Oral History Interview of Hubie Jones

Interview Date: February 16, 2006

Interviewed by: Elizabeth Conley, Suffolk University Student from History 364: Oral History

Citation: Jones, Hubie. Interviewed by Elizabeth Conley. John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project OH-064. 16 February 2006. Transcript and audio available. John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

Copyright Information: Copyright ©2006, Suffolk University.

Interview Summary

In this interview, Hubert “Hubie” Jones, a social worker as well as dean emeritus and professor at the Boston University School of Social Work, discusses the impact of the 1974 Garrity decision, which required some students to be bused between Boston neighborhoods with the intention of creating racial balance in the public schools. Mr. Jones reflects on the issue of busing’s impact on the Boston Public School system within a broader context, examining myriad problems contributing to the de facto segregation of the schools both prior to and after the 1974 Garrity decision. Mr. Jones also contemplates the issue within the broader context of race relations in the city of Boston.
### Subject Headings

Boston Public Schools  
Busing for school integration  
Cabral, Andrea J.  
Hicks, Louise Day, 1916-2003  
Jones, Hubert “Hubie”  
*Morgan v. Hennigan* (379 F. Supp. 410)

### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Jones’ background</td>
<td>p. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Jones’ involvement with the Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental reactions to the Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Options to improve Boston schools prior to Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political consequences of Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with enforcing the Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Jones’ reaction to violence resulting from Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAACP’s charge of de facto segregation of Boston schools</td>
<td>p. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational and racial consequences of Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political consequences of Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future of busing students in Boston post-Garrity decision</td>
<td>p. 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement with the arts as way to achieve racial harmony</td>
<td>p. 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence of a dual educational system in Boston</td>
<td>p. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding thoughts on the future of Boston Public Schools</td>
<td>p. 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview transcript begins on the next page
This interview took place on February 16, 2006, at the offices of City Year at 287 Columbus Avenue, Boston, MA.

**Interview transcript**

CONLEY: [first words cut off]—just going to let it run for a few seconds, because earlier, it wouldn’t let the tape run for a few minutes, it told me. First of all, I’d like to say good afternoon, Mr. Jones. And thank you for participating in this afternoon’s interview.

JONES: My pleasure to be here.

CONLEY: I’d like to start by having you introduce yourself with your full name, your occupation, and where you live now.

JONES: My name is Hubert Jones, better known as Hubie Jones. I’m a social worker. I’m also a dean emeritus at the Boston University School of Social Work, where I’m a full professor. I live in Newton, Massachusetts, where I have lived since 1961.

CONLEY: I’d like to start by having you explain your involvement in the 1974 Garrity decision\(^1\) and how you were impacted by the initial decision to integrate Boston Public Schools.

JONES: Well, I was directly impacted because Judge Garrity appointed me to a citywide coalition, whatever it was, to be a part of trying to make sure that the decision was implemented, give support that was needed to get it implemented. Coordinating Council, Citywide Coordinating Council. I was appointed by Garrity to the Citywide Coordinating Council. So I

---

\(^1\) The Garrity decision refers to the June 21, 1974, opinion filed by Judge W. Arthur Garrity in the case of *Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James Hennigan et al.* (379 F. Supp. 410). Judge Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee had “intentionally brought about and maintained racial segregation” in the Boston Public Schools. When the school committee did not submit a workable desegregation plan as the opinion had required, the court established a plan that called for some students to be bused from their own neighborhoods to attend schools in other neighborhoods, with the goal of creating racial balance in the Boston Public Schools. (See http://www.lib.umb.edu/archives/garrity2.html for more information)
was involved in those meetings trying to see what could be done to ensure that the decision was carried out, that the police protected, as they were going to be doing (inaudible).

At that time also I was appointed by Mayor White\(^2\) to a violence commission. I think we were prominent people asked to come together to try and figure out how to deal with the violence that was going on in response to the court order and subsequent activities. So, I was involved, you know, Ed Brooke,\(^3\) Louise Day Hicks,\(^4\) Judge David Nelson, the Speaker of the House, he was there as well. And all sorts of other prominent citizens trying to think what could be done to bring this city together, to heal the extraordinary rift that was going on.

**CONLEY:** Before or prior to the decision to integrate Boston Public Schools, were you an advocate for integration? Or did you feel there were other options to improve Boston Public Schools, especially—

**JONES:** Oh, I was clearly an advocate for desegregation of the Boston Public Schools. Anybody who’s read the Garrity decision knows that the Boston Public School Committee had systematically created a dual system deliberately making it impossible for black kids to go to schools that were predominantly white. And all the data is there to show that the schools that black kids were in were in the worst buildings, getting not the resources in terms of books, learning materials, and so importantly, to get anywhere, to get an education equal to a white they were getting. It’s all there. A lot of people hollering and screaming about the decision being unfair and all of this, have never read the Garrity decision, have never read the systematic research that was done to show how brick by brick the school system was made to be a segregated system and unequal and unfair.

---

\(^2\) Kevin White (1929- ), a Democrat, served as mayor of Boston from 1968 to 1984. He ran unsuccessfully for governor of Massachusetts in 1970.

\(^3\) Edward W. Brooke III (1919- ), a Republican, represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate from 1967 to 1979. He previously served as attorney general of Massachusetts from 1963 to 1967.

\(^4\) Louise Day Hicks (1916-2003), a Democrat, served on the Boston School Committee from 1962 to 1967 (serving as chair from 1963 to 1965), ran unsuccessfully for the mayoralty of Boston in 1967 and in 1971, and served on the Boston City Council before being elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1970. She represented Massachusetts’ Ninth Congressional District for one term.
CONLEY: Prior to the decision and when the decision was being implemented you do hear a lot about the resistance from parents in South Boston and Charlestown. What were the parents in Roxbury and the predominantly minority communities advocating for? What were they feeling? Before—

JONES: Well the first thing that they—the first thing the black parents wanted was a guarantee from the mayor and from the law enforcement that their safety would be assured as they moved into schools that they were assigned to, particularly in Charlestown and South Boston. There was a famous meeting at Freedom House⁵ that was held the night of the first day when kids going into South Boston particularly were set upon by angry white mobs. There was a meeting held, all the parents were gathered at Freedom House, this community center. And they demanded that Mayor White come to the meeting. And it was a very tough meeting. And they went after Mayor White saying, Look, we want you to assure that if we send our kids back into those schools that they will be, the police will guarantee their protection. And you haven’t done that. You should do that. We’re sick and tired of this, you know, blah blah blah blah. Kevin White left in a huff. He had not expected to be treated this way and it wasn’t part of the center there (inaudible).

Now were there some black parents who didn’t want their kids to be a part of a desegregated system where it meant they were leaving neighborhood schools? Yes. By and large, I would say the black community was interested in their young people getting into schools where they would be assured of getting a first class education. There had been the exodus program [Operation Exodus]⁶ that started in 1964 [sic – 1965]. Do you know about the exodus program?

CONLEY: I’m not familiar with that—-[simultaneous conversation]

---

⁵ Freedom House is a community-based, social action agency founded in 1949 and located in the Grove Hall neighborhood of Boston. Its mission is to promote economic self-sufficiency and social justice for residents in historically underserved neighborhoods through targeted educational development, increased civic and political engagement and progressive cultural advocacy. It aims to do so through collaboration between people of different backgrounds. (See http://www.freedomhouse.com for more information)

⁶ Operation Exodus was founded in 1965 by lifelong civil rights activist Dr. Ellen S. Jackson. It was a voluntary desegregation program which bused predominantly African American students from overcrowded schools in Roxbury and Dorchester to predominantly white, underenrolled schools in other parts of Boston. Operation Exodus bused 250 students in 1965, 450 in 1966, six hundred in 1967, and then decreased to five hundred in 1968.
**JONES:** Exodus was a program started by Ellen Jackson—who just passed away by the way—by Ellen Jackson, where she used the open enrollment system of the Boston Public Schools, which said that if there are open seats, and you could apply to have your kid go. Be admitted to a school out of your neighborhood. But the only catch to this was you had to pay for your own transportation. You better get them there. You had to get your child there. So she identified where there were open seats in Boston schools beyond the black community. She provided private transportation to black kids who wanted to take advantage of those seats because they thought there was going to be better education. Better books, better this, better that, better teaching, and so forth. So for a number of years, long before the Garrity decision (laughs), there was Operation Exodus, which indicated that black parents were most concerned not with integration but with making sure that their kids were getting access to the best that the school system was providing. So Operation Exodus was clearly—and it went on from 1964 [sic – 1965] to around 1969, ‘68.

Metco\(^7\) came into the picture in 1966. My wife was a part of the founding of Metco and was the coordinator of the Metco program and did it for ten years. Here was another example of black parents saying, you know, I can’t get the kind of education my kids deserve of Boston Public Schools for a whole set of reasons, and I’m going to try to get my kids through Metco into a suburban school. And I played a role, my wife played a major role in getting suburban school systems to think about making seats available to kids from Boston. It started the first year in 1966, ‘67, with about seven school systems, suburban school systems agreeing to have their open seats available to kids from Boston. There were 250 kids the first year, all in the seven communities. And as you know, there are now thirty-two hundred kids going to over thirty communities in the Greater Boston area. It is the longest-standing metropolitan educational, inter-district transfer program in the history of the country. Nothing this deep, nothing this solid, and it should have been used as a platform for a new kind of metropolitan educational approach, which it hasn’t.

\(^7\) The Metco program is a grant program funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and administered by METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity), Inc. It is a voluntary program intended to expand educational opportunities and reduce racial imbalance, by permitting students in certain cities to attend public schools in other communities that have agreed to participate. (Taken from the Massachusetts Department of Education website.)
So in short, black parents basically had demonstrated prior to the court decision that they would do anything possible to get their kids into schools that were going to give their kids a good education. And if it meant integrated schools, yes, they would go there. So all of that was evident in 1964 all the way to the court decision, even through the submission of maybe going to the court, NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] going to the court in 1972 to, you know (inaudible), federal (inaudible) to get desegregation of the schools. Back in 1963 when there was demonstrations around the schools, there was an incredible four-month period where the black leadership was after the school committee to admit there was de facto segregation. Which they said it did not exist. And to do something to remedy the situation.

In September of 1963, the NAACP Boston branch proposed a plan to the school committee that would have required very little movement of white kids around the system, that would have met the demands or concerns of black leadership, of black parents. It would not have required a great deal of disruption or movement, that it was fortified (both laugh)—what, do you think I’m funny?—by Garrity. The then-head of the school committee, Louise Day Hicks, said, “No way. We’re not going to listen to your plan, your suggestion. As far as we’re concerned it’s unconstitutional and it constitutes gerrymandering.” So there were all kinds of proposals made far short of this dramatic redistribution of kids before I’d (inaudible) Garrity. But the school committee for a whole set of reasons, one, racial politics, because basically the school committee had told their white constituents, Stick with us. You stick with us, you don’t have to worry about going to school with black kids. Just stick with us. Just stick with us. You don’t have to worry about that. And it was a part of not only using the school committee as a way for higher political office.

Louise Day Hicks went on to go to the United States Congress. And a number of other school committee folks went on to—it was a stepping stone to—and it was a whole set of racial politics. At the point at which the Garrity decision happened, that broke the back of racial politics in Boston as we had known it up until that point. The white school committee people, and other

---

8 De facto segregation is racial segregation, especially in public schools, that happens “by fact” rather than by legal requirement. For example, often the concentration of African Americans in certain neighborhoods produces neighborhood schools that are predominantly black, or segregated in fact (de facto), although not by law (de jure).
political officials who had guaranteed their white constituents that this would never happen, lost credibility. And in fact, they could no longer get political seats. A lot of people don’t realize that. Boston beginning to go in a more moderate direction in terms of politics in the city—happened as a result of Garrity. Now it’s been a long ride. But that was the beginning of it. Very imperceptible, hard to see, hard to understand. But we saw it when Louise Day Hicks lost a race to—whatever it was now, but she lost her seat. There were a number of them. And another, John Kerrigan,9 off of that (Conley laughs), on the school committee. He lost his seat. He tried to broker the school committee into another court job, or whatever it was. He lost. So the white constituency basically said, You promised us, you couldn’t deliver, you’re finished.

So, if nothing else, the Garrity decision broke the back of racial politics as we knew it in Boston. And began to move us in a more moderate direction. And as we sit here today we see a whole new field, with Sheriff Cabral,10 who just recently won, beating an Irish Catholic politician from South Boston, stunning the old political establishment here, making it clear that what was started with approach to Garrity decision is now here. Is now here. And we’re closer than—we will probably have a black mayor. Very closer (inaudible). I never thought I’d live long enough to ever even think of that, much less say it. So that’s—all right, we can go on to the other questions.

**CONLEY:** As we move forward in racial politics in Boston, do you feel the Garrity decision weakened or strengthened racial interaction between the communities, white and black communities? Just, do you feel as though—

**JONES:** Well, I mean initially, obviously there was this enormous tension, this enormous fear. This enormous fear about integration of kids, black and white. We had enormous pullout of the schools by white parents who left to go to parochial schools and other places, so that basically we’re left with a school system that maybe (inaudible) percent are colored. Basically we’re segregated. Basically we’re segregated. So that was one of the consequences of it. But these were choices that parents made. The then-cardinal, [Humberto Sousa] Medeiros, at the time of all this

---

9 John E. Kerrigan (1907-1987) was first elected to the Boston City Council in 1933, serving three terms as its president. He was a member of the council for a total of thirty years and served twice as acting mayor of Boston, in 1938 and 1945. He also served two years in the State Senate.

10 Andrea J. Cabral was elected on November 2, 2004 and sworn in on January 5, 2005 as the thirtieth Sheriff of Suffolk County, Massachusetts. She is the first female in the Commonwealth’s history to hold the position.
conflagration, said that he would not allow the parochial school system to be used as a haven for fleeing students from Boston to parochial schools. That’s what he said. Well it wasn’t true. It was a disingenuous statement, that’s a nice way of saying it was a lie. Because at the same time this publicly Catholic school system, parochial school system, was pumping up extra capacity to take in the fleeing students. Shortly prior to the Garrity decision, the parochial school system was in trouble. With enrollments. They were in trouble. The reality is, is that desegregation saved the parochial school system. That’s what happened. It saved the parochial school system that was in serious trouble around enrollments. They not only increased their enrollments, they had to increase capacity, build the buildings, blah blah blah, in order to take in the students, and they did.

Now—see now, the parochial school system does not have an issue (inaudible), but for a while it was a salvation numerically, enrollment-wise, of the parochial school system. And so it was—and so, the Catholic Church and the Catholic Archdiocese has to take responsibility for making it possible for folks who were afraid and concerned and blah blah blah, to flee the system.

So, yeah, so we had this tension. Had all this tension. And one of the problems we had is that we had political leaders who weren’t willing to stand up and say that one had to be—one had to obey the court. Instead, we had political leaders, high political leaders, who were castigating the court, and castigating the judge. These were the same people who refused to take the opportunities to do it voluntarily. Judge Garrity was not a flaming liberal. (both laugh) Judge Garrity is basically a conservative kind of guy. He’s a decent human being. I wouldn’t say he’s an ideological conservative. That would be not the case. But judges tend to be very conservative in terms of acting on these kinds of issues of big consequence. In some ways he took a long, long time before he finally made the decision.

But the evidence was so overwhelming. The damage to kids was so overwhelming that he had to act, if he was going to uphold the Constitution of the United States. And we know from the South, that when integration went well, even areas that had a history of being very, very tough, it’s when the political and business leadership stood up and said, I don’t care what you think about this. I don’t care what you feel about this. We’re not going to allow you to do anything to
undermine the court’s decision. But we didn’t have political and business leadership that came
together and said, Look, we don’t care what you think about the judge, you know, this is going to
be a difficult transition. We understand that. But this is the law of the land. And we are not going
to allow people to be violent, disruptive, mess with the rights of kids to go to school in safety. No
more. We didn’t have that. There’s only one who did. And I was involved in bringing people
together with him to try to get that kind of thing to happen. And that was the Attorney General
Frank Bellotti.\footnote{Francis X. Bellotti (1923- )}, a Democrat, served as Lieutenant Governor for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from 1963 to 1965. From 1975 to 1987 he served three terms as Massachusetts Attorney General.

I played a role, with other people, to get a meeting with all the characters from the black
community and white leadership, Louise Day Hicks included, and Frank Bellotti said, “Look, I
want to be very clear with you. My responsibility is to make sure there is public safety in this
state, and that means in the Boston community as well. And anybody I find who is doing
anything to mess with the public safety of a child or their family, regarding going to school, I am
going to use the full impact of the law. Let this be clear.” He looked straight at Louise Day Hicks
and told her that, looked straight at some of the other (laughs) white political leaders and told
them that. But he was the only stand-up, in my judgment, only stand-up person. And he did it.
He had his staff into the community looking out for what was going on. The only other stand-up
person was, you know, during the Clinton administration, was Nicky Roach, you know, head of
the Community Disorders Unit, who had his staff actually hiding in bushes and everything in
communities where there was going to be potential trouble to catch folks who were being
disruptive, etcetera, etcetera. So.

\textbf{CONLEY:} What was your reaction to the violence? Did you foresee that there was going to be
such a negative reaction in the South Boston/Charlestown communities? And was—

\textbf{JONES:} Sure. Well, on one level you’re sort of amazed that there could be this kind of a
vitriolic reaction visited on young children. That’s one part of it. You say, “Oh my God, how
could people do this, to young children? In the North? How could this be?” But, on the other
hand, you knew it was predictable. And we know from the urban renewal struggles in the early
sixties—late fifties, early sixties, when John Collins\textsuperscript{12} became elected mayor. He appointed as his Boston Redevelopment czar, Edward Lowe. Edward Lowe was not only about rebuilding the downtown commercial corridor that was in serious trouble, he was also about doing some redevelopment in Charlestown, South Boston, and Roxbury. Roxbury wanted it and got it.

He went to South Boston to peddle his wares about the benefits of urban renewal. The South Boston leadership told him to go packing. [They said,] We will not have anybody coming into this community, no government group, no matter how glamorous or whatever their sales pitch, is going to make us buy urban renewal. We will have no urban renewal, Ed Lowe and Mayor Collins. And there was no redevelopment in South Boston. They made it clear that if they came into South Boston with urban renewal there would be a war. Now these were white folks talking to white folks. This had nothing to do (both laugh) with integration. This was a government agency talking about creating better housing, commercial development, blah blah blah. They’re not going to have it. They went to Charlestown and Charlestown didn’t want it. It was one horrendous meeting where the Charlestown residents got up and went after Monsignor [Francis J.] Lally. Monsignor Lally was chairman of the BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority] at the time.

So the BRA and the mayor sent him into Charlestown to try to cool down the folks who didn’t like the urban renewal plan. And they jumped up and they screamed at Lally. They said, You’re a turncoat. Take off your collar. You’re a fraud. They screamed at him. It was the wildest meeting in the history of Charlestown (laughs), your Charlestown civic life. And by a narrow vote, the plan was approved. It was approved, but over tremendous opposition. I mean they almost made it clear we’ll kill folks if you try to come in here.

So anybody who had looked at the urban renewal struggles regarding Charlestown and South Boston, where they didn’t even want redevelopment, better housing, (inaudible) development, or whatever. And they demonstrated these fears of outsiders, you know, government folks coming in with their grand ideas for how they should live. Anybody who saw that would have to know

\textsuperscript{12} John F. Collins (1919-1995) was mayor of Boston from 1960 to 1968.
that when a yellow school bus rolled (laughs) into these communities with black kids, and
suggested their kids roll out somewhere else, you were going to have a real confrontation.
Because South Boston had always demonstrated an “us against them” mentality. So—yeah, so it
wasn’t a surprise. But it was still a surprise. It wasn’t a surprise, it was still a surprise. It wasn’t a
surprise and it was a surprise when you saw it actually play out.

CONLEY: When you saw the scenes of the rocks being thrown at the children in these school
buses what did you decide, right then, that you wanted to do, to—

JONES: Well, the first thing I wanted to do is I wanted to get public officials to, first of all, do
their job, and make sure these kids were safe, and that the police were doing their work. And to
make sure that anybody who engaged in this kind of illegal behavior was apprehended and
prosecuted. These are the reasons I brought people together to, with Pat Bellotti, to bring people
together around the table to say, “Look, I don’t care what you think about me, the bottom line,
kids have a right to be safe. Kids have a right not to be harmed. Kids have a right not to be
threatened.” So that was my first reaction. Obviously, this is horrific, this is awful, I’m angry,
I’m mad (inaudible). But I’m more angry at political and civic officials who just won’t stand tall
against this kind of violent reaction, that’s basically tearing the city apart.

CONLEY: Were there violent reactions to the violence seen at South Boston High at Roxbury
High in response? Or, did people feel as though that would just fuel the fire for the protesters in
South Boston? If there was this backlash of violence brought on by the African American
community.

JONES: Well look, you know, obviously there’s going to be some ambivalence. Nobody wants
to send their children into harm’s way. Even if you know the status quo isn’t good for your kids.
So understand when folks say, Forget that. Let’s just retreat to our own community and, you
know, let’s keep anybody out who we don’t want in. That’s just a normal response. Because the
black community was angry. The black community was scared. The kids were absolutely scared.
They were being pelted with rocks, and names, and racial epithets, and all of the rest.
But it was Boston’s crucible. But it was a crucible that was constructed by folks who refused to act. In the early sixties, starting in 1963. I was at the famous (inaudible) June 11, 1963, school committee meeting where the NAACP education committee, co-chaired by the late Ruth Batson and Paul Parks, presented the NAACP’s research on why the schools were de facto—they just said *de facto* segregated. They weren’t charging the school committee at that time of deliberately segregating the schools, in the ways in which they really did. All we know is they’re *de facto* segregated. Our kids are separated from white kids. What’s going on in black schools are worse than what’s going on in the white schools. We’re not getting the same quality of education or the same access to resources. I was at that meeting. I heard Louise Day Hicks get up and say, “Mrs. Batson, Mrs. Batson, we do not discriminate here. We deal with the housing patterns in the city of Boston. We have no control over the housing patterns in the city of Boston. We assign kids closest to their schools, because that’s sensible policy. The idea that we have deliberately, through policy or practice, segregated kids in the Boston Public Schools, and disadvantaged them, is not the case. We will not accept your de facto segregation charge.” Basically, take a hike.

And out of that came a four month conflagration that this city has—you know, there were—I was involved with all of these, there were protest movements, protest rallies, there was sit-ins at the school committee headquarters at 15 Beacon Street. People stayed overnight for three or four days, until they finally had the police come because they said there was a threat of a bomb going off, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. And there was this tug-of—this back and forth between the black leadership and the white school committee. With everybody being brought into the array. Cardinal [Richard James] Cushing got in. Cardinal Cushing, in fact, was fabulous. He made some statements that were—there was a statement he made on the Church Militant. The Church Militant is about everybody having equal rights and fair play and (inaudible). It was the only time that you had a very (telephone begins ringing) forthright statement from the archbishop of—you know, he was fabulous. And he—and Attorney General Ed Brooke was brought into the fray to try to do something. The mayor tried to get in. He was dragged in, Collins was dragged in. He was more concerned about urban renewal than trying to save the city. (telephone stops ringing) He had had a deal with the Roxbury leaders for redevelopment at Roxbury. That was going to be his contribution to the black community. It was. It was a big one in fact. And he tried
very hard not to get caught, sucked in, caught into the politics of—this wild politics that was going on around the school. He tried to stay away from it.

CONLEY: After you saw the backlash of the implementation of school integration, was there ever a time when you thought that you wished the ruling had been different and there had been another decision of how to fix the school system?

JONES: Well, hindsight is always—you know. (both laugh) I’ve had these arguments with people around, you know, that Garrity could have done other things, he had other choices. I was on a program for twenty years, “Five on Five,” on Channel 5 where I debated conservatives. Two liberals, two conservatives would debate each other, to get a decent (inaudible) argument about how Garrity destroyed the school system, destroyed the city, didn’t know what the hell he was doing, could have had—you know, bottom line is Judge Garrity did what we thought he had to do. Judge Garrity had to do what you had to do because leadership prior to Judge Garrity’s decision refused to do what they could have done. They had the power to design the desegregation plan they wanted, that they thought would have been the right plan. They weren’t prepared to do that. So he was left to do what the United States Constitution demanded.

And yeah, there could have been other choices. I won’t even get into matter-of-fact debates about the different choices he had. He should have done this instead of that, blah, blah, blah. And he shouldn’t have sent people through the tunnel over to East Boston. And oh, it was endless! Bottom line was, this is what had to happen. No matter what plan, it required people to make adjustments that they—in terms of where their kids went to school and how to deal with it. You still were going to have this tension. You still were going to have this opposition. But you didn’t have a civic leadership that was strong and committed. They were concerned with the power of their political constituents, who they thought could throw them out of power.

And in the absence of having civic leadership that's standing tall, for what the law says is—when the judge says (inaudible), you’re going to have this kind of disequilibrium in a city. But you know, nobody wanted violence, nobody wanted the level of turmoil that went on. Nobody wanted that. But you don’t get this kind of change without disequilibrium. You don’t get major
social change without going through a period of disequilibrium. The question always is, do you have the leadership that helps you get through the disequilibrium with the least possible damage or negative consequences, so you can get to the other side where you have a better people, you have a better day.

I’m writing a book on Boston and race right now, starting with the fifties all the way through 2000. And part of the question is, what did leadership do or did not do, to get us to the other side. Now we’re on the other side now. But is it better than what we had? Yeah. I mean, at one point in our history, you couldn’t get a job if you were black. You couldn’t get a principalship. You couldn’t get a principalship, or headmastership, in the Boston Public Schools. You just couldn’t. And so the personnel situation has changed. In terms of people having fair access to jobs. Boston Public Schools was the preserve of the Irish Catholic community. They owned the school. They owned the school system. It was their school system. They were in power. It was a patronage deal. That’s how you got your jobs. You bought tickets for their campaigns and their campaign things. You had a chance of getting a job, a teaching position even. Not to mention administrative positions. It was a real tight deal. It was also corrupt. They were using their power to get contracts to friends and so forth. All that’s gone now. You don’t have that. You don’t have that now.

Now, the question is, do you have great education in the Boston Public Schools? Well, we don’t have that either. I chair a citizen commission on academic success for Boston Schools, where we’re in the process of doing research and we’re going to disseminate a report in June, which we hope will be a roadmap for the next superintendent. About how we can move this system to provide great education with terrific outcomes for all the kids who go there. We still have that challenge. Even though you have a more, a fairer system in terms of folks of color, as the whites, getting access to jobs, and principalships. And we had a couple of black superintendents, they didn’t work out, (laughs) you know. So that—school system is more open.

When I ran the Roxbury multi-service center, starting in 1965, you couldn’t get into a Boston Public School when you went there, unless you knocked and rang a bell. They were closed. They were closed. There was a, the parents engagement was something called the Boston—the Boston
Home Association? Anyway, there was a parent body. Home and School Association, that’s what it was. Home and School Association. Well, it was tightly controlled by the (inaudible) school system. If anybody got up and go to these Home and School Association meetings and challenge what the school system was doing, boom, they almost got kicked out of the meeting. It’s a closed deal. Closed shop. There’s no criticism. No advocacy for change that would be tolerated. But all that’s gone.

Parent groups that are engaged, have a right to being engaged. You know, Garrity set that in motion. You know, with the citywide parent councils and all that. That was the beginning of breaking the Home and School Association way of doing business, making it quite clear that parents have a right to say something about what’s happening to the education in their schools, and school officials and teachers have to listen to it. And hopefully respond to it in positive ways. That came out of the Garrity decision. That broke the back of the Home and School Association. It was a company shop. It was ridiculous.

So yeah, it had to happen. Eventually it was going to happen. Oh, I used to tell people—I’ve been telling people for many, many years, I said, “Well, one of the consequences of this is that the politics in Boston is now going to change.” He said, “Aw, what are you talking about?” “It’s changing. You don’t see it, you can’t see it. It’s changing. It’s changing. It’s going to be more inclusive.” It may take another twenty years, but it’s changing right before our eyes. Eventually it’s all going to be seen. Then Cabral won and everybody said, Whoa, here it is. We’ve got Finneran, we’ve got Finneran, out Speaker of the House, very powerful Speaker of the House. All right? Well, he’s gone. A young black woman, thirty-one years of age, is his successor. All right? Haitian, his successor. (Inaudible) thought we might live long enough to see that. Cabral got half of the votes in what used to be solid Irish Catholic West Roxbury, Roslindale, and Hyde Park. Half of the votes. There’s a whole new constituency who’s willing to look at what a person can do as opposed to what a person’s ethnicity or religion or whatever is. You know, Who are you? Are you competent when you do a job? You’ve got more people looking at people on a meritorious basis, and not operating out of fear.

Cabral was a big thing. There’s a whole different calculus in city hall because of Cabral. A whole different calculus. The school committee with the mayor was moving toward a new assignment process that was going to take us back to our neighborhood schools. You know that, right? Remember that, recently? And they were getting signs from these meetings with the community that they didn’t like the plan. But they were going to do it anyway. Cabral won. Three days later they dropped the plan. Cabral won. Boom. Because I had been called the Sunday before they dropped the plan. They said, What are we going to do about this? They’re going to ramrod this whether we like it or not. What can we do? I went to a meeting called by Councilor [Chuck] Turner and Mel King14 and some other old hands; they said, What are we going to do? Cabral wins. Three days later. Boom. The plan is gone. They’re not—the mayor’s running. He wouldn’t dare now, having seen the community of color speak. (laughs) He would not dare go ahead with pushing the plan. They dropped it. So, then, why’d you drop it? Oh, blah, blah, blah. We know why they dropped it. Now (inaudible).

So we’re at a new place. We are now a multicultural city. Fifty-three percent of the folks in the city are of color. You know, one quarter of the residents of the city were basically new immigrants and so forth, have come to the city in the last five years. A demographic revolution in the city of Boston. And we’re just fueling the change of politics and leadership. So Boston has a very interesting future. Now, what we do in it is another question. (both laugh) Because just having a multicultural politics it doesn’t mean it’s going to be any better than (both laugh) non-inclusive politics. And with a black mayor, doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to have a great leadership of a city unless it’s the right one, it’s the right person. You know, we’ve got two black superintendents and they both were bad, awful. And I had to personally speak against one of them. I don’t like to go around—go out against black leadership unless I have to. But the damage to the system was so bad, I had to publicly chastise it. I had to publicly chastise it. With an editorial in the—an op-ed piece in the Boston Globe. So, we know that, but we—

14 Melvin H. King (1928- ) is an educator, activist, and writer who has served as Adjunct Professor of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He also ran for mayor of Boston in 1983, narrowly losing to Raymond L. Flynn.
This is the best time to be in Boston. We’ve got enormous opportunities right now. The Greenway just being built, Rose Kennedy Greenway,\textsuperscript{15} thirty-acre strip. If it’s done the right way we can knit the city together. If the South Boston Seaport District\textsuperscript{16} is built out in the right way and people from across the city have access to it and to the water and so forth. We could knit the city together. But will we? I don’t know. I had a group of eighty leaders on a retreat down in Chatham, Massachusetts, this past weekend to talk about all this. Can we build a shared vision to take this city to the place where it ought to go? We have the chance to do it. We’ve got this opportunity here. How are we going to use the Greenway? How are we going to use the South Boston Seaport district? How are we going to use this public market we’re trying to build? I don’t know. How are we going to do it? We just came up from—I took them all to Vancouver, the city program which I co-chair. We took them up to Vancouver to look at a city that knows how to do it. Does it. Four days. You could see it. They’re a very diverse city, Asian. Asians, diverse in terms of Asians. Set up with folks in Vancouver, could even talk a little English. Asian or Indian or whatever, you know. So, anyhow, off to it.

\textbf{CONLEY:} When you mentioned the demographics, that was leading into my next question. Given the current demographics of the Boston Public School system, do you feel it’s still necessary to bus students to different schools? Or do you feel the money should be sent somewhere else to improve the education in the Boston School System?

\textbf{JONES:} Oh, let me just say this. I tried to get out from under this whole busing thing by saying the bottom line is whether you’re going to have good quality schools everywhere in the system, where you’re going to have a system where the best resources, the best opportunities are available to everybody. That’s the bottom line. The truth is that when you have excellent education, parents, no matter what color they are, they don’t care how they get there. They really

\textsuperscript{15} The Rose Kennedy Greenway is an approximately 1.5-mile-long (2.4 km) series of parks and public spaces in the North End section of downtown Boston, Massachusetts. It is the final part of the Central Artery/Tunnel Project (a.k.a. “Big Dig”) that put Interstate 93 underground and removed the obsolete elevated freeway. It was named in honor of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy and was officially dedicated on July 26, 2004.

\textsuperscript{16} The South Boston Seaport District is the section of South Boston north of First Street. It is also known as the "South Boston Waterfront." The Central Artery/Tunnel Project has created a completely new transportation network for this area, facilitating its redevelopment.
don’t care. They really don’t care. (laughs) They aren’t worrying about the inconveniences or whatever it takes to get their kids to the school.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

JONES: They need to be able to have decent life chances. Go to college or whatever. That’s the bottom line. In America, historically, that has been proven. Whether you’re living in—I was just down in Chatham and saw these kids being, as I was driving to the retreat, I saw these kids being bused in Chatham, in a bus going (both laugh) on ten miles to their schools. Uh-huh. I said to my wife, “I wonder if they’re upset about busing?” (both laugh) “I wonder if they’re upset about being bused across the Cape (Conley laughs) to get to school?” So at the end of the day nobody’s yelling and screaming about the distance to get to the Latin School.17 Because they know when they get there they’re going to get an education that equips them to have a shot at going to college. Nobody’s yelling and screaming about getting to the Boston Arts Academy18 because they think that they’re going to get the kind of arts education, blah blah blah, that these kids want.

Now, when you talk about younger kids, and you’re going to say, Well, younger kids (inaudible) older kids from high school. But younger kids shouldn’t be moved around like this. I think we know that where you get a good education, parents will do whatever it takes for their kids to get there. Even if it means putting them on a bus at five o’clock in the morning and going to Hingham or whatever (laughs), Lexington, or whatever. The bottom line is, what’s going to happen at the end of the day in terms of the education of our kids? So what we’ve got to focus on is developing kids’ education. So that it’s excellent. You know, on one hand I say it’s a little ridiculous that we’re spending all this money on transportation. You can get at this for purposes of integration, desegregation, because 85 percent of folks are kids of color. There’s no way you’re going to integrate the Boston Public Schools, in racial terms. You’ll never integrate. If busing is now through integrating the Boston Public schools, it can’t be done. So from that perspective spending thousands of dollars on busing is ridiculous, if it’s only for that purpose.

17 Boston Latin School is a public exam school and the oldest public school in the United States.
18 Boston Arts Academy, founded in 1998, is the city's first and only high school for the visual and performing arts.
Now if busing is being used for other reasons, so that you just don’t have black kids, you may have a diverse community. If you just have black kids in schools, in one school, and Latino kids in another school, and Asian kids in another school, well, you know, I’m not for that either. They all might have color, but they all have different cultural and other kinds of identity and gifts that should be shared. That should be shared. So yeah, if current busing is going to keep us from having all Haitian schools, all (laughs) African American schools, yeah fine, that’s fine with me. There is something to be said for kids learning in a multicultural world, in a global world, for kids to know how to come together, learn together, prosper together, and not be intimidated by the boogeyman called race. Race is a boogeyman in America that keeps folks from being together with folks different than themselves.

I don’t know if you know this but I’m the founder of Boston’s Children’s Chorus.¹⁹

**CONLEY:** Mm-hmm. I’ve read about that.

**JONES:** Okay. It’s about three years old. The reason I founded the Boston’s Children’s Chorus is because I woke up about five years ago and realized that probably the best way to bring young people together across racial, ethnic, and social class lines, so you have real social integration, is through the arts. Now I had all other kinds of illusions. I thought it could happen through desegregation of the schools while they were segregated. I thought it could happen through some kind of camping program that brought kids together. It helped, but not great. But I saw the Chicago Children’s Choir in Chicago about six or seven years ago, I think. See the national convention, this very diverse children’s choir singing at a level of artistic excellence, it was unbelievable. And I said, “Oh!”

So, in 2002 I started the journey and started forming a similar kind of organization. We have in our choir children from urban communities in Boston as well as other—thirty-nine communities

¹⁹ Boston Children’s Chorus, founded in 2003, is modeled after the Chicago Children’s Chorus. Through music, the chorus aims to bring together children of diverse backgrounds from Boston and its suburbs to foster youth development, social healing, and community building.
in urban communities as well as the suburbs. Thirty percent of our kids are from the suburbs, because we want class integration, and non-city suburban integration. And the rest from urban neighborhoods. Boston, Somerville, Charlestown, Cambridge. These kids have come together to learn how to sing together, discipline. To sing at [Margaret] Jewett Hall. And you know, at levels of excellence and be ambassadors for the city. Demonstrate that kids can come together, and learn to live together. We’re not programming anything; all we’re doing is helping kids share their gifts, their musical gifts, their vocal gifts, their cultural gifts.

So I step into a rehearsal sometimes—and so kids say, Oh, Mr. Jones, how you doing? How you doing? Take that kid from Jamaica Plain, “I was out in Dover last weekend with my singing choir. We had a hell of a good time.” A white kid from Marshfield who came into Roxbury to go to a movie with so-and-so, “Hey, you know, we had a great time, Mr. Jones. It was wonderful.” We’re not programming any of this. As a result of making friendships, as a result of having a good time together, being validated together through their music. That’s when the kids say, You know what it’s like when an audience stands up and applauds you? You know what’s that like? Whoa. They’re validated. Together.

So I thought that’s the best way to get it done. It’s my last thing I’m doing in terms of a contribution to Boston. And I’m trying—this is probably (inaudible) the best way to get kids to come together across racial—and the mother in Marshfield, and the mother in Dover, and the mothers and fathers in Lexington aren’t worried about getting their kids into rehearsals, at the Tremont Temple near Park [Street] Station. They’re not worried about it. All they know is that their kids are going to have a fabulous experience. (laughs) And the kids from Mattapan, and the kids are all getting into the rehearsals. All they care is that they’re in them. They’re in. They’re having a great time. They’re going to Japan. We took Japan last summer, you know, for a life changing experience. Nobody’s worried about the busing or the transportation, and it’s a real commitment to get (laughs) their kids and pick them up and all of this. No, they find this is what they want for their kids. They want their kids to be in a diverse situation. They want their kids to know how to live and prosper with other kinds of kids. So that’s what we’ve got to do. So now at this stage of my life I’m doing it through the arts. That is the only thing I’ve found that’s worked. (laughs) It’s the only thing I’ve found that works.
And we had a big thing on my board because, you know, we outgrew the place we started rehearsals, which was in the Back Bay at the First Church on Marlborough Street (inaudible). Well, we outgrew the space and—so we had to get another space. So there was a space at Hibernian Hall in Roxbury. It just opened up, this site at Hibernian Hall. The kids said, Well, let’s take the chorus there. I said, “No.” I said, “Absolutely not.” “I will not take the choir—you all can do what you want, but I will not support taking the chorus, the central choruses, to Hibernian Hall for rehearsals. Because I want the black kids in this chorus, particularly, to come into the center of the city, to know that the center of the city also belongs to them. Because I am sick and tired of living in a city where do you not see the presence of folks of color in the public light, or in the central part of the city except over near the Macy’s and Filene’s.”

And we had a parent in the chorus (laughs), because we had a photo shoot for our (inaudible) on the Swan Boats. So a week before, one of the parents says to our program director—I understand the parent [said], “This photo thing we’re going to in the Boston Public Garden, where is that?” He says, “Oh, it’s across from the Boston Common.” “Well, where’s that?” This woman has lived in Roxbury all of her life, Dorchester, probably Dorchester, not Roxbury, it was probably Dorchester. And didn’t know where the Boston Public Garden is. Or the Commons. This is why I (both laugh) said that the central choruses should have their rehearsals in the center of the city. (pounds hand on table for emphasis) Because these families, these kids, have to know that they own the whole city. This is Boston’s Achilles heel.

Now we have neighborhood choirs; we have a neighborhood choir in the South End, we’re going to have one in Dorchester soon. We’re going to have neighborhood choirs all across the place. And those choirs will feed into the Central Choirs of (inaudible). So I have no problem with having a choir. I said, “I have no problem having a neighborhood choir at Hibernian Hall, don’t get me wrong. But I’m not eliminating the possibility of people having to come to the center of the city.” Particularly folks of color in the city. And Asians, Latinos, African Americans. You know, 52 percent of the city—I go to a Red Sox game, I can count the number of folks of color in the whole ballpark. I go to the Museum of Science, I can’t find us. I go to the Museum of Fine Arts, I go to Symphony Hall where I was recently the other day, I count the house everywhere I
go. Symphony Hall, full for (inaudible), maybe I saw ten black folks. But this is normal. This is acceptable. This is acceptable. It’s acceptable. And this is what we’ve got to change.

So everybody’s worried about the integration of schools, blah blah blah. Let’s talk about the integration of our institutions. Let’s talk about the Fleet Center, or whatever it’s called now. (laughs) Let’s talk about the Museum of Fine Art. Let’s talk about the—I mean, the only cultural arts museum that’s serious is the Children’s Museum. And I helped them with a whole—I don’t know if you’ve seen it yet, but there’s a whole new exhibit there called Boston Black where they have replicated a Roxbury, North Dorchester community. At the—so kids, young kids all over the region, come in and they see what a black community’s like. This is the beauty parlor, this is the grocery store, this is the this. It’s only black visible until you go there, Latino stop, there’s a Haitian thing there, you know. In this community it’s multicultural. You can’t have a black community that’s just African American (both laugh). You know, it’s a whole different deal.

So, that’s the challenge for Boston. Will we find ways to bring the community together? Now the Boston Children’s Chorus is going to do this once our kids are really singing. I mean, it’s still a while now. Once they’re really singing we’re going to be bringing the whole community together to sing together. Right in the Boston Common, or wherever. Or in Copley Square. We’re going to bring the diversity we’ve created together to sing together. We’re going to use this as a vehicle for social change and integration. Where people come together because they want to come together and they’ll have fun together once they get there. They’ll not be petrified something catastrophic is going to happen to them. They’ll get close to some people that they don’t know. This is the deal. You read all the crime stuff and people getting assassinated, homicides, and all this stuff going on in the black community. All that does is fuel people’s notions, Whoa, stay away from the city, stay away from those communities. They’re awful. Whoa, they’re dangerous to this, to that.

I once taught a class at Boston University School of Social Work. I was dean for many years. One part of this class I taught was we had to go to dinner out and spend a weekend together to look at aspects of the American society that we were talking about, studying about. So this year we went out and part of it was to go to Roxbury. We went to Roxbury Court and then several of
the agencies, look at some stuff. So that evening we were at this retreat center, where we were beginning to process what the day was like. One of the students, a white student, said to me, “I’m very mad, I’m very angry. I’m very, very angry.” I said, “Well, what are you angry about?” “Well, I’m angry about the fact that, I’ve been here, I’ve been in Boston for three years. And I now know tonight that I allowed the Boston media to paint such a picture of Roxbury and North Dorchester as a jungle, that I never went near there. And today I had one hell of a trip, learning about the people, the people we’ve met with, the leaders we’ve met with, the institutions we saw. There’s a lot of fabulous stuff going on in Roxbury and I would not have been there if it hadn’t been for this course and your requirement that we go out into the community. So I am just really upset that I have allowed the media to so program me to stay away from the Roxbury and the black community.” (inaudible) Well this is what happens. This is what happens. This is what happens. So, I don’t know, go off the topic, go ahead.

CONLEY: No, I’m fascinated by all this. One thing you mentioned was the Boston Latin School. What I’m interested in is, do you still believe it’s a dual education system in Boston, where you have Boston Public Schools and then you have the Latin Schools?

JONES: Well sure, first of all when—first of all it’s a dual system in this sense. I told you I was associated with the Mass. Advocates for Children. Chairman of the board for ten years. I was on the board for thirty years. And one year we did a report called Locked In, Locked Out. It identified the tracking system in the Boston Public Schools which showed that by third grade, based upon testing, a decision was made about who should get access to advanced placement courses, the best that the system offered. And you got on one track, and that track would take you all the way to the exam schools, if you wanted to go there. If you got on the other track where the decision was made that you didn’t have what it took, you got access to the—not the best schools, let’s just say, not the best schools, or the AP [Advanced Placement] courses, or the magnet school, or whatever. Which meant that you weren’t going to get to the school, to Latin. And so there’s a—in that sense there’s a dual system. It affects both black and white people. In

20 Magnet schools are schools offering special courses not available in the regular school curriculum and designed, often as an aid to school desegregation, to attract students on a voluntary basis from all parts of a school district without reference to the usual attendance zone rules. (Definition from the Library of Congress.)
fact, you know, they don’t got that many white people in the system now. So they’re splitting us for years. And there’s still a tracking system. I mean, it’s not—

So that’s a reality. Of course the irony of the Latin School is, is that parents who take their kids out of the Boston Public Schools in the early years and put them in parochial schools or private schools, then want in to the Latin School. So if you’re a parent who stayed in the Boston Public Schools, went through all the mess and all the nonsense and were able to survive your way, and your kid being eligible to get into the Latin School, you’re now faced with competition from folks who gave up on the system, but now they want to come back in. To get the best of what they—now they say, quote, We have a right to that. We pay taxes in Boston. So we have a right to it. I mean, why shouldn’t we have a right to it? But it’s kind of ironic. They gave up on the system and now they suddenly want to come back in and tell everybody else who’s qualified also to get in, you can’t, because there are only so many places.

Now we knew when the court made the decision to reverse Garrity’s enrollment requirements at the Latin School, that once that was discarded that you were going to have less and less folks of color in the enrollments. At the point in which it (inaudible) it was like 30 percent, I believe. I don’t know the numbers. Thirty—

CONLEY: It was in the thirties, yeah.

JONES: In the thirties, low thirties. You know what it is now? Fifteen. When it happened—well, we know it’s going to happen now, right? So it’s fifteen now. So people jump up and down and say, Oh, Garrity this, blah blah blah blah. Here’s proof that if you didn’t do some unusual or non-conventional inventions to try to protect the possibility of kids of color getting into—now we’re talking about a system that’s now 85 percent of color. And Latin School is 85 percent white. End of story, end of case. You don’t have to make any greater case about the dynamics of racism, or institutional racism. There it is. And if you don’t take steps to try to keep that from happening it is going to happen. Because certain people have privileges. Access to Internet, access to—parents who can take them around to show them the world, give them great experiences. You know, supportive of an education. I had a son in here the other day who was
screaming and yelling about not—I said (snaps fingers), “Stop it. You were privileged. You know you were privileged? (laughs) You sit right there. You know you grew up in Newton and you were privileged. (Conley laughs) You know you were privileged. You don’t get it. You’re grousing about where you are in the world right now, because of decisions you’ve made? You made them. (both laugh) But you were privileged.” “Oh, oh, why did you—?” “Hey!”

So, I mean—there’s such a thing as privilege. There’s also such a thing as middle class black privilege as well as white privilege. And these are the folks who are getting—the people of privilege, no matter what color they are, are getting access to the best of the school system has to offer because they’re not going to tolerate it. And if the school system’s not going to provide it, they’re going to go into that corner and they’re going to put them into independent parochial or private school.

**CONLEY:** So in conclusion, what is your hope for Boston Public Schools for the future? What would you like to see?

**JONES:** Well, the one we have to get—first of all, we have to get a top flight superintendent that is committed to radical reform of the Boston Public Schools. I just think that leadership does make a difference. When we hired Payzant, before they hired him, people first met with him, and he said one thing to them. You should be clear that we’re not talking about just bringing in a good new superintendent. That won’t do it. We’re talking about a team of people who are as experienced, or as talented, as the superintendent, [who will] with the division of labor seriously change the system. A superintendent by himself is not going to—you’ve got to bring in a team of people who are very talented in all the areas that have to be dealt with. And to work collectively to drive this system to a whole different place. Well, Payzant didn’t do that. Most of the people he brought in to be his senior people were lightweights. Really lightweights. I mean really lightweights. (both laugh) I’m serious.

---

21 Thomas W. Payzant, a former undersecretary in the U.S. Department of Education, served as superintendent of the Boston Public Schools from October 1995 through June 2006. He was the first superintendent selected by the appointed Boston School Committee.
The best example of this was a wonderful young man named Tim Knowles who he made the head of instruction. Well, Tim Knowles started as his intern. He got a degree at Harvard and he started as his intern while he was at Harvard. He was his intern. And the next thing we know he’s the head of instruction for all of the school system. I love the guy by the way. I like Tim Knowles a lot. But he’s not, you know, not the depth of experience, you know, to move the (laughs) instruction of a Boston Public School System. This was replicated over and over again. So that’s what we got. We need a superintendent that is going to be engaged with the community. A superintendent that is going to be engaged with the community.

The other thing we need, which is part of the thing I’m looking at for this commission report, is can we get the Boston Public School system management and the union to get on the same page concerning the conditions and management prerogatives that are needed to run the Boston Public School system. Now, every school system, any urban school system that has made any serious change got the union to make concessions so that they were in an alliance with the school system so the school system and management could do what was necessary in terms of getting an education for kids was paramount. But we’ve got a mess here with the union and management. We haven’t gotten the concessions we need from the union in order for management to do their job in terms of the hiring, evaluation, and firing of teachers who aren’t doing their job. And the best example of this is we have these pilot schools, you know, which are under the school system, but they have the power to hire, and the majority of them—there’s not that many of them; I helped start one—are doing a very good job. They’re getting results (inaudible). The union says, We don’t want any more private schools. And when you have the—most private schools have the teachers working after school, working longer hours, and you’re not paying them for it. You’ve got to pay them (pounds hand on table for emphasis) for these extra hours they’re working. You’ve got to do this. The very thing we’re trying to get out from under. The teachers here aren’t screaming about this. They’re committed to having a school that works. And they have one that works. The kids are getting educated. They’re getting good academic results. Show them the MCAS\textsuperscript{22} tests.

\textsuperscript{22} MCAS refers to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, which includes a standardized test that all public school students must pass in order to graduate high school.
So you’ve got to have—I’m convinced, if you can’t get the union and management on the same page for a serious reform agenda, I don’t care how you change the math teaching (laughs), the literacy stuff, this stuff, that stuff, I don’t think you’re going to get there. So I would like to see something happen there. And you just have to have principals who can do the job. And you have to have parents thoroughly engaged in the school system. There’s all kind of research that shows that if you have effective leadership at the school level, or if you have parents substantially involved in the schools so you can hold the teachers accountable, you’ll have an effective school. If you have one of them you’ll have an effective school. If you have terrific leadership you’ll have an effective school. Or if you have parents substantially engaged and holding account, you’ll have an effective school. If you have both of them, you damn well (Conley laughs) would have an effective school. It’s a whole effective school research that was done. Looked at every variable under the sun, and they found out that the most important things were parents involvement and accountability of the school to the parents, and/or excellent leadership. But we’ve got to get excellent leadership in every school. And we’ve got to have parents who are substantially involved in terms of holding schools accountable. On the community side, we’ve got to get the community leadership really engaged with the schools. I’ve talked to black leadership. They know what’s going on. They have a lot to say. They never go to a school committee meeting. They never show up at a school committee meeting. They never go into (laughs) the local school in their area to see what’s going on. Well, a lot of them see what’s going on. To say, How can I help you? You know, What’s going on, but how can I help you? You can’t have this kind of disengagement of community leadership from a school system and think you’re going anywhere. If people want to jump up and scream about Payzant or this or that—but my thing to them is, “What do you know about the schools? Have you ever been to a school committee meeting?” That’s where the policy decisions get made. And some of them got good (inaudible) kids. “You’re not dead. You’re missing in action. So what are you talking about?” So that’s what I’d like to see. I also would like to see more metropolitan educational options. The suburban schools and the Boston Public School system come together for dramatically—we’re not going to exchange seats, that’s not going to happen based upon race and class. That ain’t going to happen. But what can we do to have classes from Lexington, to have classes with kids at the Science Museum, or whatever.
For one brief moment in the sixties there was a whole talk about metropolitan education, blah blah blah. Well it went up (snaps fingers) in flames because people didn’t want to do it. It went up against the barriers of race and class and fear and everything else. And we have a metropolitan educational platform called Metco. Thirty-five years in the makings, or thirty-six, whatever it is. Thirty-eight years, because it started in ‘66. Thirty-eight years in the making. A platform. Deep. It’s not going away. It’s not going to go away. Every year there’s threats that the Metco funding is going to be cut and blah, blah, blah, blah. It’s not going away. It’s deep. It’s deep. It’s not going anywhere. It’s deep. How are we using this platform? Besides busing urban kids out to the—so what are we doing to—

I know it can be done. I see it with the chorus. I’m doing a little thing with the chorus, I see it can be done. You know, I see what can be done. There’s got to be some creativity. We need leadership with creativity, boldness, courage. People are ready. People are hungry to move in a different direction. They’re hungry. Everywhere. From Charlestown to South Boston to Roxbury to Mattapan to the South End, they are hungry for different leadership that’s bold, creative, exciting. We’re not giving it to them. We’re not giving it to them. It’s the same old same old. The kids know it. The kids know it. You ever talk to these kids, they’ll tell you. They’ll tell you two things, You adults don’t care. Mel King—I don’t know if you know Mel King? Mel King ran for mayor once. An extraordinary man, now seventy-five. Extraordinary man (inaudible). He still gets called occasionally into schools. So he went into a school. A few black kids from high school said, Come, come. We want to talk to you. We’ve got some problems about what’s going on in this school. So he’s sitting there listening and these kids are sort of pouring out their concerns about what’s going on. And one kid jumps up and says—starts to say something to him. And he says, “Oh, forget it, forget it. I don’t ask you to care about us. You adults, all you care about is yourself. You’re only doing stuff around your own interest in this city. Don’t waste my time. I’m sorry. I’ll sit down.” He sat down. “You won’t even stand to work for us, you won’t even stand up for yourself. Now how could I think (laughs) you’re going to come here and stand up for our issues in this school? I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I lost my head.” He sat down. There’s the story. It’s the story.
So it’s not only about why the issue of blah blah blah—I went to a national meeting. Mary Wright Edelman, head of the Children’s Defense Fund, you ever heard of her? Extraordinary woman, running the Children’s Defense Fund. At this meeting with all elderly black leaders—one of the most incredible meetings I ever went to in my life, in Atlanta, September one—to talk about the conditions of this country and what this country is doing to folks of color, blah blah blah. She got up there and the usual litany of all the things that are going wrong for kids. Then she said, “You know, I asked the Lord, what’s wrong with our children? And the Lord said to me, ‘The trouble with our children are the adults.’” That’s the trouble with our children. That’s us. We’re not doing anything. We’re not doing anything to protect our kids. We’re not doing anything to advance their interests. We’re not doing anything to make sure their appropriate needs are being—that’s the problem with our children; it’s us. (snaps fingers) That’s where it is. Thank you.

CONLEY: Well, I’d like to thank you very much.

JONES: You’re very welcome.

CONLEY: For this interview.

JONES: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW