

Chapter 3

Exposing the “Whole Segregation Myth”: The Harlem Nine and New York City’s School Desegregation Battles

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“We will go to jail and rot there, if necessary, but our children will not go to Jr. High Schools 136, 139, or 120,” asserted Mrs. Viola Waddy.¹ Mrs. Waddy was part of a group of African American mothers who had been keeping their children out of three Harlem junior high schools since the beginning of the 1958 school year. The black press dubbed the group the “Little Rock Nine of Harlem,” an honorific title that favorably compared the women to the “Little Rock Nine” in Arkansas, the group of high school students whose integration efforts had made national headlines the prior year.² Harlem’s “Nine” claimed that their sons and daughters were not receiving an equal education in these Northern segregated schools.

These boycotting parents were brought to court by the New York City Board of Education in December 1958. They were charged with illegally keeping their children out of school. Their cases were heard before two different judges who issued opposing verdicts: Four of the mothers were found guilty in Judge Nathaniel Kaplan’s courtroom for violating New York State’s law on compulsory education. Less than two weeks later, two other boycotting African American mothers were found innocent of similar charges in Judge Justine Polier’s courtroom. In a landmark legal victory, Judge Polier charged the New York City Board of Education with offering inferior educations to the city’s black children.

This essay tells the story of New York City's postwar school integration activists, focusing closely on the school boycott and legal battles of the "Harlem Nine." Their protests are linked to the Northern civil rights movement and the battles to desegregate the New York City schools. Two themes emerge from these intertwined stories of female and civil rights activism: First, this 1950s story reveals that the Northern struggles did not lag behind the Southern movement but happened concurrently. In other words, these school battles shift the traditional periodization of the Northern civil rights movement, which has generally focused on the 1960s and the Black Power movement.

Popular and scholarly accounts of school integration battles have generally followed the federal legal and legislative battles that have assumed that de jure and de facto segregation were distinct systems requiring separate dismantling. Therefore, attention to Northern conflicts related to equal educational opportunities has often been linked to legal cases that explicitly ruled on de facto segregation in the early 1970s.³ In New York City specifically, the highly publicized confrontations of the late 1960s around the issue of decentralization and community control in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district came to represent New York's civil rights movement.⁴ Yet for New York's black residents—those who had been in the North for generations as well as new migrants from the South—racial equality in the city's public schools was also a Northern issue that took on heightened urgency in the 1950s. When we tell the history from the experience of parents who were on the front lines in the North in the 1950s, how does our understanding of postwar civil rights struggles change?

The prominence of women as parent activists in this period of supposed female passivity, the second theme, links the reperiodization of the Northern civil rights movement with the ongoing project of reinterpreting the history of women and gender in postwar America.⁵ The protesting African American mothers articulated their concerns through a variety of discourses that offer insights into women's political culture of the 1950s. While they often suggested that their demands were natural, emanating from nurturing maternal instincts, their assertions were not limited to a "motherist" rhetoric.⁶ Like women activists in the South, their claim to equal rights was also driven by a deep understanding of black women's social and economic status and their desire to see their children have other options. They were motivated by shared and individual histories of racial discrimination, gender inequality, and economic exploitation. And they demonstrated that "motherwork" in the black community bridged the boundaries between public and private and revealed that motherhood was hardly a monolithic identity.⁷ The mother activists expanded their arguments with references to the

national civil rights movement that was erupting around them and boldly asserted that they too deserved "a fair share of the pie."⁸

Judge Justine Polier's decision in favor of the boycotting parents explicitly linked the Northern and Southern struggles for civil rights. Polier's ruling, drawn extensively from the case built by Paul Zuber, the parents' attorney, was premised on precedent-setting civil rights cases. The paradox of her ruling, however, was that though she referenced legal cases that challenged de jure segregation in the South in order to prove that Harlem's black schoolchildren were not receiving an equal education, she did not indict the Board of Education with practicing de facto segregation. It was the parent activists who challenged the very definition of de facto segregation by exposing the ways in which de facto style segregation was protected and insured by the state.

New York City was a whirlpool of competing ideologies and political agendas in which race was only beginning to emerge as an important force. The varied responses of white parents, Board of Education administrators, leaders, teachers, and the mayor reveal the complicated nature of race relations in New York in the postwar decades. The city's white communities denounced any association with a blatantly racist South. Recalling the television coverage of Southern black students being attacked for attempting to integrate Central High, they were quick to assert that New York City was not Little Rock, Arkansas. White parents expressed concern that they not be seen as racist while laying claim to their neighborhoods and asserting their rights as citizens and taxpayers.

Black communities like Harlem were bubbling with political activity ranging from the Democratic Party-style politics of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Manhattan Borough President Hulan Jack to the growing presence of the Nation of Islam and its nationalist orientation. Harlem intellectuals and artists were actively embracing anticolonial struggles in Africa and defining their struggles in relation to these international independence movements. And blacks throughout the city were reading Jackie Robinson's responses to civil rights struggles around the country in his *New York Amsterdam News* columns.⁹ Yet New York's blacks still wielded little economic and political clout when it came to the city's power base.

Mayor Robert F. Wagner, a Democrat, whose three terms in office spanned this period of school integration battles, paid limited attention to the concerns of New York's blacks. Borrowing the language of intergroup relations, with its emphasis on intergroup statesmanship that social scientists made popular during the war, he created a commission of religious and ethnic leaders who were mandated to resolve the city's racial and ethnic problems in the spirit of "unity."¹⁰ The Commission on Intergroup

Relations (COIR) in fact shaped few policy decisions. The mayor's political base was not the city's African Americans, and so he did not fear the threats from local NAACP leaders that he would lose black votes if he failed to intervene, for example, in a school integration conflict in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant.¹¹

The Board of Education, however, could not so easily dismiss parent activists from the city's black communities. And the activists persistently pursued both the board's lay leadership and its paid administrators. These differing responses offer useful insights into New York's postwar racial culture. Both bureaucratic imperatives and ideological racism motivated the superintendent and his deputies who opposed integration efforts. At the simplest level, school administrators needed to protect their turf and defend their actions and policies.¹² School Superintendents William Jansen and his successor, John Theobald, masked their objections to integration proposals in their advocacy of the "neighborhood school" policy.¹³ In contrast, the lay leaders (who were selected by the mayor) were far more likely to support efforts to study the issue of school integration while embracing the liberal racial ideology being advanced in the postwar period that pathologized the black family.¹⁴

Employing the language of "cultural deprivation" in describing their black and Puerto Rican students, the majority of the city's 40,000 public school teachers were also invested in maintaining the status quo. The teachers used phrases like "problem children" and "difficult schools"—the accepted educational and sociological terminology of the day—to discuss the city's African American and Puerto Rican schoolchildren. In public testimony, their characterizations of these "problem children" ranged from frankly racist descriptions of "primitive children" to more subtle descriptions of children coming from "culturally deprived homes" and suffering "cultural handicaps."¹⁵ Their racial attitudes were informed, in part, by the desire to protect their working conditions and workplaces. Organized into dozens of small associations and unions (without collective bargaining power), most of the teachers' groups opposed desegregation recommendations that threatened to force them into schools with predominantly black and Puerto Rican students. From their perspective, they had the most to lose by desegregating the schools.¹⁶

Those who actively and passively resisted implementing a program to integrate the school system—Mayor Wagner, Board of Education administrators and lay leaders, the school system's teachers, and the city's middle-class and working-class white parents—did not speak in a unified voice on this issue. However, the combined impact of Northern-style liberal racism, ethnic solidarity, and class fear created a formidable obstacle to desegregating New York City's public schools in the 1950s and 1960s.

Harlem parents had complained about the poor quality of the schools in their community for over two decades. In the aftermath of the 1935 Harlem Riot, Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia's Commission on Conditions in Harlem confirmed these grievances: The schools were antiquated (no new schools had been built in Harlem for over 20 years), poorly equipped, overcrowded, and staffed with too many substitute and inexperienced teachers.¹⁷ It was to this report that Kenneth Clark, the African American psychologist, referred 20 years later when he claimed that in the interim, conditions in Harlem schools had only deteriorated.¹⁸ In February 1954, Clark characterized the prior two decades as "a stage of educational decline" for African American students in the city's schools and called for a study of these conditions.¹⁹

High level administrators within the Board of Education attacked Clark's analysis, which he issued three months before the landmark Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*. The attacks ranged from outright rejection of Clark's characterization of the schools as segregated to attempts to discredit Clark himself by insinuating that he had Communist affiliations as a supporter of the radical Teachers Union.²⁰

Try as they might and did, the Board of Education could not readily dismiss Clark's charges. He was backed by the Intergroup Committee of New York's Public Schools, a broad and vocal coalition of 28 organizations.²¹ Shortly thereafter, the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, issued in May 1954, gave national prominence to an issue that board administrators may have hoped would just go away. And certainly Clark's important role in the Supreme Court decision made it far more difficult for the board to discredit him. Equally important, Clark's rather mild call for a study was supported by a powerful sympathizer, Arthur Levitt, the President of the Board of Education.

Dr. Clark succeeded in getting the board's attention only after the *Brown* decision. However, Clark had been attending to the interrelated issues of New York's troubled youth and the impact of school segregation on New York's schoolchildren since the mid-1940s. Kenneth and Mamie Clark, two young psychologists, opened the Northside Center for Child Development in 1946. Based in Harlem, the center offered a range of mental health services to the community's underserved troubled youth. Developing black youth's self-esteem was a central concern of the Clarks. It was this issue of self-esteem that was pivotal in Kenneth Clark's testimony in the *Brown* case as he argued that segregation stigmatized and damaged black children. At Northside in New York City, the Clarks and their staff developed a model for building self-esteem that employed "psychological counseling in part to heal the injuries of racism in a largely segregated city."²² The Clarks also set about to address the

structural causes of racism by attacking New York City's segregated school system.

School Superintendent William Jansen finally agreed to support Clark's call for a study that was entitled "The Status of the Public School Education of Negro and Puerto Rican Children in New York City." The study was to be conducted by the Public Education Association, an independent organization. However, maintaining his view that segregation did not exist in the New York City schools, Superintendent Jansen demanded that the researchers use the word "separation" instead of "segregation" in their report. Segregation, he insisted, was what they had in the South, not in the North.

The board also decided, as advised by its Public Relations Department, to "show good faith" and set up its own committee to evaluate the findings of the Public Education Association's report.²³ Thus the Commission on Integration was founded. The two most divisive issues that the Commission on Integration addressed were zoning, which dealt with the configuration of neighborhood boundaries for defining local school zones, and teacher assignments, which addressed the contentious issue of how to staff the predominantly black and Puerto Rican schools. It was these two issues that were hotly debated at the commission's January 1957 public hearing.

At the public hearing, Mrs. Mae Mallory, who later became one of the "Harlem Nine," accused the New York City school system of being as much of a "Jim Crow" system as the one she experienced in Macon, Georgia, where she grew up.²⁴ She could not have used more provocative language as far as the Board of Education was concerned. The guiding principle for Superintendent Jansen as he participated in the commission's work was a deep-seated and seemingly intractable race blindness. His refusal to recognize the impact of race conflicted with NAACP leader Ella Baker's demand for a census of the city's student population. By January 1958, Ella Baker would be heading to Atlanta to work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and eventually with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Though widely known for her leadership in the Southern civil rights movement, Baker, in fact, lived most of her adult life in New York City and, from 1946 to 1958, devoted much of her attention to the issue of school segregation in New York.²⁵ Both she and Superintendent Jansen served on the Commission on Integration. Their disagreements reflected a fundamental difference—her insistence and his unwillingness to name race as a critical force in the shaping of educational opportunities for New York City's schoolchildren.

Race was at the heart of the matter for those parents who opposed the commission's recommendations. The issue of race surfaced in the avoidance of the issue in the testimony of one white working-class parent who expressed the views of many in her letter to the president of the board. She wrote, "There is no segregation in N.Y. City public schools, so why integration?"²⁶ Others addressed the issue of race explicitly by simply stating, "We don't want our children integrated with Blacks."²⁷ Some parents, fearing their loss of control, identified the problem in terms of race and warned the Board of Education, "Do not let the Negro politicians and spellbinders mislead you."²⁸ And another parent did not mince his words as he expanded on stated and unstated prejudices. He said, "Clean up the Jungle Homes and you won't have Blackboard Jungle Children; sending them to other schools won't change their stripes."²⁹

The vehement, sometimes vitriolic responses of white parents from around the city confirmed the suspicions of black parents who testified that their children were not receiving an equal education—a fact that had been determined by the Public Education Association's report. At the 1957 public hearing, Naomi Clark, a black PTA president, described the inferior part-time education that her children were receiving due to an overcrowded school:

May I give you a picture of an antiquated school which has 43 classrooms and 51 classes. This is one of the overcrowded schools in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area. ... I am the mother of three children. One goes to school from 8:30 to 12:30, the other two from 11:30 to 3:30. This part-time is a hardship on children and parents alike.³⁰

William Delmar, a Harlem parent, described the contrasting educational experiences of his 15-year-old son in a mostly white school and his 13-year-old daughter in a 100 percent black school:

We notice the difference in the content of the curriculum, in its quality and the amount of enrichment. ... We notice the difference in the quality of guidance. In the mixed school, guidance counselors try to be imaginative, to be in guidance with the aspirations and potentialities of the students. In my daughter's school, guidance is limited to channeling children to be [beauticians] or nurse's aides.

He linked these unequal educational conditions directly to the teachers' situation. In his daughter's school, 52 percent of the teachers were substitutes. As he noted, "competent teachers refuse to come or stay in the school."³¹

While the Commission on Integration's public hearing in the winter of 1957 revealed a good deal about school conditions and parents' attitudes and fears, it yielded few concrete changes or improvements. For many African American parents, the board's pace and concern was far too slow and half-hearted. In an attempt to exert greater pressure on the board, parents joined forces and created Parents in Action Against Education Discrimination, a coalition of organizations that included local chapters of the NAACP, the Negro Teachers Association, Harlem's Parents Committee for Better Education, Jamaica School Improvement Council, and the 369th Veterans Association. Parents in Action, believing that integration was the only way to insure that their children would receive an equal education, escalated their organizing throughout the summer of 1957.³²

Parents in Action met with Mayor Wagner on the day he hosted a reception for Althea Gibson, the African American Wimbledon champion. The irony of airing their grievances on that particular day was not lost on the parents as they tried to hold the mayor accountable on the issue of educational discrimination in New York City.³³ Quick to remind Wagner of his role in appointing the school superintendent, they cited Superintendent Jansen's failure to provide experienced teachers to the schools that their children attended and to act on the integration reports in general and called for Jansen's retirement.³⁴ While making little impact on the mayor, Parents in Action continued organizing throughout the summer. The coalition called upon parents to listen to a weekly radio show on WLIB devoted to the issue of educational discrimination, write their complaints to the Board of Education, and sign a petition. Seasoned organizers like Ella Baker helped run weekly parent workshops where, according to Baker, the parents "became aware that they had certain rights."³⁵ The activities of the summer culminated in a picket and rally at City Hall in the beginning of the new school year.³⁶

On the heels of the fall rally, one group of Harlem parents formed the Junior High School Coordinating Committee around a campaign for "Freedom of Choice of Junior High Schools" and began planning a school boycott for the following school year.³⁷ The committee was composed of a mixed-income group of parents who resided in Harlem's middle-class projects, the Riverton Development, and the lower-income Lincoln Projects across the street.³⁸ Children from both projects were zoned for local Junior High Schools (JHS) 120, 136, and 139. The committee demanded that the children of Harlem be allowed to attend junior high schools outside of Harlem so that they "can have the opportunity to receive *all* the education that is being given on the best standard possible." This was something they did not believe was possible in the Harlem junior high schools.³⁹

The Junior High School Coordinating Committee had well-developed analyses about why Harlem children were receiving inferior educations. They recounted how as parents, Board of Education officials had told them that their children were culturally deprived. Once so designated, the schools they attended were branded as "X" or "difficult" schools; lower standards were then applied to the schools. The Coordinating Committee backed their analysis with statistics about JHS 120, 136, and 139, the three junior high schools in Harlem that parents had chosen to boycott. They claimed that teachers referred 40 percent of the student body in these junior high schools to trade and vocational high schools and recommended less than 20 percent of the students for specialized high schools with college-bound tracks. Furthermore, they argued, while teacher shortages were a citywide problem, the shortages were 20 percent higher in the Harlem junior high schools than in all-white or predominantly white enrollment schools.⁴⁰ Mirroring the arguments made by leading integrationists like Kenneth Clark, the Coordinating Committee spoke passionately of the damage done to all students—black and white—in segregated schools.

A year later, in the fall of 1958, the Harlem parents began a school boycott. The parents of 15 Harlem children zoned to attend JHS 120, 136, and 139 kept their children home.⁴¹ By the time the boycott was in full gear, the participating parents were primarily from the low-income Lincoln Projects. As Barbara Zuber, Paul Zuber's wife, described, "Their philosophy is, what have we got to lose when you are on the basement floor of humanity in terms of educational opportunities."⁴² With truly nothing to lose, Carrie Haynes, a spokeswoman for the boycotting Harlem parents, described the growing frustration, "Conference upon conference has procured nothing. We're going to see this through to the bitter end [even] if it goes to the Supreme Court."⁴³

The Harlem parents did not get to the Supreme Court with their boycott; however, their case ultimately made it to the city's Domestic Relations Court. Initially the boycotting parents, with the assistance of their attorney Paul Zuber, addressed the illegality of keeping their children out of school by organizing private tutoring sessions. Reverend Eugene Callendar, minister at the Mid-Harlem Community Parish on Seventh Avenue and 122nd Street, was sympathetic to the grievances of the Harlem parents and offered his church as a site for the students' classes. For over a month the children were taught English, mathematics, social studies, world events, music, French, and art appreciation by five licensed teachers, as well as by Paul and Barbara Zuber.⁴⁴

By mid-October, the boycotting parents realized that the Board of Education was duly impressed with the tutorial classes they were running

and was going to leave them alone. Recognizing the irony of the situation, they decided to end the private tutoring. Knowing that they now defied the compulsory education law, the parents hoped to force the Board of Education to act on their grievances by filing a claim against the city for \$1 million. The claim accused the city of "sinister and discriminatory purpose in the perpetuation of racial segregation in five school districts in Harlem;" it named Superintendent Theobald, Mayor Wagner, the Board of Education, and the Board of Estimates as the defendants.⁴⁵

The parents succeeded in prompting several responses from the Board of Education. A couple of days after the claim against the city was filed, Theobald requested that the State Education Department conduct a study of the three junior high schools in Harlem that the parents were boycotting. Theobald asserted that the parents' protest had not influenced him to request the state study but did play a part in determining which schools would be selected for the study. Though he attempted to downplay the ongoing school boycott, the boycotting parents declared a victory in their two-year-long battle.⁴⁶

The Board of Education also responded by summoning the Harlem parents to appear before the Domestic Relations Court "for failure to comply with the provisions of the compulsory education law."⁴⁷ For the boycotting parents, the court summons also proved to be a victory, though not initially. Judge Nathaniel Kaplan, who found four of the parents guilty of violating the state's law on compulsory school attendance, tried six of the nine parents.⁴⁸ However, less than two weeks later, Judge Justine Polier, who was hearing the case of two of the parents in her courtroom, dismissed the charges against them.

In this landmark decision, Polier concurred with the boycotting parents that the children who attended the junior high schools in Harlem were receiving "inferior educational opportunities in those schools by reason of racial discrimination."⁴⁹ While agreeing with the defendants that de facto segregation existed in the junior high schools of New York City, Polier did not find evidence that de facto segregation was a consequence of any wrongdoing on the part of the Board of Education. However, citing the testimony of expert witness Dr. Kenneth Clark, she agreed that regardless of whether segregation is a result of governmental action or private housing segregation the separation of children by race disables equal educational opportunities.

The black press and community groups hailed the ruling as the first Northern decision against de facto segregation in public schools.⁵⁰ Polier did not charge the board with causing segregation; she charged it with the results of segregation. However, in basing her decision on pre- and post-*Brown* cases that Zuber, the parents' attorney, cited, she argued that the

North could no longer hide behind de facto segregation as an excuse for inferior educational facilities. Polier referred, for example, to a recent case in Virginia, *Dobbins v. Commonwealth of Virginia* (Va. 1957) in which the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia overturned the lower court's conviction of black parents for refusing to send their children to a racially segregated school on grounds that the school was segregated and inferior. The Virginia Supreme Court argued that compulsory education laws, "cannot be applied as a coercive means to require a citizen to forego or relinquish his Constitutional rights." The judge admonished the New York City Board of Education for suggesting "that the courts of this State be less solicitous of the rights of its citizens."⁵¹ In general, she chided the Board of Education for having "done substantially nothing to rectify a situation it should never have allowed to develop," more than four years after *Brown* and eight years after the Supreme Court's ruling in *Sweatt v. Painter*.⁵²

The focus of Polier's ruling in favor of the parents was on the damaging aspects of segregated education, and she held the Board of Education responsible for these inferior educational facilities. Most specifically, she blamed the board for allowing discrimination in teacher assignment that resulted in less qualified teachers being assigned to the schools in which black and Puerto Rican children predominated. Explaining that the Board of Education is legally responsible for assigning teachers, she linked the board's actions—or inaction—to Southern-style racial discrimination, stating:

The Board of Education of the City of New York can no more disclaim responsibility for what has occurred in this matter than the State of South Carolina could avoid responsibility for a Jim Crow State Democratic party which the State did everything possible to render "private" in character and operation.⁵³

Polier based her conclusions about the board's discriminatory practices on the recent Board of Education figures, showing that as of September 1958, the average percentage of teacher vacancies was 49.5 percent in schools with over 85 percent black and Puerto Rican (X schools, as they were euphemistically called in the Public Education Association's 1955 study).⁵⁴ The city's Y schools (those with over 85 percent white students) had an average of 29.6 percent teacher vacancies. What this meant for students attending the junior high schools being boycotted in Harlem was best relayed by Alfred Nussbaum, the principal of JHS 136.⁵⁵

Nussbaum testified at the hearing that of the 85 teachers in his school, less than half were regularly licensed. Forty-three teaching positions were filled by substitutes, and often the substitutes were filling positions in subject areas that they were not trained to teach. For example, 9 of the 11 math teachers in

his school were not licensed to teach that subject. Only three of the six teachers in the Science Department were licensed to teach science. (One of the science substitute teachers was licensed as a substitute social studies teacher; a second substitute was licensed to teach first through sixth grades but not junior high school.) In addition, the heads of the science and art departments were not licensed to teach those subjects, and one of the assistant principals was not licensed as an assistant principal. Under questioning by Justice Polier, Nussbaum granted that the curriculum at his school was as good as any "subject school" but not necessarily as good as the curriculum in integrated or all-white schools.⁵⁶ It was on the issue of teacher staffing that Polier repeatedly criticized the New York City Board of Education for being in violation of U.S. law, going back as far as the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision that sanctioned segregation but at least required "equal facilities."

Perhaps, most importantly, Justice Polier approached this case not from the narrow perspective of whether the parents had violated the law but from the broader perspective of what she called "institutional racism."⁵⁷ As she wrote in *The Matter of Skipwith and Rector* decision, "The Board of Education contends that one arm of the state—this court—must blindly enforce the unconstitutional denial of constitutional rights by another arm of this state—the Board of Education."⁵⁸

Judge Polier's ruling was a powerful vindication for the Harlem parents of their experiences in the junior high schools that they were boycotting. Furthermore, the court hearing itself served to support the community's historic and ongoing complaints that their children were not receiving an equal education. Her ruling also helped embolden the four mothers who were convicted by Judge Kaplan for violating the state's compulsory school law. On the eve of their sentencing, which could include a ten-day jail term, they declared: "We are packing our tooth brushes and bags and we will present ourselves before Judge Kaplan for jail sentencing. We will go to jail and rot there, if necessary, but our children will not go to Jr. High Schools 136, 139, or 120."⁵⁹

On the heels of Judge Polier's dismissal of the charges against two of the parents, the four convicted mothers asked Judge Kaplan to reopen their case and dismiss the charges filed against them by the Board of Education.⁶⁰ Ultimately, Judge Kaplan announced that he would take no action against the four mothers, and they escaped punishment.⁶¹ The leniency they were granted was also directly related to an interim solution that was reached between the "Harlem Nine" and the Board of Education. The agreement, negotiated between Zuber and Superintendent Theobald, with the assistance of the mayor's COIR, represented a compromise on both sides. The children would not return to the schools for which they

had been zoned, nor would they be admitted to the schools that their parents requested. Instead they would be sent to a school that Superintendent Theobald chose, JHS 43. This school was also based in Harlem but it had a pilot project that offered special guidance services and a cultural program sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board and the National Scholarship Services for Negro Students.⁶²

Both the Board of Education and the parents considered the solution an interim one as they awaited the outcome of a couple of court cases. Much to the chagrin of the Harlem parents, the Board of Education had appealed the Polier decision.⁶³ Concurrently, the parents were waiting on a \$1 million civil suit they had filed against the city for the "alleged injustice suffered by the children in segregated schools."⁶⁴

The very fact that the board initiated (though ultimately dropped) an appeal of the Polier decision served to unite many in Harlem against it.⁶⁵ Shortly after the board announced its intent to appeal the decision, the Empire State Baptist Convention, representing 350,000 Baptists, called for the removal of every board member, with the exception of Baptist board member Dr. Gardner Taylor, the one black board member. Forming an emergency committee on the Harlem School Crisis, the convention's leadership threatened a mass march on City Hall if Mayor Wagner did not replace the board. Their only stipulation, according to Reverend George Lawrence, the emergency committee's chairman, was that if the board rescinded its decision to appeal the Polier decision, then they would not lead "a City Hall pilgrimage."⁶⁶ Board of Education member Taylor, president of the Protestant Council and pastor of the Concord Baptist Church, called upon his congregation of more than 8,000 members to contribute \$1,000 to help cover the expenses of fighting the board's appeal.⁶⁷ Explaining that the congregation made a yearly donation to the United Negro College Fund, he said that this year the funds collected would "be used to conduct New York's Jim Crow School fight."⁶⁸

The Harlem Neighborhoods Association (HNA), a coalition of Harlem civic and social organizations, also protested the board's appeal. As they argued, an appeal would "increase the gap separating the Board of Education from our community."⁶⁹ Within Harlem's political arena, two state legislators, Senator James L. Watson and Assemblyman Lloyd E. Dickens, both Harlem Democrats, responded to the board's appeal by sponsoring a resolution that called for a joint legislative committee, with subpoena power, to study the school segregation issue in New York City.⁷⁰

The public outcry demonstrated that many in Harlem were deeply offended by the implications of the board's decision to appeal Judge Polier's verdict. The board's action confirmed many African Americans'

long-held suspicions that, as Dr. Taylor put it, "The city of New York is saying to underprivileged Negro and Puerto Rican children just this: You can't go to schools that are equal, you can't have equal opportunities here."⁷¹ And in the process of confirming suspicions, the city's black parents and community leaders saw their protests as linked to similar struggles in the South. "Wittingly or unwittingly the board erased the last line of differences between Little Rock and New York," concluded Dr. Taylor.⁷²

Southern civil rights struggles like the Little Rock, Arkansas, school integration battles featured prominently on the front pages of the *New York Amsterdam News*. The editors juxtaposed photos of mob action in Little Rock with headlines reminding readers, "Don't Forget, N.Y. Has Its Own School Problem" and a photo of a Harlem mother registering her daughter in the local school. The caption under the photo stated: "While [the] nation's eyes [are] focused on attempts by Negro children to enter all-white schools for the first time in the South, little Gertrude Jenkins undergoes the same experience right here in New York City. Here she registers at 100 percent segregated Public School 194."⁷³ The 1959 New Year's Day cartoon depicted an African American toddler aiming a shotgun at three crows, "Jimcros" [*sic*], that represented the Little Rock Board of Education, the Norfolk Board of Education, and the New York City Board of Education.⁷⁴

If being cast in relation to nationally televised Southern battles gave greater weight and importance to this Northern fight, then being linked to Southern civil rights leaders served a similar function for the Northern women boycotters. The Harlem mothers were compared to Daisy Bates in Little Rock, Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Aurtherine Lucy in Tuscaloosa, Irene Morgan in Virginia, and Ada Sipuel in Oklahoma and celebrated in the sisterhood of Southern women activists.⁷⁵ Being associated to these Southern heroes helped ensure their respectability at least within the black community as they publicly asserted their rights. *New York Amsterdam News* editor James Hicks had been noting the importance of Southern women civil rights activists for several years before paying attention to local parent activism. In one particularly explicit editorial, Hicks offered a chronology of women challenging segregation in the South and concluded: "The hand that rocks the cradle is shaking up this country of ours in the fight for civil rights!"⁷⁶

These Southern activists were represented as mothers regardless of their maternal status. Their political value and moral authority rested in the fact that they were, at least symbolically, "cradle rockers." In painting this image, Hicks was mirroring the portrayals of black women in the national media. Jacqueline Jones noted in her study of *Ebony* that the black magazine, which had the largest circulation in the postwar period, regularly featured

accomplished black women who defied prejudice and challenged bigotry. While acknowledging the reality that many black women had to work outside of the home, the magazine consistently presented portraits of women who successfully combined careers with motherhood. At the same time, the magazine also celebrated those women who were able to take advantage of their husband's postwar higher wages and stay at home. As one editorial announced, "Goodbye Mammy, Hello Mom."⁷⁷

Constructing an image of respectable black women as good mothers—in the North and South—was in keeping with popular culture's depictions of America's postwar (and laid-off) happy housewives. In the black community, however, this representation of motherhood was also a response to a political struggle in which motherhood was the battlefield over which the rights and legitimacy of black families were being fought.⁷⁸ Analyzing the black family—its social structure, psychology, and history—proved to be fertile territory for postwar liberal and conservative social scientists to explore. The implications of their theories were critical as they affected legal decisions and public policy. Building on the writings of E. Franklin Frazier and Gunnar Myrdal, social theorists focused on the "matriarchal" family structure to characterize the black family as pathological. African American mothers came under the scrutiny of social scientists who essentially blamed these supposedly dominant women for the failures of black men and the "cultural deprivation" of black children. As social scientists shifted the focus on racial inferiority from biological determinism to cultural pathology, advancing an image of good mothers was one response to the cultural wars of the 1950s.⁷⁹

The portrayal of Harlem's women activists in the local black press suggests that the black community looked to their maternal roles to provide leadership. The women were saluted as "courageous mothers" whose resistance became the copy for headlines: "Striking School Moms Say ... 'We'd Rather Go To Jail.'"⁸⁰ Equally important was the presentation of these women as regular, normal mothers—just like white mothers—who want the best for their children. Hence, an article subtitled one section "Mothers Comments" and included simple and universal comments by a group of Brooklyn boycotting mothers, such as, "I want to see that he [ten-year-old Harold] gets a better education" and "I want her [ten-year-old Deborah] to attend a good school."⁸¹

As they were represented to the black community, it was black women's maternal roles that gave them credibility and authority to step into the public sphere. Often it was *Amsterdam News* editor Hicks who would appeal to the "moms" to join the demonstrations at City Hall: "But don't go alone. See to it that your minister goes and as many people from your

church as possible.”⁸² Hicks, who the year before was attacked while covering the “Little Rock Nine”’s attempts to integrate Central High School, placed Harlem’s “moms” in their domestic space in his informal “chat” with them and depicted them as responsible mothers, caring for their children the way good mothers do:

Hi Mom,—May I come in a minute? Thanks. No, I won’t sit down. I know you’re busy getting the kids ready for school and I hate to bother you. But it was so important that I thought I’d better drop in and tell you about it. It’s about the schools, Mom, and I know you’re interested, that’s why I came. You go ahead with your ironing and I’ll try to be as brief as possible.⁸³

These mothers were good mothers, not only in their private domain but also in their public roles as workers. Contrary to popular depictions of America’s women returning to the home after WWII, black female participation in the labor force remained steady after the war and increased for white women. By 1950, one-third of all black wives worked outside of the home compared to one-quarter of all married women. African American women continued to find work in the lowest paying sector of the economy, with almost half of all black women employed in domestic work.⁸⁴ Their work lives, therefore, had to be presented as yet another aspect of what made them good and responsible mothers. As Hicks reminded readers in another editorial, these mothers who worry about the ways in which the minds of their children have “been subtly, but systematically twisted, stunted and warped by a school system” are the ones who also stand “over a hot stove eight hours in someone’s kitchen.”⁸⁵

The maternalist representation enhanced the status of black activists as respectable mothers and women. The maternalist argument, however, advanced on behalf of the boycotting mothers, was also a restricting one that was premised on a belief in male superiority and did not allow women to claim leadership positions.⁸⁶ For ultimately, though these women were saluted as courageous by the local black press, it was equally apparent that their cause would only succeed with the leadership of black male lawyers and civil rights leaders. In his “chat” with the “moms,” Hicks put it quite clearly:

Things have been happening in this school business since I talked with you last time, Mom. In the first place, you and your child have at last some support—some real support, Mom. You’re not fighting alone, anymore. A young lawyer by the name of Paul Zuber has filed suit against the schools. And you know what else—I saved this until the last, Mom, because I knew you’d be tickled to hear it—you know what else? Thurgood Marshall has stepped into the picture on the side of the young lawyer.⁸⁷

The black press authenticated the power of the mothers by linking it to real, male power. And the leaders were not only male but also educated. They were the professional class of lawyers, ministers, psychologists, and journalists within New York's black community. Their professional status suggests that the lines of division within the community were embedded in both class differences as well as traditional gender roles. Hicks's description of the gendered and class divisions within New York City's community of civil rights activists simply mirrored the divisions operating in the civil rights movement as a whole as public power was taken by male leaders in the North and South.⁸⁸

Not only did a maternalist identity offer little power, the activists themselves did not necessarily embrace it. As Mae Mallory explained, her role in the movement for equal educational opportunities did not stem from a moral authority embedded in her maternal role. Quite to the contrary, she was motivated by a powerful desire to ensure that her daughter not be defined by her gender and race and relegated to the bottom of the social and economic ladder as a black woman. "I wanted both my children to get the best possible public education that they could," asserted Mrs. Mallory, "because I wanted to break the cycle of women doing days work or factory work."⁸⁹ She shared the belief of her Southern sisters from Montgomery's Women's Political Council that "a woman's duties do not end in the home, church or classroom."⁹⁰ Their sense of entitlement extended beyond the boundaries of class, race, and gender as they described their activism as the struggle for human rights.

How do we assess the impact of these mothers who were on the front lines of the school integration battles? In the short run they were successful in drawing the Board of Education's attention to their issues, and the board offered piecemeal solutions to individual black families. When black mothers demanded equal educational opportunities for their children in Harlem's segregated schools, they brought attention to an issue generally seen as the exclusive domain of the segregated South. The school boycott and Polier decision underscored, as Mae Mallory put it, the "whole segregation myth" in New York City. In other words, the boundaries between de jure and de facto segregation, between the North and the South, were blurred as the mothers called attention to inferior educational opportunities in the city's black schools, and Judge Polier admonished the Board of Education for having administered this inequality in the wake of *Brown*.

The "Harlem Nine" provided a model of neighborhood school boycotts that would be replicated in black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods over the next decade and a half. Like the "Harlem Nine," future parent boycotters would experience first hand the intransigence of the Board of Education.

Steeped in its institutional machinations that, in many cases, related to racial politics and in some cases had nothing to do with race, it would prove to be a very difficult system to change. Black parents would continue to experience the limitations of their political power and legal rights when it came to the city's power structure. Conversely, they would be radically affected by the changing demographics of the city that had everything to do with race and class, as the city lost a significant share of its tax base in the flurry of white flight. Finally, as political activists, the parent boycotters would continue to be confined by maternal identities that limited their power and the possibilities of the movement.

Notes

1. "Defy Court's Order in School Boycott," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1958.
2. "Parents Close Special School," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 18, 1958. In the fall of 1957, nine African American school children attempted to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The mobs of white residents who attempted to block the students from entering the school became a national and international story, as did Governor Orval Faubus's use of the Arkansas National Guard to achieve the same purpose. Though President Eisenhower called in U.S. paratroopers to protect the nine students, and in June 1958 the first black student graduated from Central High, the struggle continued through the fall of 1958 when Governor Faubus closed all of the public high schools in Little Rock. The schools were not reopened until August 1959, when the Supreme Court ruled that the closing was unconstitutional. See Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (New York: David McKay Co., 1962); Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom* (New York: Bantam, 1990), 36–52; and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 222–225.
3. The literature on Northern (and Western) struggles for equal educational opportunities generally picks up the story with the Supreme Court's 1973 challenge to de facto segregation (*Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1*) and the court-ordered school busing cases of the early 1970s. Boston's busing war has received a fair amount of attention (see Jeanne Theoharis's critical analysis of this literature in this volume). Other examples include Gregory S. Jacobs's study of Columbus, Ohio's 1977 court-ordered school desegregation case, *Getting Around Brown: Desegregation, Development, and the Columbus Public Schools* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); George R. Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983); several essays in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, Gary Orfield, Susan E. Eaton and the Harvard Project on School Desegregation, eds. (New York: The New Press, 1996), including "Still Separate, Still Unequal," by Susan E. Eaton, Joseph Feldman,

- and Edward Kirby, and "Segregated Housing and School Resegregation," by Gary Orfield. The recent publication of James T. Patterson's *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and ensuing debate about the court's, the civil rights attorneys', and the historians' attention to Northern school segregation underscores that this remains a contentious historical and contemporary issue. See Lewis M. Steel's review of Patterson's book and letters to the editor in *The Nation*, February 5, 2001, and April 30, 2001.
4. The media coverage of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict specifically and the Northern civil rights movement in general focused on the militancy of the black community leadership's demand for community control. Journalist Daniel Schorr has talked about the ways in which reporters were directed to focus on violent aspects of the movement. See interview with Schorr, *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews*, exhibition video, "The Civil Rights Movement," (produced by the Jewish Museum, New York, 1992). For references to various partisan accounts and scholarly interpretations of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville episode and a discussion of the conflict's 1950s context, see Adina Back, "Blacks, Jews and the Struggle to Integrate Brooklyn's Junior High School 258: A Cold War Story," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20 (winter 2001): 38-69.
 5. Joanne Meyerowitz's anthology has been pivotal in challenging traditional depictions of women in the 1950s. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
 6. Annelise Orleck, Alexis Jetter, and Diana Taylor use the term "motherist" to describe the activism of mothers, which may include but is not necessarily limited to a maternal rhetoric. *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1997), Introduction. See also Kathleen Blee, ed., *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Evelyn Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey, eds., *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency* (Routledge: New York, 1994); and Molly Ladd-Taylor and Laurie Umansky, eds., *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
 7. In offering a black feminist theory of motherhood, Patricia Hill Collins has coined the term "motherwork" to argue that the rigid distinctions between public and private posited in feminist theorizing about motherhood are not applicable for understanding racial ethnic women's experiences and histories of motherhood. "Shifting the Center: Race, Class and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood," in Glenn, Chang, and Forcey, eds., *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, 47-48.
 8. Author interview with Mrs. Mae Mallory, January 30, 2000, Brooklyn, N.Y.
 9. Charles Green and Basil Wilson, *The Struggle for Black Empowerment in New York City* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989); "2000 at Moslem Feast in Harlem," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1957; Robin D. G. Kelley, "House Negroes

- on the Loose: Malcolm X and the Black Bourgeoisie," 16 (essay, author's personal possession); and Kelley and Betsy Esch, "Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution," 2-5 (essay, author's personal possession).
10. Remarks by Mayor Wagner at Dinner of the Urban League, February 15, 1954. Robert F. Wagner Papers, New York City Municipal Archives (hereafter referred to as the Wagner Papers), B.59, F.685. See Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) for a discussion of the intergroup relations field.
 11. "Brooklyn Pupils Shifted in Integration Program," *Herald Tribune*, October 30, 1956.
 12. David Rogers offers a comprehensive analysis of the bureaucratic structure and functions of the Board of Education during this period. *110 Livingston Street: Politics and Bureaucracy in the New York City Schools* (New York: Random House, 1968).
 13. Though Jansen and Theobald both embraced the "neighborhood school" policy, Theobald was not as unequivocally opposed to integration as was his predecessor. Having served as Mayor Wagner's deputy mayor before being appointed to be Superintendent of Schools, Theobald brought to the position political skills and an intellectual understanding of the issue that Jansen never had. See Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*. Diane Ravitch also discusses the differences between the two superintendents, though our conclusions about Theobald's commitment to school integration differ. *The Great School Wars: A History of New York City Public Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), chapter 23.
 14. The work of E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), and Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), strongly influenced postwar policymakers. As historian Regina Kunzel has noted, however, they were less inclined to focus on the aspects of Frazier's analysis that indicted racism. Regina Kunzel, "White Neurosis, Black Pathology: Constructing Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy in Wartime and Postwar United States," in Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 320. See Michael Katz, *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-23, for a useful historical overview of the pathologizing of the "underclass."
 15. The testimony of various teacher organizations at the public hearing held by the Board of Education's Commission on Integration in January 1957 offers insights into teachers' attitudes about race. See Adina Back, "Up South in New York: The 1950s School Desegregation Struggle" (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 1997), chapter 3.
 16. *Ibid.* Only the small, radical Teachers Union and the even smaller Negro Teachers Association organized vigorously on behalf of school integration.
 17. Report of the Sub-Committee on Education and Recreation of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem and Recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Education and Recreation, Supplemental to the Report of April

- 1942 (personal collection); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), 215.
18. "Segregated Schools in New York City," speech by Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, April 24, 1954 at "Children Apart" Conference. United Parents Association Archives, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College Columbia University (hereafter referred to as UPA Collection), S.10, F.52.
 19. Speech by Kenneth B. Clark, Urban League of Greater New York, Negro History Week-Brotherhood Month Dinner, February 12 and 15, 1954, pp. 1-2. UPA Collection, S.10, F.52.
 20. Letter to William Jansen from Clare C. Baldwin, Assistant Superintendent, May 12, 1954, 2-3. Board of Education Collection (hereafter B/E Collection), S.456, F.2C.
 21. The Intergroup Committee included organizations like American Jewish Congress, Citizens Committee on Children, NAACP, Public Education Association, and United Parents Association.
 22. Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Children, Race and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 23.
 23. Letter to William Jansen from Paul W. Aron, Public Relations Assistant, November 22, 1954. B/E Collection, S.456, F.2C.
 24. Testimony by Mrs. Mallory (Speaker #38) from PTA of Public School 10, Manhattan, at the B/E Public Hearing, January 17, 1957. B/E Collection, S.261, B.2, F.14.
 25. Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), chapter 5. According to Grant, Baker was critical of the New York City branch of the NAACP for paying little attention to "problems in its own backyard." Curiously, Baker's biographers also pay little attention to her leadership in the Northern civil rights movement, though biographer Barbara Ransby describes that moving to Atlanta to work with SCLC was a difficult decision for Baker to make as she was "deeply involved" in the local struggles for educational equality. Barbara Ransby, "Ella J. Baker and the Black Radical Tradition" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1996), 199-200. Baker's organizing skills and philosophy, well honed in the North, suggest links between Northern and Southern civil rights activities worth exploring more fully. Historians' inattention to pre-1960s Northern civil rights activism is demonstrated again in Kenneth B. Clark's oral history interview conducted for the Oral History Collection of Columbia University. In this extensive interview, which was conducted over the course of 14 sessions between 1976 and 1985, the oral historian never once asked Clark about his involvement with New York City's school integration movement.
 26. Letter to Charles Silver from Mrs. Henry C. Kolin, February 21, 1957, B/E Collection, S.261, B.1, F.10.
 27. Letter to the New York City Board of Education from O'Neil and Nillson, n.d., B/E Collection, S.261, B.1, F.10.

28. Letters to Charles Silver from Samuel Atkin, March 23, 1957, and Wesley Baker, January 29, 1957. B/E Collection, S.261, B.1, F.10.
29. Letter to Board of Education from Raymond M. Chaitin, January 19, 1957, B/E Collection, S.261, B.1, F.9.
30. Testimony by Naomi Clark (Speaker #48), President of the PTA of PS 129, Brooklyn, B/E Public Hearing, January 17, 1957, B/E Collection, S.261, B.2, F.14.
31. Comments to Charles Silver, members of the board, Mr. Jansen from William Delmar, President of the PTA of PS 136, Manhattan, n.d., B/E Collection, S.261, B.1, F.8.
32. "Parents Rap School Jim Crow: Air Protests Before Mayor," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1957. Letter to Mayor Robert F. Wagner from Ella Baker, Paul B. Zuber, and Richard Parrish, June 28, 1957. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Collections of the Manuscript Division, the Library of Congress. (Hereafter referred to as NAACP). II, F: "Ella Baker." Their strategy for achieving integration included calling for a construction moratorium on new schools in sites that would only intensify segregation and transferring all junior high school students from schools with predominantly black enrollments to junior high schools in other districts. As they monitored the actions of the board, the parents accused it of a variety of abuses: They charged the district superintendent with establishing the summer school remedial reading program in a school closest to the area's white communities and farthest from the black neighborhoods, and they accused the board of intending to send the newest teachers with the lowest passing grades to the Harlem schools.
33. Report of Education Committee to the Executive Committee of the New York Branch, NAACP, by Ella Baker, July 9, 1957. NAACP, II, F: "Ella Baker." Gibson was the first African American to be honored by New York with a ticker tape ceremony. See coverage in *New York Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1957.
34. Parents in Action Against Educational Discrimination, leaflet, "Jansen Must Go!" July 1957. NAACP, Ella Baker File. "Parents Rap School Jim Crow: Air Protests Before Mayor," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1957.
35. Ellen Cantarow, "Ella Baker—Organizing for Civil Rights," in *Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change*, Ellen Cantarow and Susan O'Malley, eds. (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1980), 68.
36. "Parents Picket City Hall Over Integration Delay," *The New York Times*, September 20, 1957; and "Don't Forget, N.Y. Has Its Own School Problem," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 28, 1957. *The New York Times* claimed that 200 parents attended the picket, and *New York Amsterdam News* offered the figure of 500 parents.
37. Parents in Action Against Educational Discrimination, leaflet, "Your Committee Had Things to Report... So Please Be Present October 10 [1957]. ..." NAACP II, F: "Ella Baker."
38. The Riverton Development was built by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in response to the company's exclusionary policies in its Stuyvesant

- town development. Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1965), 57.
39. Letter to Rose Russell from Carrie E. Haynes, Chairman, Junior High School Coordinating Committee Supporting 9 Parents of Harlem, and Ruby Sims, President of the PTA JHS133, January 31, 1959. The Teachers Union of the City of New York records. Labor-Management Documentation Center, Cornell University. (hereafter referred to as the TU Collection) 5015, 45-49.
 40. *Ibid.*, 1.
 41. Letter to Rose Russell from Carrie E. Haynes; "21 Negro Pupils Are Kept Home on Charge of Segregation Here," *The New York Times*, September 9, 1958, 1; "Harlem Parents Still on Strike," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 20, 1958. Six of the 21 boycotting students were from Brooklyn. The Brooklyn boycott was resolved within several days as the new school superintendent, John Theobald, agreed to admit the boycotting students to a better-integrated school than the one for which they had originally been zoned. The Board of Education characterized this rezoning as part of a general rezoning plan that they had been intending to effect later in the school year. "Brooklyn School Dispute Settled When Negroes Accept Rezoning," *The New York Times*, September 16, 1958. "Brooklyn Parents Seeking Showdown on JimCro [sic] Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 13, 1958; "Brooklyn Parents in School Victory," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 20, 1958.
 42. Author interview with Barbara Zuber, Troy, N.Y., July 16, 2001.
 43. "21 Negro Pupils Still Kept home," *The New York Times*, September 10, 1958. Carrie Haynes personally experienced the benefits of being part of the larger community of civil rights activists. When the city nearly evicted her from her Lincoln Project home, Bayard Rustin, acting executive director of In Friendship, the organization formed by Rustin, Ella Baker, Philip Randolph, and Stanley Levinson to raise funds for Southern integration activists, literally stopped the eviction with a loan from In Friendship. "Community Halts Woman's Eviction," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 4, 1958.
 44. "Harlem Parents in Plea to State," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1958; "Harlem's Boycott Classes," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 20, 1958; "School Boycott Rests with Theobald," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 11, 1958.
 45. "School Boycott Rests with Theobald," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 11, 1958; "Parents Close Special School," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 18, 1958; and "Harlem Parents File for Million," *The New York Times*, October 29, 1958. This was not the first time that African American parents brought a suit against the Board of Education. In fact, Mae Mallory, one of the parents on whose behalf the 1958 suit was filed, had filed a suit against the Board of Education the year before. In that suit, Mallory attacked the school zoning laws as unconstitutional and sought to compel the board to permit her daughter to attend a junior high school outside of her school district. That same fall, Mrs. William Robinson, a Bronx parent, filed a similar suit. "Negro

- Sues City on School Zoning," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1957; "More Parents File School Suits," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 27, 1957; and "2D School Suit Filed," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1957.
46. "State to Probe JHS in Harlem," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 8, 1958; and "State Will Study 3 Harlem Schools," *The New York Times*, October 30, 1958.
 47. "6 Mothers Summoned," *The New York Times*, November 12, 1958.
 48. "4 Mothers Guilty in School Boycott," *The New York Times*, December 4, 1958. Kaplan heard three other cases and adjourned one of them until a further hearing; dismissed another on a technicality; and in the third case, the mother was placed on parole because she had returned her child to public school.
 49. Judge Polier Ruling, Domestic Relations Court of the City of New York, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, MC413 Justine Polier Collection, B21, F247, 28, December 15, 1958. "2 Harlem Schools Called Inferior as Court Frees Two in Boycott," *The New York Times*, December 16, 1958; and "Court Finds Bias in Harlem Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 20, 1958.
 50. Justine Wise Polier, *Juvenile Justice in Double Jeopardy: The Distanced Community and Vengeful Retribution* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), 152.
 51. Polier Ruling, 13.
 52. *Ibid.*, 25. The Supreme Court ruled that Heman Sweatt be admitted to the University of Texas Law School, as there were no equal facilities in Texas for African Americans wanting to go to law school.
 53. *Ibid.*, 26.
 54. "The Status of the Public School Education of Negro and Puerto Rican Children in New York City," presented to the Board of Education Commission on Education, prepared by the Public Education Association assisted by the New York University Research Center for Human Relations, October 1955. TU Collection, 45-1. The postwar vocabulary in New York for "deserving" (white) and "non-deserving" (nonwhite) students ranged from the impersonal notations of "X" and "Y" to references to "problem" schools, "difficult" schools, and "subject" schools.
 55. *Ibid.*, 21–22.
 56. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20; *New York Amsterdam News*, November 15, 1958.
 57. Polier, *Juvenile Justice in Double Jeopardy*, 151. Polier described the criticism she received after the ruling, especially from the higher judicial hierarchy, like state Supreme Court judges who "showed anxiety about a Juvenile Court judge acting as either a citizen or a judge to protect constitutional rights." On the other hand, Polier had the support of Thurgood Marshall (then Director of the NAACP's National Education and Defense Fund), who called after her decision and said that the fund would take the case if it were appealed (page 9). Polier also described the volumes of hate mail she received, including the last vituperative letter she received, 14 years after the decision, in which the person wrote: "People like you are the real criminals—not the stupid black and white niggers who are wrecking a once great City and nation. They are

doing what scum like you have taught them to do—take an aggressive violent stance or demand their alleged rights. May you rot in hell" (page 152).

58. "2 Harlem Schools Called Inferior as Court Frees Two in Boycott," *The New York Times*, December 16, 1958.
59. "Defy Court's Order in School Boycott," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1958.
60. "Boycott Parents Want New Trial," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 27, 1958. Other concerned parents were also emboldened by the Polier decision. Shortly after her ruling, another group of Harlem parents visited JHS 52 (on Academy Street and Broadway) and requested, to no avail, that their children be allowed to register there. As they explained, "The parents based their request upon their constitutional rights and on Justice Polier's recent decision." Telephone message to the Teachers Union from Carrie Haynes. TU Collection 5015, 45–49.
61. "Harlem Parents to Gain Leniency," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1959; and "4 Negro Mothers Freed in Boycott," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1959.
62. "Harlem Talks Bid for School Peace," *The New York Times*, January 30, 1959; "School Boycott End Foreseen in Harlem," *The New York Times*, February 8, 1959; "Pact is Reached on Harlem Schools," *The New York Times*, February 11, 1959; and "A Joint Statement" by John Theobald and Paul Zuber, February 10, 1959. B/E Collection, IV/A/3, B.22, F.3.
Some of the parents had tried unsuccessfully to enroll their children in Inwood Junior High School, an integrated school in Washington Heights. "Boycott Parents to Sue on Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 10, 1958.
63. Theobald and Zuber, "A Joint Statement"; James L. Hicks (columnist), "Wasting Time," and editorial, "Why Not Act," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 3, 1959; "Dr. Taylor Raps N.Y. School Board," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 10, 1959; and Board of Education, "Statement Released at Press Conference," January 13, 1959. B/E Collection, IV/A/3, B.22, F.3; and "City Plans Appeal in School Boycott," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1959.
64. "Pact is Reached on Harlem Schools," *The New York Times*, February 11, 1959; "Negro Parents Act To Sue City Schools," *The New York Times*, January 6, 1959; and "Boycott Parents to Sue on Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 10, 1959.
65. Polier, *Juvenile Justice in Double Jeopardy*, 152.
66. "School Board Appeal Enrages Baptists," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 24, 1959. The Empire State Baptist Convention included all of the Baptists in New York State who attended some 340 churches. The Baptists represented the largest denomination of African American Protestants. See Clarence Taylor, *The Black Churches of Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 236–238.
67. The next year, Reverend Taylor, one of Martin Luther King's closest friends, was part of an insurgent group that included King and that tried unsuccessfully to get Taylor elected to the presidency of the National Baptist Convention (NBC). Their goal was to bring the NBC into the forefront of the civil rights

- movement. See Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 227, 335–336. See also Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 197–198.
68. "School Board Appeal Enrages Baptists," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 24, 1959.
 69. Letter to Teachers Union from Milton Yale, Executive Secretary, HNA, March 4, 1959. TU Collection, 5015, 45–11. Until the late 1950s, the HNA was called the Central Harlem Council for Community Planning. It was founded in 1934 and was under the umbrella of the Welfare Council of New York City.
 70. "Dickens, Watson Will Ask State Probe of School Integration," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 24, 1959; "2 Bid State Study City School 'Bias,'" *The New York Times*, January 28, 1959.
 71. "2 Bid State Study City School 'Bias,'" *The New York Times*, January 28, 1959
 72. "City Plans Appeal in School Boycott," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1959.
 73. Front page photo, *New York Amsterdam News*, September 14, 1957. "Don't Forget, N.Y. Has Its Own School Problem," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 28, 1957.
 74. Cartoon, "Knot-Hole Gang," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 3, 1959.
 75. "The Message," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 27, 1957. See Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers, 1941–1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) for the best compilation to date on civil rights women activists.
 76. "A Woman's World," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 5, 1956. As I note in "Blacks, Jews and the Struggle to Integrate Brooklyn's Junior High School 258," (63, n. 42), initially there was no coverage of local school integration struggles in the *Amsterdam News*.
 77. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 268–274. Joanne Meyerowitz's study of women's magazines in the postwar decade concurs with Jones's analysis and offers a general corrective to Betty Friedan's monolithic characterization of America's postwar housebound women. See Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946–1958" in Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 229–262.
 78. Ruth Feldstein makes a powerful argument for looking at motherhood as a battleground on which the meaning of respectability and rights was fought in the race wars of the civil rights movement. Ruth Feldstein, "'I Wanted the Whole World to See': Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till," in Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 263–303.
 79. Many scholars have written about the emergence of a postwar theory of black family pathology. In addition to works cited in note 14, other works that focus especially on the gendered aspects of these theories and their impact on black women include Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), chapter 14; Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American*

- Women* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), chapter 6; and Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992), chapter 2.
80. *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1958; "Wasting Time," January 3, 1959.
 81. "Brooklyn Parents Seeking Showdown," September 13, 1958.
 82. "City Hall Date," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 9, 1957.
 83. *Ibid.*
 84. Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 260–269.
 85. "We're Sick Too," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 22, 1958.
 86. Hicks explicitly asserted this in one editorial in which he described himself as a man who "believes in the superiority of the male," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 5, 1956.
 87. "City Hall Date," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 9, 1957.
 88. Belinda Robnett probes the meanings and forms of black women's leadership in the Southern civil rights movement in which leaders like Ella Baker and Septima Clark described being excluded from the formal network of male religious leaders. *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Fannie Lou Hamer's biographer, Chana Kai Lee, describes the ways in which Hamer was discriminated against by NAACP male leadership, who considered her an inappropriate leader as a poor, uneducated woman. According to Lee, Hamer had a sharp analysis of class divisions and hierarchy within the civil rights movement. *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). For other discussions of women's roles, see Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers, 1941–1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
 89. Author interview with Mrs. Mae Mallory, Brooklyn, N.Y., January 30, 2000.
 90. Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 172.