issues, and not district policies, responsible for segregated schools. The LAUSD superintendent at the time, William Johnston, and the rest of the district's leadership argued that the district had no control over the racial and ethnic distribution of students in its schools and therefore had no culpability for perpetuating it. District leadership also contended that desegregation through busing threatened the right of students to attend neighborhood schools. Echoing the assertions of racial innocence by SAUSD proponents, the Los Angeles Board of Education and Johnston contended that segregation resulted from discrimination in housing throughout the region. By asserting that mandatory integration programs threatened the ideal of neighborhood schools, LAUSD leadership employed the language of local control, just in a different way than the secession proponents in the Southeast Cities had. But the board of education and district administration would soon be forced by the courts to abandon this position and seek remedies to segregation.

Once the district's appeal was filed, planning for integration in the LAUSD was halted until a decision came from the appellate court.[386] In the meantime, opponents of the busing program organized to oppose the possible implementation of busing in the LAUSD. These

[386] Technically, busing was halted because only the federal standard for proving *de jure* segregation, which was less stringent than the standard set by Egly, could be applied until a decision came from the court of appeals.

groups were based primarily in the majority-white San Fernando Valley and the Westside areas of the city. The three most significant of these groups were BUSTOP, a coalition headquartered in the San Fernando Valley comprised of parents, community leaders, and PTA members; Better Education for Students Today (BEST), also comprised of PTA members and community activists; and Parents Against Cross-Town Transportation of Students and Teachers, a short-lived but influential organization that opposed mandatory busing but supported a limited optional busing program.[387] In time, BUSTOP became the most prominent of these groups.

These coalitions expressed their support for integration while also opposing busing, asserting racial innocence in a similar way to SAUSD petitioners in their official statements. In fact, Parents Against Cross-Town Transportation of Students and Teachers supported voluntary busing for integration, a program the LAUSD had already implemented. BUSTOP and BEST also became "intervenors" in the case, allowed by the court to submit their own plans for desegregation during the first phase of the integration program planning process. The groups submitted comprehensive plans to the court that featured alternatives to busing. This sign of détente between the court and integration opponents was short lived, however, as a few years later BUSTOP and its allies sought to disqualify the presiding judge from the case.[388]

In June of 1976, however, in the midst of heated battles fought over busing and desegregation all across the country, the California Supreme Court upheld the Crawford

[387] Jess M. Carrillo, "The Process of School Desegregation: The Case of the Los Angeles Unified School District" (PhD diss., UCLA, 1978), 131-132.

[388] Bill Boyarsky, "Challenge to Egly Delays Hearings," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1978, D3. Egly's disqualification was sought based on the allegation that BUSTOP's attorney was excluded from closed door meetings Egly had conducted in order to mediate parts of the case outside of the courtroom.

decision, and as a result the Los Angeles Board of Education moved to devise a plan to satisfy the order sent on remand from the Supreme Court to "immediately … prepare and implement a reasonably feasible desegregation plan."[389] By this time, however, Gitelson had been voted off the Superior Court and Judge Paul Egly had been chosen to replace him to preside over the *Crawford* case. Egly appointed Monroe Price, lawyer and professor of Law at UCLA, as a "referee" to monitor the development of the desegregation plan.[390]

After months of planning and the submission of several plans that were rejected by Egly, the board of education officially adopted a plan "which it considered meets its moral commitment to integration and legal requirements of the court's decision."[391] In late April of 1977, nearly 14 years after the original *Crawford* filing in Los Angeles Superior Court, Egly authorized the LAUSD to proceed with the first step in its plan, an entirely voluntary phase, in time for the upcoming school year. The ruling came with the stipulation that changes could be made as necessary.[392] The following year, Egly accepted a plan for a mandatory program and ordered district administration to begin planning for implementation in the fall of 1978 despite growing concerns about the costs associated with it.[393] The goal of the initial part of the

[389] *Los Angeles City Schools Spotlight*, March 21, 1977, Special Edition, 1. Monroe Price Papers, UCLA, Box 1, Folder 3.

[390] William Trombly, "Desegregation Referee Named," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1977.

[391] *Los Angeles City Schools Spotlight*, March 21, 1977, Special Edition, 1. Monroe Price Papers, UCLA, Box 1, Folder 3.

[392] William Trombley, "First Phase of School Plan OKd by Judge," *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1977, A16.

[393] Bill Boyaesky, "Judge OKs L.A. Integration: Plan for One Year Clears Way for Busing in September," *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1978, A1.

mandatory phase of the plan was to transport approximately 65,000 students (29,000 white and 36,000 minority), primarily in grades 4 through 8.[394]

BUSTOP and its allies in the San Fernando Valley began to organize a student boycott in response to the mandatory busing plan. The strategy became a serious threat to desegregation efforts, and once the busing program was implemented, LAUSD could not meet its quota for 30 percent white students at many of the schools in majority black and Latino areas.[395] By the last months of the school year, failure to meet the 30 percent white student ratio in numerous schools at majority-minority schools caused LAUSD leadership to scale back the program out of necessity. By the time school started in September of 1979, LAUSD leadership devised a new, scaled-back busing program.[396]

In addition to the boycott of the busing program by primarily Valley-based parents, anti-busing forces across the state were mobilizing behind a new ballot initiative effort aimed at putting an end to school busing statewide via referendum. Authored by Alan Robbins, a Democratic state senator who represented a portion of the San Fernando Valley, Proposition 1 would roll back the broadened responsibility for alleviating segregation placed on school boards in California as part of previous court decisions like *Crawford* and its predecessor, *Jackson*.[397] It

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[394] Carrillo, "The Process of School Desegregation," 215; William Trombley, "'Initial' Desegregation Plan Given Go-Ahead by Egly," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1978, A8; William Trombley and Myrna Oliver, "Judge Orders School Board to Start Integration," *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1978, A7.

[395] William Trombley, "Busing Cuts Greeted with Regret: Programs Not Given Enough Time, Supporters Say," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1979, B3; "Los Angeles Schools Open With Busing and Boycotts," *The Washington Post*, September 13, 1978, A5.

[396] William Trombley, "Busing Cuts Greeted with Regret; Programs Not Given Enough Time, Supporters Say," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1979, B3.

[397] See Chapter Five for a more in-depth discussion about the *Jackson* case and its relationship to *Crawford*.

would limit school desegregation programs in the state to only instances where there was proof that "the segregation was caused by government action with a discriminatory intent."[398]

In order to avoid the fate of Proposition 21, Robbins' initiative was carefully-crafted and targeted an important distinction in the California Supreme Court's upholding of the original *Crawford* desegregation mandate. In addition to issuing its remand to the lower court to assist the district in creating a feasible desegregation plan, the court found fault with the original ruling that *de jure* segregation existed in the LAUSD. Instead, the high court characterized segregation in the Los Angeles schools as *de facto*, changing the basis of the desegregation order from the narrower and more difficult to demonstrate federal standard that relied on proof of legally-imposed segregation to a broader standard based on the Equal Protection Clause of the California Constitution, where the legal standard was informal segregation—one that was considerably easier to meet. Proposition 1 leveled a direct challenge to this ruling, and made the implicit argument that the people of California had the right to choose which standard should be followed by state policymakers. The care taken with the wording of Proposition 1 was another important differentiator from Floyd Wakefield's 1972 measure, which had the much broader purview of halting all student reassignment based on race.[399] Additionally, the fact that this new proposed constitutional amendment defaulted to the federal standard for mandatory desegregation allowed proponents to again invoke racial innocence, as demonstrated by the sharp focus of Robbins and

[398] School Assignment and Transportation of Pupils California Proposition 1 (1979), http://repository.uchastings.edu/ca_ballot_props/861.

[399] HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*, 107-108.

the pro-Proposition 1 forces on the toll busing took on students.[400] The initiative capitalized on a judicial dispute over the responsibility for alleviating segregation in schools, allowing proponents to cloud its intended result—which was ending all mandatory desegregation programs in California's public schools—and allowing proponents to place the blame for this result on a technicality.

Proposition 1 traveled a rocky road to the ballot—failing to gain enough support in 1978 from either the state legislature or via petition.[401] The following year, however, the state legislature reconsidered the initiative, likely motivated by the challenges faced by the LAUSD in implementing the busing program, which were both compounded by and contributed to increasing political pressure against busing. In March of 1979, both the California Senate and Assembly voted to include the measure on the June 1980 ballot. But Robbins' political star had risen with Proposition 1, and he initiated a successful vote in both houses of the legislature to call a statewide special election for that November that would include his proposal. The initiative was approved by California's voters 68.8 percent to 31.4 percent. Like Proposition 21, this newest proposal to eliminate mandated desegregation programs passed the electoral test decisively. It was also immediately appealed in court by pro-integration forces.[402]

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[400] Ibid., 120; School Assignment and Transportation of Pupils California Proposition 1 (1979), http://repository.uchastings.edu/ca_ballot_props/861.

[401] Either approval from the legislature or signatures on a petition that equaled a percentage of the electorate according to a specific formula would have qualified the initiative for the ballot.

[402] HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 124-129. HoSang argues that proponents of Proposition 1, which now included a group of professional, and savvy, political direct mail marketing experts, tapped into the anti-tax rhetoric of Proposition 13 in order to boost the likelihood of passage. His argument is convincing, but as demonstrated by the extended history of SDO and school district politics, invoking public finance and taxation is a long-standing political tactic. UPI, "NAACP Sues to Block Prop. 1," *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1979, B3; Carl Ingram, "NAACP Can Join Suit Challenging Antibusing Law," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1979, B3.

In the meantime, BUSTOP and its allies had waged a battle for greater influence on the Los Angeles Board of Education. BUSTOP co-chair and founder Bobbi Fiedler, whose political mobilization began with anti-busing activism at her children's Valley-based elementary school, challenged and won the board of education seat occupied by then board president Robert Docter in 1977.[403] It was a launch pad for her election to the U.S. Congress in 1980, a campaign in which she emphasized the busing issue.[404] Nearly two years after Docter's ouster, the Valley-based anti-busing activists then launched a successful recall of board of education president Howard Miller. Not only was the effort a triumph, but BUSTOP's other co-chair, Roberta Weintraub, was elected to replace him on the board.[405] Resistance to busing had fundamentally altered the composition of the school board and severely diminished the efficacy of desegregation efforts. Like the efforts of residents of the Southeast Cities to create the SAUSD that complicated the unification of the Los Angeles school districts in an earlier era, the largely grassroots mobilization of primarily white homeowners disrupted plans to implement what was widely viewed as a challenge to neighborhood schools.

While BUSTOP had become a powerful force in electoral politics, it was the electoral juggernaut Proposition 1 that marked the official end of busing and any "reasonably feasible" effort at desegregating public schools, both in LAUSD and statewide. A complicated appeals

[403] "BUSING FOES ELECTED IN LOS ANGELES VOTE," *New York Times*, June 2, 1977, 29; Jack McCurdy, "2 Busing Foes Win School Board Seats: Bustop Leader Fiedler Ousts Docter; Conservative Ferraro Reelected Easily," *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1977, A3.

[404] HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 113; William Endicott, "Corman Defeated; GOP Gains 4 Seats in State Delegation," *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1980, A3.

[405] "School Board President Miller Ousted: Organizer of Recall, Busing Foe, Wins Race for His Seat," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1979, A3.

process followed the initiative's approval, and even though the California Supreme Court refused to hear the case, the United States Supreme Court did, still under the umbrella of the *Crawford* case, in March of 1982. It handed down a decision at the end of June and upheld Proposition 1, ruling that it did not violate the U.S. Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment, allowing it to become a permanent amendment to the state constitution. The focus of the majority opinion on neighborhood schools indicates the persistence and centrality of the Common School ideal in debates over the nation's public education system.[406] The court supported the claim of Proposition 1 advocates that they sought simply to preserve neighborhood schools, and ruled that there was no discriminatory intent built into the initiative—a standard for proving that a statute violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The opinion stated that in the case of the LAUSD in particular, "The benefits of neighborhood schooling are racially neutral."[407] This statement echoed the long-standing invocation of racial innocence by anti-integration forces.

Applying the framework of racial innocence to my analysis of school district organization (SDO) in Los Angeles County is critical because it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in creating administrative structures for public schools. These include the numerous constituencies involved in the process, the motivations of those groups, and the effects the decisions made about SDO have on larger social and political debates. It allows

[406] The majority opinion was authored by Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

[407] Powell followed this statement with the observation that "This is manifestly true in Los Angeles where over 75% of the public school body is composed of groups viewed as racial minorities." This was a reflection of the demographic change that had happened over the nearly 20 years that *Crawford* was litigated, but also perhaps ignoring the core problem of segregated schools and the history of racial exclusion upon which the case was based. *Crawford v. Board of Education of the city of Los Angeles*, 458 U.S. 527 (1982).

scholars to move beyond generalizations and unpack the extent to which race and ethnicity are intertwined with other considerations in education politics. People who espoused the ideal of neighborhood schools at various points in time, even when it resulted in increased racial and ethnic segregation, did so because of an array of motivations that included some very practical factors, like safety and what were no doubt real connections to friends, neighbors, and communities. Additionally, in a period of rapid change and growth in the area, some sought to preserve a sense of community that they had found in places like the Southeast Cities and associated "consolidation" with the notion that government threatened a sense of autonomy and sovereignty associated with an independent civic status.[408] They are similar to the "suburban warriors" that Lisa McGirr credits with leading the conservative movement of the second half of the twentieth century that reached its apogee in national politics with the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.[409] Many residents of the Southeast Cities saw themselves as part of a group of distinct urban areas bounded by both natural and man-made barriers that shared far more in common with each other than with Los Angeles. Because public school campuses served as important community landmarks that sometimes doubled as community centers, they were an important part of this civic vision. Race and ethnicity were also an important consideration.

The concept of racial innocence is also important because it forces a consideration of the real steps residents took to try and preserve segregated schools while acknowledging that other critical factors were at work. The threat posed by the Great Depression and the Mattoon Act, for

[408] Attempting to discern people's feelings, intentions, and true motivations is problematic, but the ways residents of the Southeast Cities describe their attachments to the area suggests that that many had discovered a real distinct sense of community.

[409] McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.

example, to the financial stability of homeowners left an understandable aversion to taxation and public debt. In addition, many parents, especially those who opposed busing, were no doubt most concerned with the quality of education and safety of their children. The fact remains, however, that the ultimate results of racial innocence in this case are both persistent segregation in the state's public schools and unremitting attempts to break apart the LAUSD that began before it was even unified. At the same time, proponents of the various secession movements are connected by the narrative of declension that has been long associated with public education.

This notion of the urban school district as a metonym for decline and dysfunction has a long history that extends back to at least the 1950s, a chronology that coincides with the expansion of district consolidation and unification. The creation of the large, impersonal district bogeyman was foundational to expounding the virtues of smaller districts by comparison. The SAUSD petitioners, for example, used this argument to justify their movement to secede from the proposed unified Los Angeles schools and attempt to implement what they considered to be much superior "local" control.

The "centralization" of administrative functions has become part of the dominant historical narrative of public education in the U.S. But peeling back the layers of that narrative, and engaging in what Clifford Geertz famously called "thick description" reveals the complexity of creating effective administrative structures and the variety of interest groups that have sought to influence the project of making free formal education available to Americans. It also illuminates the fact that the form and ultimate function of public schools has been a struggle between ideologies that has evolved over time and been affected in profound ways by a mix of interests. It has been a compromise, and in Los Angeles County in particular, no group—

Progressive reformers, conservatives that want privatization and a voucher system for funding, or advocates of giant countywide districts—can claim that the other has held dominance in this struggle. Digging deeply into the debates and political maneuvering over school district organization also aids in gaining a better understanding of the interest groups involved in education and their connections with each other, as well as the extent to which education as a political issue has affected the political economy of significant metropolitan areas like Los Angeles.

Examining education through the lens of the school district organization (SDO) process naturally led me to rely to a large degree on the records of the Los Angeles County Committee on School District Organization (LACCSDO), as well as the records of the California Department of Education's Bureau of School District Organization—both of which are full of other stories of battles over the form, function, size, and shape of districts. The voluminous records of committees and government officials that have played a central role in adjudicating these debates over public education hold potential to shed new light on the ways in which education and broader social and political trends are interrelated. Further research that utilizes these resources, which are often not preserved in official historical archives but in the offices of county education officials, promises to add further understanding to the story of public education in the U.S. At any given meeting of the LACCSDO, battles over similar issues to those debated in the SAUSD fight in the 1960s and 1970s still play out today.[410] These most often garner the attention of the residents of the specific neighborhoods involved, and little, if any, media

[410] The author witnessed a contentious meeting in 2015 over the move of a very small number of households into another district in an area that had not ever unified and was still comprised of a fragmented group of small districts with a history of disputes over attendance zones.

attention. It is often at this level, however, that public education continues to be shaped in important ways that remain to a large extent outside of the control or oversight of education policymakers.

There are other areas of the SAUSD case specifically that warrant further exploration because they hold potential for creating better understandings of the ways various constituencies acted on school district politics, and the dynamics involved in these debates at a local, grassroots level. The notable opposition movement that emerged in the Southeast Cities to challenge the SAUSD movement, for example, suggests that there was a vocal minority of residents in the Southeast Cities who were pro-integration, and the accusations they leveled against SAUSD opponents around an adversity to taxation and a lack of support of public education cautions against the assumption that the area was comprised of a solidly anti-integration, politically ultra-conservative coalition.[411] While the opposition effort ultimately had little effect on the plan's proponents, who advanced it through the approvals process and to the state board of education three times, the situation was clearly more complex than it first appeared to be. The extent to which the county committee favored the SAUSD position while marginalizing others is worthy of further exploration as well, and could have reflected both larger social biases of the period and perhaps political calculation, especially in light of the tension that existed between the LACCSDO and the state board of education.

[411] Becky Nicolaides has acknowledged these groups, who challenged the homogeneity that often seems present in the Southeast Cities, and were often the flashpoint for political debate, in her work on South Gate. In particular, she focuses first on the tensions between the merchant class and laborers, and then between renters and property owners, the latter holding far more political power than the former. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*.

The Reagan-era department of education's *A Nation At Risk* report added new fuel in the 1980s to the virtually continuous attempts to break up the LAUSD. As the *Los Angeles Times* declared in a piece in the early-1990s about the legislative attempts since 1970 to dismantle the district: "For 23 years, people have tried to split the L.A. school district. It is a saga of flip-flops and feuds fueled by shifting political alliances and the city's big swing in demographics."[412] Consolidation and unification, as envisioned by education policymakers, was only partially implemented in Los Angeles County, yet the idea that the size and geographic footprint of the LAUSD was the primary cause of its problems was a commonly expressed belief.

The latest campaign to tap into the "failing district" narrative is the charter schools movement—which may ultimately prove to be the tactic that achieves at least a significant downsizing of the LAUSD, if not its dismantling. Charter schools are independent entities that are publicly funded and started by parents, teachers, community members, or other interests. They operate under the terms of a charter with a county or state. Since California allowed the establishment of charter schools via the Charter Schools Act of 1992, the state, and LAUSD in particular, has been the site of exponential growth of this type of public-private hybrid, and the heated debate that has come along with its proliferation.[413] By the 2016-2017 academic year, 228 charter schools were in operation in the LAUSD, accounting for approximately 17.5 percent of the district's total schools and centers. Students in independent charter schools, which are considered to be outside of LAUSD's total, numbered 107,142. It is a significant number,

[412] Ralph Frammolino, "Breaking Up's Been Hard to Do," *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1993, SBA1.

[413] The Charter Schools Act is found in California Education Code § 47600. The statute and various laws that followed that clarified its scope and implementation allowed public money to support these independent schools and required school districts, under certain conditions, to provide classrooms and facilities on existing campuses.

especially considering that those students would normally be a part of LAUSD's total enrollment, which stood at 557,632 for the 2016-2017 academic year.[414]

The growth of charter schools is the latest in a series of significant changes to the district since the busing effort ended in the early 1980s. Segregation in the district has also worsened in the face of a massive demographic change. Since the integration program ended, the ethnic makeup of LAUSD students has become overwhelmingly Latino, significantly complicating the task of defining segregated schools.[415] Still, segregation in the LAUSD and the distribution of resources and the disparate levels of achievement that have accompanied it has persisted, particularly for African American children. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights initiated an investigation into LAUSD and found that the district was possibly violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[416] The investigators found that a number of schools in specific areas of the district had black student enrollments that ranged from 88-to-94 percent, and that these schools in particular were low performing on statewide standardized tests.[417] While district administration agreed to implement measures to help remedy the disparity, black students in particular still by-and-large attended segregated schools that were some of the lowest

[414] LAUSD Office of Communications, *Los Angeles Unified School District: Fingertip Facts 2016-2017*, Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles, California, August 2016.

[415] For the 2016-2017 school year, the district was comprised of 74 percent Latino students, 8.4 percent African American, 9.8 percent white, and 6.0 percent Asian. LAUSD Office of Communications, *Los Angeles Unified School District: Fingertip Facts 2016-2017*, Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles, California, August 2016.

[416] Arthur Zeidman, Director, Office of Civil Rights San Francisco to Dr. John Deasy, Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District, October 11, 2011; The specific charge was that the district may have been in violation of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which "prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance."

[417] Ibid.

performing in the district by multiple measures. The lowest performing schools also tend to be located in what was previously known as South-Central Los Angeles (now referred to simply as "South Los Angeles"), which has maintained a notable proportion of African American residents, even though the area underwent a significant demographic change in the 1980s and 1990s with an influx of Latino residents to the area. Jordan High School, previously the focus of the original *Crawford* filing, was one of those included in the list of the five lowest performing high schools. Meanwhile, my San Fernando Valley-based high school, where the seed for this project was first planted, is now an independent charter school and the experiment in diversity that was facilitated by the buses that arrived at campus every morning and left each afternoon is no more—a symbol of a complex school system that has always been in flux.

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