THE SCHOOL DESEGREGATION CRISIS OF CLEVELAND, OHIO, 1963-1964

The Catalyst for Black Political Power in a Northern City

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During the 1963-1964 school year, black Clevelanders launched a yearlong protest in an effort to end de facto segregation and other discriminatory policies within the Cleveland public schools. Inspired to some extent by the civil rights activity of black Southerners, Cleveland's African American community utilized several protest techniques during the crisis: peaceful negotiation, picketing, mass demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts, and finally, legal action. Although the protest achieved some moderate reforms, it failed to achieve its ultimate goal: citywide school integration. Nonetheless, the failed protest was actually a victory in defeat for the city's black community because it served as a catalyst for black unity, awakened them to the limits of protest, and subsequently forced them to place greater emphasis on attaining political power. This study of the Cleveland school desegregation crisis will help us understand the broader connection between black protest and the rise of black political power in America.[1]

The genesis of the Cleveland school crisis lay in the second great migration and the resulting white flight. Between 1950 and 1965 Cleveland's black population grew from 147,847 to 279,352, while its overall population shrank from 914,808 to 810,858. In 1950 black inhabitants represented only 16.2 percent of the population, but by 1965 they accounted for 34.4 percent, with more than 99.9 percent of them living in the rigidly segregated black East Side corridor. This demographic shift created racial tensions over access to decent housing, fair law enforcement, and increased employment opportunities. But school discrimination emerged as the principle source of racial conflict.[2]

As thousands of African Americans flocked into the city after World War II, the city school population underwent a phase of rapid growth. Between 1950 and 1965 the school population rose from approximately 98,000 to 149,655, with African Americans representing about 54 percent of the overall district total. Since all students in the district were assigned to schools in their immediate neighborhood, segregation became more intense on the predominantly black East Side. As black students increased their presence in the school

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district, their parents developed a long list of grievances: inferior teachers, teacher segregation, a lack of remedial teachers, low teacher expectations, few blacks in administrative positions, high student-teacher ratio, poor physical plant, inadequate social services, and a severe lack of vocational courses. In comparison, schools on the all-white West Side had the most experienced teachers, the best services, the most attractive buildings, and a low student-teacher ratio. Black parents expressed tremendous concern regarding the school district's apparent discrimination, but school overcrowding became the principal source of their frustration.[3]

Although schools at all levels experienced some congestion, the problem was most apparent at the elementary school level. Between 1952 and 1963, the total enrollment of the city's elementary schools rose from 66,798 to 92,395, with the second great migration responsible for much of the growth. Since the school board failed to adequately plan for the mass influx of black children, school administrators used libraries, gyms, storerooms, playrooms, dispensaries, basements, attics, and portables as classroom space. Furthermore, some elementary school students took classes at nearby libraries, churches, community centers, and the former stadium of the local Negro League Baseball Team. In spite of these emergency measures, thousands of kindergarten students were placed on waiting lists to begin school during the mid-1950s. In 1956, for example, 1,465 children could not begin kindergarten because the school system had no space for them.[4]

In response to the issue of overcrowding, school officials launched a controversial relay program in 1957. With the permission of the Ohio State Board of Education, elementary students at congested schools attended class in double sessions. Half of the student body attended school in the morning, the other half in the afternoon. By 1961, 130 classes were operating on double sessions. However, at least 1,700 kindergartners were still on waiting lists that same year.[5]

Once black parents realized that the relay system was the board's solution to school overcrowding, they formed the Relay Parents March to Fill Empty Classrooms. Led by school activist Daisy Craggett, the Relay Parents marched on school board headquarters and demanded full-day sessions. When the school board failed to respond, the parents expressed their disgust in a strong resolution to the school board. "The punishing inequalities of double session and relay classes are clearly established by educators," the letter read. Scholars "report the loss of two months of achievement for every nine months of double session classes." The letter then listed the academic consequences of half-day schooling: "student grades decline, library use falls off, absenteeism increases, and the best students suffer the most." The Relay Parents were hopeful that the school board would end "part-time education . . . with deliberate speed."[6]

The Relay Parents found it hard to accept that black children were forced into half-day sessions when schools in predominantly white areas operated as much as 50 percent under capacity. In white schools, according to a Cleveland Public Schools memorandum, there were approximately 165 empty classrooms at the start of the 1961-1962 school year. But the school board ignored the demands of the Relay Parents who called for bussing black students to vacant white schools until new schools were built.[7]

Once it became clear that the school board would not bus black students to white schools, the Relay Parents continued picketing at school board headquarters throughout September and October. The demonstrations attracted much publicity and they produced results: The school board agreed to provide transportation from crowded schools to those with space.[8]

By choosing direct action to attract publicity, the Relay Parents broke the city's existing pattern of solving racial conflict. The primary method of protest by black Clevelanders since the 1930s had been negotiation. But the Relay Parents, inspired to a great extent by the emerging direct action protests in the South, knew that direct action would attract media attention to the plight of their children and to the discriminatory policies of the school board. The appearance of protestors at the school board came as a shock to the city's white residents because typically, Cleveland's black leadership class had preferred to quietly negotiate behind the scenes. However, the Relay Parents were outside of the black leadership clique. Many of them were college-educated southern migrants who had moved to the Glenville area in search of better living conditions for their families and better educational opportunities for their children. When the school board gave in to their demands, the entire city took note and created an atmosphere conducive to change.

Although the school board settled the controversy by abolishing the relay program in spring 1962, school officials replaced it with an even more controversial bussing plan that began at the start of the 1962-1963 school year. The bussing system involved sending and receiving schools. Black students and their teachers were sent from overcrowded black schools into underutilized white schools. Black parents liked the idea because it was an improvement from half-day sessions and it opened up regular classroom space.[9]

Before launching the bussing plan, school officials decided that it was impractical to bus students to the far West Side. Instead, the school board agreed to bus students to the few all-white East Side schools, which limited transportation costs and commuting time. Black parents approved of the board's bussing plan but were outraged on realizing that the school board had altered the bussing plan to minimize contact between black and white students all in an attempt to appease angry white parents.[10]

Although the receiving schools appeared integrated to an outsider, the bussed students were treated, in the words of one observer, "like a containerized shipment of cattle." For instance, once the bussed students arrived at the receiving school with their teacher, they had to remain in that particular classroom the entire day. Furthermore, the students could not eat their lunch in the cafeteria and were banned from assemblies, physical education classes, and school-wide extracurricular activities. Finally, black students only had access to the school restroom at one designated time per day and were not allowed to see the in-school nurse.[11]

School officials deliberately segregated the bussed students because they did not want to antagonize white parents. Prior to launching the controversial plan, school administrators explicitly told white parents that bussing was only to relieve overcrowding until new schools were built. There would be no integration under any circumstances. Cleveland Schools Superintendent William Levenson explained the controversial policy:

> It is obvious to you that the easiest thing to do was to put children from a school in a bus with their teacher and take them to that school. That is why it was done. Secondly, and quite honestly, we were launching an endeavor about which there was a great deal of concern to the people of a certain racial area. This is quite obviously a reason we did it as we have.

Levenson firmly believed that black students could earn a decent education in a segregated setting. The superintendent's comments did not shock African Americans because they realized that he sympathized with white parents and that he followed the wishes of the racially conservative seven-member school board. Although the school district was more than 50 percent black, only one African American, William F. Boyd, sat on its seven-person board.[12]

Presiding over the school board was thirty-five-year-old Ralph McCallister. After gaining election to the board in 1961, he ascended to the presidency in the early part of 1963, just one year after serving on the board. His experience as a teacher in lily-white suburban districts made him an attractive school board candidate, and during his initial campaign the teacher-turned-attorney received endorsements from the Cleveland Teachers Union, the Cleveland Federation of Labor, and the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party, among others. Although McCallister often espoused the rhetoric of a liberal, his leadership during the school crisis convinced African Americans that he had little concern for civil rights issues or black folks in general.[13]

McCallister's base of support came from white ethnics on the predominantly black East Side, whose children would be directly affected by any change in school policy. Groups such as the Collinwood Improvement Association and the North American Alliance for White People were at the forefront of the resistance effort. Like their white counterparts in the South, these organizations represented parents who did not want any change in the traditional pattern of school segregation or race relations in general. They viewed black kids as pathological, intellectually inferior to their own, and they feared miscegenation. Although not all white politicians were this extreme in their views toward black people, the white-ethnic voting bloc was large and many politicians, including McCallister, were unwilling to jeopardize that base of support. Thus, McCallister segregated the bussed students to appease white parents, but in the process he angered the Relay Parents who had now taken on the name of the Hazeldell Parents Association (HPA).

All of the bussed students were from Hazeldell, which with 2,250 pupils was by far the largest elementary school in the city. When the parents of the bussed students discovered the discriminatory treatment at the receiving schools, they received the support of the newly formed United Freedom Movement (UFM), a civil rights coalition organized to coordinate all of the city's civil rights activity.[14]

The formation of the UFM was historic in that it represented the first time the city's black community presented a united front to white civic leaders. Prior to its formation, the black community was deeply divided by class and ideology. The traditional black leadership class, which was represented by ministers, politicians, and the middle-class-oriented National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Urban League, often boasted throughout the 1940s and 1950s that Cleveland was the best location in the nation for African Americans. They often pointed out that Cleveland had the highest number of black judges and city council representatives than any other city in the country. Their attitude contributed to the conventional notion among whites that black Clevelanders had very few (if any) grievances. Although Cleveland did have visible political representation, black politicians generally eschewed race-based community politics in favor of individual pursuits and interests.

But nonetheless, the NAACP preferred to work behind the scenes in their low-key efforts to bring about change. They kept the visibility of black frustration low while focusing on symbolic issues. In the eyes of the city's white power structure, the NAACP represented the responsible leaders of the black community because they did not expect too much, too soon in the area of racial justice. Although the NAACP's gradualist approach to race advancement was supported by the city's black middle class, the city's black poor looked to Cleveland Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) for support.[15]

Young and militant, Cleveland CORE represented the voice of the black poor and working class, particularly many southern migrants who had come North in search of the promised land only to have their expectations unfulfilled. Unlike the NAACP, CORE defined the problems of the city's African American community in terms of housing, jobs, and schools, concerns that the black middle class rarely addressed as it celebrated individual success. CORE did not look at individual success as a sign of racial progress; rather, they looked at the collective nature of black life in Cleveland, and with support of black southern migrants they utilized aggressive direct action techniques in an effort to bring about change. Although the NAACP was somewhat uncertain about forming an alliance with CORE and other more militant groups, their survival as effective civil rights organizations required it. Plus, school discrimination was an issue that cut across class lines. It affected nearly every black family in the city.[16]

Once the HPA acquainted the UFM with the treatment of the bussed students, the coalition embarked on a battle to end all vestiges of school segregation in Cleveland and the city would soon witness its first major racial confrontation. Based on 1963 school board statistics, 93 percent of all elementary school students attended de facto segregated schools. At the junior high level that number was 78 percent, and in high schools across the city approximately 83 percent of all students were either in all-black or all-white schools. Thus, the school board did operate a rigidly segregated school system.[17]

During four weeks of negotiations with the UFM, the school board reaffirmed their decision to maintain the segregation of the bussed students. Thirty-five-year-old school board president Ralph McCallister stated that the exclusion of the bussed students from schoolwide activities did not represent another attempt to segregate the schools; rather, it was the most sound policy decision. Superintendent William Levenson added, "It was the easiest thing to do, we do not want to agonize anyone more than necessary by attempting to integrate." One school board member argued that segregating the transported pupils was only a safety measure: "Where they leave in a group, they are with their teacher on a bus, they go to their school, go to a classroom, meet again and go to their bus, and are taken back to their original school." This system was much better than integration.

> You would have us take them to the school and disseminate these children to different classrooms. Then they would have to collect all of them afterwards and get them on the bus. If one is missing, they would have to wait for him. These are the problems that could happen.

After weeks of negotiations failed to produce an agreement, the UFM issued an ultimatum: that the students be fully integrated into the receiving schools by September 23, 1963. The school board ignored it.[18]

The school board's apparent disregard for the concerns of the UFM was part of a larger civic tradition in Cleveland supported by city hall, city council, big business interests, newspaper editors, and white ethnic voters. Throughout the city's history, the political and economic elite neglected the serious issues of the city—housing, health and welfare, education, and unemployment—while trumpeting low taxes and small government. Moreover, the white community had a history of ignoring black grievances, knowing that whatever protest African Americans launched would be sporadic, short-lived, individualistic, and solved behind the scenes. But this time, however, when the school board decided not to integrate the bussed students, the city encountered its first major racial confrontation.[19]

In the eyes of the CORE and HPA contingent, the four weeks of negotiations with the school board were simply a waste of time. But the school board's

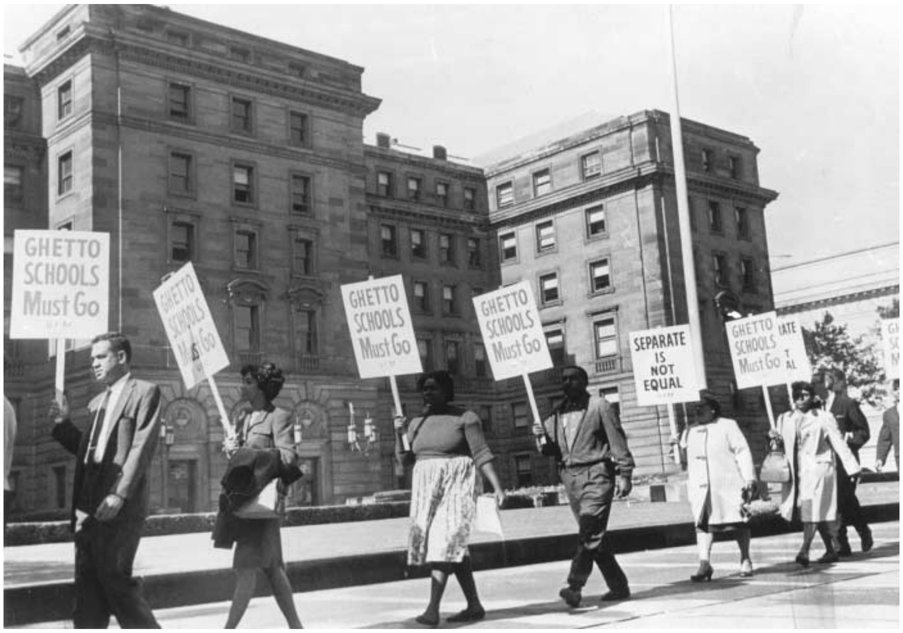

Figure 1: United Freedom Movement picketing of school board headquarters, September 25, 1963.
SOURCE: Courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University.

defiance helped them convince the moderate element within the UFM that peaceful negotiation was no longer an effective protest strategy. They would have to utilize new protest techniques. Furthermore, the school board's refusal to change the controversial bussing policy gave CORE and HPA leaders the ammunition they needed to take over the coalition and launch direct action protest. From then on, in the words of one UFM member, "Rarely was a motion to take direct-action turned down in favor of a lesser course of action."[20]

On the evening of September 24, the UFM, strongly urged on by representatives from CORE and HPA, voted to set up a picket line at the downtown headquarters of the school board. Reverend David Zuverik, cochair of the UFM school committee, saw direct action as the only recourse: "All we are demanding are basic rights . . . we seek meaningful integration . . . we have bent over backwards to accommodate the Board, but now we apparently have to take stronger action." UFM President Harold Williams was a bit harsher in his remarks, stating, "The revolution has come to town, let's hit the street like one mighty wave. The school board has been given a golden chance to take a great step forward, it hasn't, when we picket we are simply exercising an extension of the right of freedom of speech." The planned demonstrations angered McCallister: "I wasted an awful lot of time in the best of faith."[21]

The next day, approximately 250 protesters picketed the Cleveland School Board and demanded an end to de facto segregated schools and other

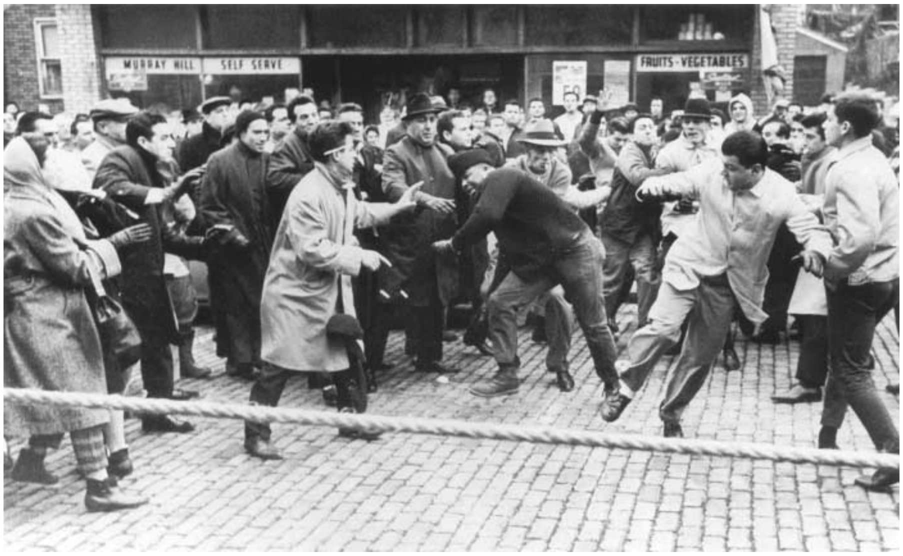

Figure 2: Black protester attacked during school demonstration in Little Italy, January 30, 1964.
SOURCE: Courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University.

discriminatory practices. Signs reading "Ghetto Schools Must Go" and "McCallister Is Stalling" were visible among the protestors. Picketing continued throughout the week, with the hope that by the following Monday the school board would respond at its biweekly meeting.[22]

It did. The school board agreed to integrate some of the bussed students immediately and all of the transported students by the beginning of the second semester, as long as the decision met "sound educational principles." The school board also agreed to appoint a human relations committee to develop plans for systemwide integration. In light of the board's concession, the UFM decided to cease picketing with the understanding that the bussed pupils would be fully integrated by January 15, 1964, the start of the second semester.[23]

The use of direct action once again caused the school board to act because it generated a great deal of publicity. Whereas the UFM's efforts to negotiate peacefully proved fruitless, they got immediate concessions when they launched demonstrations. Although the conservative element within the coalition detested direct action, they understood that mass demonstrations would force school officials to act quickly.

While the UFM presented a united front to white Cleveland, tensions still arose on issues of strategy. The NAACP, which by far had the largest delegation within the UFM, still wanted the coalition to follow its historic conservative style: peaceful negotiation. However, CORE and HPA consistently favored direct action mass protest because it was proven to be effective and would precipitate further confrontations with white Cleveland. The

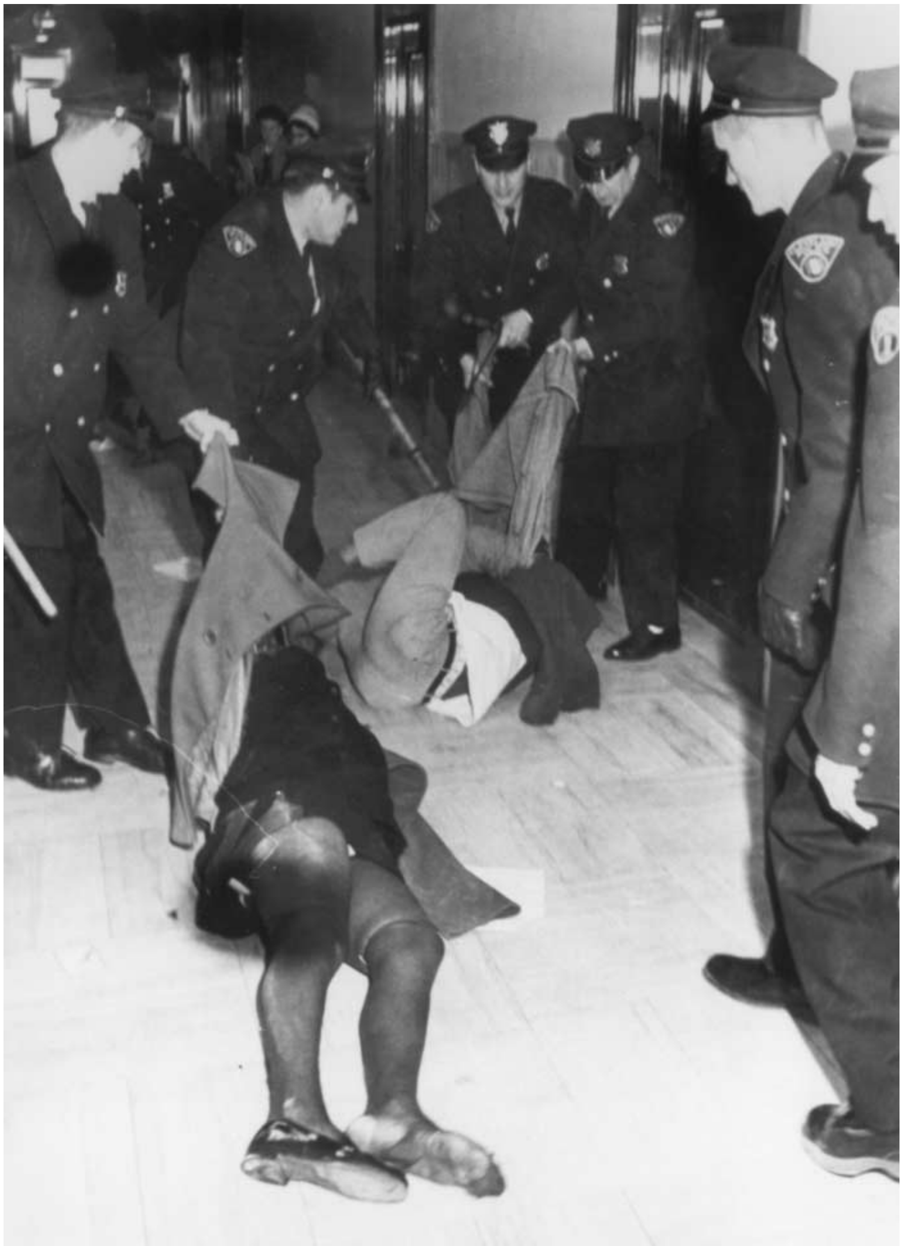

Figure 3: Black protesters being dragged out of school board headquarters during a sit-in, February 4, 1964.
SOURCE: Courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University.

ideological tensions within the UFM mirrored a broader NAACP-CORE conflict. Cleveland CORE would often complain that the NAACP was too conservative, while NAACP supporters resented the so-called militance of CORE.

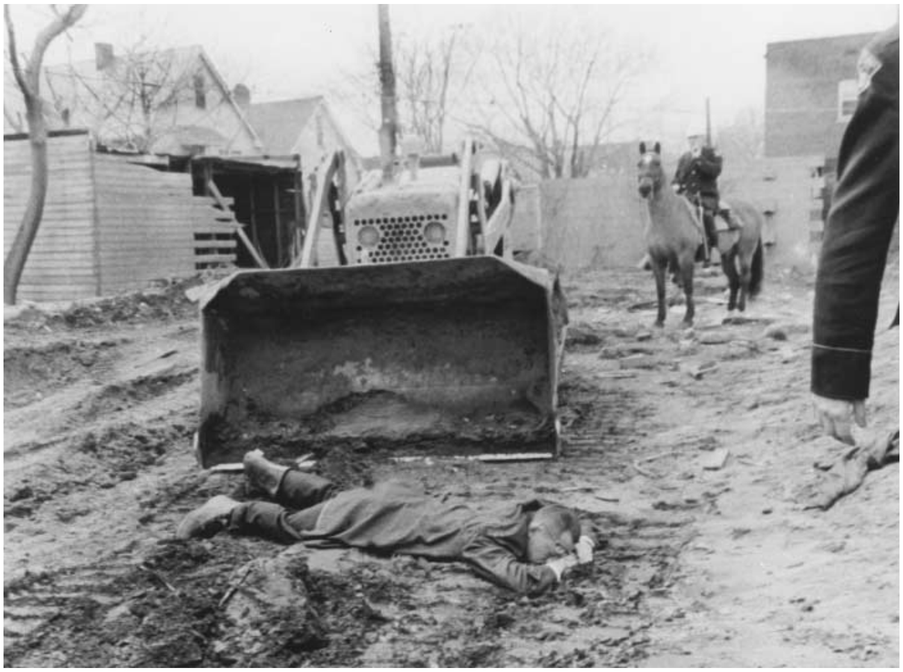

Figure 4: Reverend Bruce Klunder, just seconds after he was crushed to death by a bulldozer, April 8, 1964.
SOURCE: Courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University.

Nonetheless, the NAACP always went along with the coalition's decision to launch direct action, but it was always CORE and HPA that supplied the manpower. While these divisions could have possibly fractured the coalition, the attitude of school officials toward integration angered moderates as well as the so-called militants. Thus, instead of exploiting the divisions within the UFM, the actions of the school board actually strengthened the coalition.

As the second semester began in January 1964, UFM officials eagerly awaited the board's plan for the integration of the 940 bussed students. They soon discovered that school officials had no intention of honoring the September 1963 agreement. Rather, the school board decided to implement a diffusion plan that called for mixing about 20 percent of the bussed students for a brief forty-minute period each day. The bussed students were to remain separate at all other times. When questioned about the board's decision to violate the agreement, school board president Ralph McCallister contended that the board never promised to integrate the bussed pupils. "We said as long as it was in keeping with 'sound education principles,' " he replied. UFM supporter Bettie Eckland wondered if McCallister's comments were meant to imply that "integration is not in keeping with sound educational principles?" She then declared that "McCallister is not going to get away with this. The board made

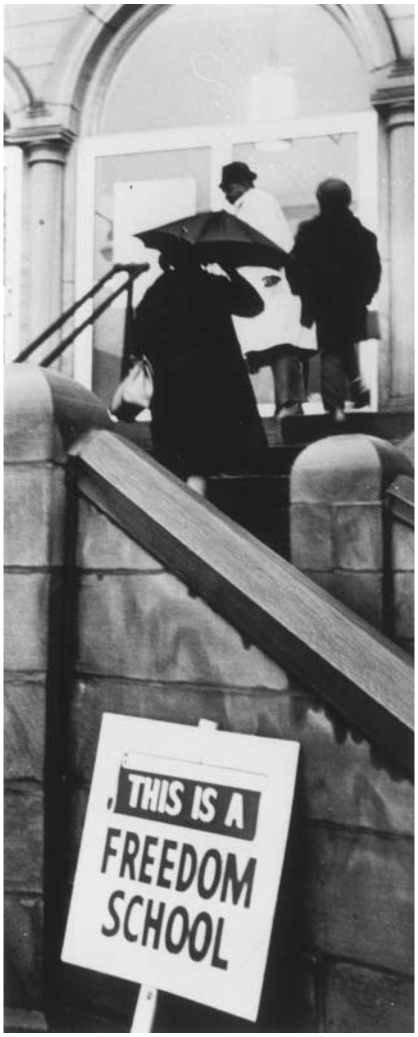

Figure 5: Students entering freedom school on the morning of the school boycott, April 20, 1964.
SOURCE: Courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University.

those resolutions and they are going to stick to them." McCallister further angered black residents when he defended the board's segregationist policies on the grounds that black students were "educationally inferior" to white students. The failure by the school board to fully integrate the bussed students into the receiving schools illustrated their willingness to appease white parents such as one who told the board that "forceful diffusion will result in forceful resistance." Another angry white parent, when told of the board's plan to partially integrate the bussed students, exploded: "We are looking for education for our children, not for Negro sons- and daughters-in-law. I don't want my grandchildren black. I am proud of my race. I want to stay white."[24]

On Sunday, January 26, the UFM launched a protest at the receiving schools to publicize what was happening to their children. “There is no sense in negotiating something that is already ours by constitutional right,” said HPA President Eddie Gill. Other members of the HPA explained the urgency of the protest: “My child tells me that other (white) children call them niggers as they go to classes. They bring home dirty milk bottles because they cannot use school facilities.” Mrs. Ella Louis told a reporter that her children had to take gym in a hallway and that they were not allowed to participate in the school’s Christmas pageant.[25]

The UFM and HPA staged their first mass protest at Brett Elementary School in the white working-class enclave of Collinwood on Wednesday, January 29. As the Hazeldell parents marched along the sidewalk with placards reading “Down with McCallister” and “We Are Americans, Too,” they confronted white hecklers. Tensions quickly developed as whites repeatedly referred to the demonstrators as “dirty niggers.” The harassment turned physical when an angry white resident knocked a picket off the sidewalk. At the other end of the picket line, white hecklers appeared with dogs. According to one journalist, “They tried to make the dogs attack the pickets. The hecklers marched through the line saying ‘sic-em, sic-em.’ ” Although the demonstrators were being harassed, white police officers failed to protect them. Luckily, the protest ended without any injuries. While some were picketing at Brett, other members of the UFM staged an involuntary sit-in at the board of education as they waited for Superintendent Levenson to report for work. He never did.[26]

That evening, school officials released a statement denying reports that the bussed students were kept segregated at the receiving schools. “We are integrating classes,” said the statement, “and by next September we are preparing to accomplish complete integration.” It further read that the picketing at Brett Elementary upset them since they were only adhering to the agreement adopted by the Cleveland Board of Education in September.[27]

On Thursday, the protest spread to Memorial Elementary in Little Italy. The pickets arrived to face a mob of 1,400 white people who attacked them with bricks, guns, knives, and clubs. Some innocent black citizens were caught up in the midst of the riot, including a couple who had their car windows broken with baseball bats as they drove through the area. Another vehicle occupied with blacks was riddled with bullets as it passed through the same intersection. Innocent reporters were also attacked, such as Allen Howard and Kenneth Temple of the *Call and Post*, the city’s black newspaper. Howard recalled the tense moments as he and Temple arrived on the scene:

> I don’t know about Ken (Temple) but I suddenly felt like Daniel in the Lion’s Den. Frightened and speechless we realized that we were trapped. There we stood with about 200 red-blooded American mobsters staring us right in the eyes. Hate and prejudice dripping from the eyes like blazes of fire.

The brutality began. "And then there was a kick, which fortunately landed short of the mark. Then the whole pack rushed forward." Howard miraculously managed to stumble toward a policeman and "told him what happened." The policeman's response: "You went in there and started something. You incited a riot. Don't start anything. Get out of here." The policemen's attitude was apparently contagious because the police did not arrest a single rioter. But the failure of the police to stop the riot and make arrests did not go unnoticed. "Police were present in large numbers and saw repeated examples of violence and lawlessness; yet, not one person was taken to jail, booked, or held for court," read one eyewitness account. When Mayor Ralph Locher was presented with evidence of police neglect, he responded by stating, "There comes a time when no matter how many police you have, it is impossible to prevent violence."[28]

The appearance of white counterprotestors was a clear illustration that the school crisis had now clearly evolved from a battle between black residents and the school board to a struggle over board policy between black and white residents. White parents were clearly threatened at the prospect of even moderate integration within the receiving schools, and they took out their frustrations on black protestors. In many ways, the violence at the schools took the focus off of the school board's discriminatory policies while placing the focus on angry parents and protestors. Ralph McCallister had skillfully played black and white residents against each other to deflect attention from himself and the school board.

In the aftermath of the riot, the city's Italian American community went to great lengths to explain their actions. Longtime resident Louie DePaola admitted that "we showed a bad example for our children," but he blamed the school board for failing to adequately explain the bussing plan. "The picketing of the schools was confusing and the people in our neighborhood didn't know what it meant." Ohio State Senator Anthony Calebrese concurred, stating, "Had the mayor of Cleveland clarified the situation, or had the board of education gotten together with the PTA groups, I believe a peaceful solution of this situation may have been possible." But Calabrese did condemn the actions of his people: "The Italian people are a minority group themselves and should certainly show human consideration for minority problems."[29]

On Tuesday, February 4, the demonstration spread to the board of education as the UFM engaged in a different form of direct action: the sit-in. However, tempers flared as white police officers forcibly removed the demonstrators. During the disturbance, several protesters were thrown down three flights of stairs. Hazel Little and May Myrick, both in their fifties, were among those who were tossed down the concrete staircase. Little told a reporter about the brutality: "I was dragged down three flights of stairs by the police, and when they got me to the bottom of the stairs they threw me into a corner." Although she pleaded with police officers to take her to the hospital, she was first taken to jail along with twenty other protestors and charged with obstructing justice and assault of a police officer. Myrick recalled that the harassment and brutality continued inside the jail. "While in the cell, I was treated horribly, the matrons wanted me to remove my clothing so that they could examine me while policemen and other males were present." Despite the unlawful arrests and brutality, on their release, the protesters staged an impromptu picket in front of police headquarters.[30]

While the brutality and arrests were being made on the third floor of the building, police blocked the stairs and the elevators. When a *Call and Post* reporter asked why they could not go on the third floor, a policeman told him that "they were not in charge of the building," and therefore they "couldn't let people just wander around and go where they wished." When the reporter protested the police blockade, one police officer smiled and said "get up the best way you can."[31]

Mayor Ralph Locher and other white community leaders were noticeably quiet throughout the weeklong disturbance and the black community took notice of it. Although the school system was outside the scope of mayoral control, blacks were outraged that Locher refused to mediate the dispute and that he would not protect black protestors from white attacks. When the UFM demanded a public investigation into the conduct of police officers in Little Italy, he denied their request by stating that it was the UFM who triggered the violence. In spite of the community outrage, the mayor refused to get involved in the controversy. Instead, he made a plea "to let law and order prevail in this city."[32]

However, the publicity surrounding the sit-in at board headquarters convinced Mayor Locher to negotiate an agreement that called for the immediate integration of the bussed pupils into the receiving schools on March 9 and the building of new schools to relieve overcrowding. This agreement was introduced for adoption at a special school board meeting on February 10, and the board passed it with slight modifications. The board's resolution called for the "integration of the transportation classes forthwith and a discontinuation of the transportation class system by whatever means the board deems necessary and proper." The UFM accepted the substitute proposal under the condition that if transportation classes were eliminated they would not tolerate half-day sessions, portables, rented classrooms, substandard classrooms, or overcrowded classes. "We will have to wait and see if the board carries out the resolution. There are still some questions. For instance, how long is forthwith? This could mean two months, in which time this semester will be half over," said the UFM's Harold Williams. He further stated that "discontinuing the transportation classes could mean sending the pupils back to substandard classrooms." HPA President Eddie Gill was even more skeptical: "This resolution sounds vague. I'm still waiting for them to explain it more." Cleveland CORE President Ruth Turner was perhaps the most upset and disturbed by the board's actions. "It was nothing. It should have been rejected last Tuesday. The community interest has subsided now. We will have to start all over again to get community interest.” Turner was particularly concerned about the board’s use of the term *forthwith*. Did it mean “two weeks or two years?”[33]

On March 9, the designated day of integration, many white parents kept their children home. One school official reported a high rate of “absenteeism” at the receiving schools. When two hundred concerned white parents showed up at Brett that morning, “they received an explanation of the new integration policy” from the school superintendent and other officials. A similar briefing was held at Memorial Elementary as well. Parents at both schools appeared satisfied with the board’s explanation and later returned with their children.[34]

When the UFM officials discovered that only a small percentage of the bussed students were integrated on March 9, they were convinced that the school board had once again not honored its commitment. “We won’t be able to tell how useful the program is effective is until our children are able to tell us what is happening and how the program is affecting them,” said one HPA member.[35]

Days later, the school board announced the construction of three elementary schools in the all-black Hazeldell neighborhood to relieve overcrowding at Hazeldell Elementary. However, the UFM did not interpret the board’s construction plans as an attempt to relieve overcrowding but as a shrewd way of extending the school district’s historic pattern of segregation. The board’s actions caused the protest to shift from the treatment of the bussed students to the board’s construction plans and an all-out attack on the board policy of neighborhood schools.

The school construction plans were the school board’s way of appeasing white parents. School officials sold white parents on the idea of integration by informing them that it was only to be a temporary arrangement until new schools were built. On completion of the new schools, the bussed students would then be resegregated back to their neighborhood schools. McCallister understood that this was his only way out of a precarious situation and he quickly utilized it. Although the school board president had satisfied the concerns of white parents, he would soon come face to face with a unified black community.

When the board announced their construction plans, the UFM immediately called for a moratorium on all school construction. “We charge all three schools as being both separate and unequal in violation of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling,” read a UFM press release. It went on to warn the school board that if they persisted “in building ghetto schools . . . we will be compelled to take immediate remedial action.”[36] The allegations concerning the school board’s building program were accurate. Historically, the board’s school construction program did increase segregation. For instance, all of the twenty-five new schools completed between 1955 and 1962 were de facto segregated. Eighteen were all black and the remainder were all white. The UFM wanted the school board to build schools in fringe areas in communities where blacks and whites lived in closer proximity. But this was simply impossible considering the high degree of racial segregation in Cleveland.[37]

School officials rejected the UFM request to stop construction. “Who appointed it (UFM) dictator of policy for the people of Cleveland,” McCallister asked reporters. “We have purchased land and retained architects, and advertising for bids is underway,” he stated, “how far can we go before turning back just because one group wants to select second sites and set school policy?” The school board also refused to discuss plans for the full integration of all students in the district. In response, the UFM school committee announced their own plans for system-wide integration. The UFM proposal called for the elimination of neighborhood schools in favor of centralization, the building of new schools in fringe areas, and the expansion of the busing program to alleviate overcrowding instead of building new schools. At the next school board meeting William F. Boyd, the only African American on the board, asked his colleagues to consider hiring William Briggs of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission as a consultant to help the board handle the crisis. “The other board members made no response to Boyd’s suggestion,” said one observer. “They just don’t recognize the scope of the problem,” a dejected Boyd said, “and they just keep opening themselves to further badgering.”[38]

The UFM objected to the construction plans not only because they would increase segregation but also on the grounds of good fiscal policy and safety. First, it wondered why the board was building new schools in the Hazeldell area when there was a 17 percent vacancy throughout all elementary schools. In addition, they argued that since it cost $1.25 million to build a new school, why not continue to bus children, which cost only around $35,000 a year. UFM officials also questioned the feasibility of the proposed sites. The proposed Woodside location was not large enough for a playground, while the Lakeview site was located on a major thoroughfare, scheduled to be widened in the coming years, meaning that it would have to be torn down or remodeled in the near future. The Cleveland City Planning Commission voiced similar objections. The UFM characterized the board’s construction plans as an attempt to continue the school district’s legacy of segregating black children.[39]

The UFM made it clear that its purpose was not to stop school construction but rather “to start it rapidly on a bold, new, and more satisfactory direction.” The UFM wanted the school board to “restudy” its school construction plans “with the help of whatever experts and advice are available.” The UFM officials also declared that ten years after the *Brown v. Board* decision “there can be no excuse for a housing policy that so plainly reinforces the existing pattern of school segregation, and the educational injustices which result.” The protestors were also angry that the board did not wait for the anticipated April 1 report from the school board’s Human Relations Council formed in September 1963. The UFM found this disturbing since the council was responsible for drafting plans for system-wide integration. Since its formation, the council had met twenty times as a committee and more than seventy times in subcommittees. The UFM considered it “bad faith” that the board would proceed with construction plans without the council’s report. Ruth Turner made one last plea for the school board to restudy its housing program when she warned that they would “bring the issue to a head with all means at our disposal” if the board went ahead with its construction plans.[40]

In spite of the protest, school construction crews were at the proposed sites in early April preparing the property for excavation. When UFM officials learned that construction was under way, they announced that they would picket and possibly stage a school boycott. “We have to do something to stop the building of these schools and stop our children from being resegregated,” said HPA President Eddie Gill.[41]

Although the UFM considered their protest logical, many white citizens considered the demands of the civil rights coalition unreasonable. The political editor of the *Cleveland Press* remarked, “These are the very people who have complained about the lack of adequate school facilities for their children. Now they have issued an ultimatum demanding a slow-down in providing these facilities.” The editor further stated the board’s actions were proper because it would end the “awkward” system of bussing. Furthermore, he argued, brand-new school buildings could hardly be considered inadequate or unequal. The writer considered the UFM protest against segregated schooling nothing more than a transparent and deliberate attempt to sabotage the Cleveland educational system.[42]

After fruitless negotiations, the UFM decided to picket at the particular school construction sites to express their displeasure with the board’s plans. Approximately fifty demonstrators arrived at the Lakeview property on Monday, April 6, to protest the board’s construction plans. As they held a picket line on the sidewalk, several protestors decided to form human barricades in an attempt to stop construction. Thirty-year-old Booker T. Eddy shocked other protestors when he crawled beneath a slow-moving truck as it headed onto the construction site. “Eddy had to be dragged from underneath the truck by several policemen.” He was the first to be arrested. Minutes later, twelve other demonstrators jumped into a ditch directly in the path of heavy construction equipment. After the protestors ignored police requests to get out of the ditch, they were forcibly removed. The female demonstrators in the ditch were lifted out of the ditch by policemen while the men “were simply thrown out.” Mounted policemen quickly grew impatient with the demonstrators and hundreds of onlookers and disbursed the crowd by pushing, shoving, and making arrests. Several spectators had to be restrained by protestors from attacking the police. At the end of the afternoon, twenty protestors had been arrested.[43]

Similar protest techniques were used the next day as picketing continued at the Lakeview construction site. It quickly turned deadly when Reverend Bruce Klunder, a twenty-seven-year-old white minister and CORE activist, was crushed to death by a bulldozer while lying in an inclined ditch. Although the operator of the tractor tried to stop, “his reaction was too slow,” said one eyewitness. Klunder was killed instantly. Within seconds one spectator attacked the operator and another tried to commandeer the bulldozer. Minutes after the tragedy, police arrived in riot gear to disperse the crowd. In spite of the tragedy, construction crews resumed work later that day, and that evening angry black youth expressed their displeasure regarding Klunder's murder by throwing rocks and stones at police cruisers and looting several white-owned stores in the area.[44]

More than two thousand people attended a memorial service for Klunder later that night at Cory Methodist Church. Movement officials capitalized on the large crowd by encouraging others to get involved in the school protest. "Don't just sit there and applaud, but get out there with us and take some action," pleaded one speaker. HPA executive secretary Minnie Hill told the crowd that segregation equaled inferiority: "Your child can go to those inferior schools and make all A's and B's and still when they graduate you have supported 18 years of ignorance." She then told the parents in the audience to get up off their "ignorance and do something." When Cleveland CORE President Ruth Turner announced that plans were being made for a school boycott and an economic boycott against several white-owned businesses, "the crowd shouted its approval by jumping to its feet and clapping."[45]

The following night Mayor Ralph Locher secured an injunction forbidding interference with construction crews and limiting picketing to ten persons at a time. The mayor also negotiated an agreement between the UFM and the school board, which called for a two-week truce on demonstrations while the board restudied its construction plans. The board agreed to stop construction until a panel of experts examined the entire "school segregation problem." The truce was short-lived, however. The following day, McCallister shocked UFM officials by announcing that he would not honor the agreement and that the school board would proceed with its construction plans. UFM demonstrators then staged a series of sit-ins at board headquarters during the weekend before common pleas court judge John V. Corrigan issued temporary restraining orders against further demonstrations at school headquarters. The UFM responded by calling for an economic boycott against white-owned businesses and a one-day boycott of the schools.[46]

On Tuesday, April 14, picketing took place downtown in front of May Company and Higbees, two of the city's most popular department stores. Protestors also appeared at the offices of the *Cleveland Press*, confronting its discriminatory and biased press coverage of the entire school crisis. Although the protests were largely ineffective, it convinced white business leaders that they could no longer ignore the racist practices of the city's school system.[47]

UFM supporters grew excited as the planned April 20 school boycott date approached. "I feel we have the support of all parents and the boycott will be a big business for Cleveland Negroes and will aid in the struggle for equal education," said Baxter Hill of the UFM education committee. The boycott called for all students in the school system, black and white, to stay away from school to protest the board's support of segregation. Instead, children would attend freedom schools set up throughout the city. "Every child will be a freedom soldier and will learn something about himself and his struggle," said Ruth Turner. Within days of the boycott, more than nine hundred teachers, one hundred school locations, and a complete schedule and curriculum were organized. The UFM also mounted a massive public relations effort. They staged rallies, high school students distributed leaflets, and loudspeakers on cars informed the community about the importance of the boycott. Housewives, social workers, nearby teachers, and area college students signed up to teach, and scores of churches raised money for teaching materials.[48]

Once they noticed the impending success of the boycott, McCallister and other school officials responded with a series of threats. The school board president stated that seniors who participated would jeopardize their graduation, that other students faced possible expulsion, and that teachers on limited contracts would not be renewed. In spite of McCallister's threats, plans for the boycott still went forward.[49]

When McCallister's threats failed to stymie the boycott, Cleveland's white power structure made two attempts to split the coalition and stifle the boycott. The first attempt came when influential members of Cleveland's business community pressured a few black politicians and ministers into publicly expressing their displeasure with the upcoming boycott. However, several well-respected leaders of Cleveland's black community immediately called a meeting with the city's traditional black leaders, and everyone in attendance was asked to sign a statement showing their support for the boycott. Those who refused to sign would have their names publicized throughout the black community. Everyone in attendance signed it. The second attempt came on the evening before the boycott when white leaders held a meeting with black leaders "to try and cool things off until they had time to settle matters peaceably around the conference table." Despite the pressure, black leaders held firm and the boycott proceeded as planned.[50]

As the day for the boycott neared, the UFM exploited the publicity and called for widespread reforms in addition to system-wide integration. They wanted more black teachers, integrated teaching materials, a lower student-teacher ratio, more administrative personnel, mandatory race relations training for all teachers, effective remedial programs, increased social services, and the discontinuance of racially biased testing materials.[51] The UFM staged rallies throughout the weekend preceding the boycott to generate momentum. Dick Gregory spoke to more than two thousand youth on Friday evening. On Saturday another youth rally was held in Rockefeller Park, and "an overflow crowd" attended a final rally at Cory Methodist Church on Sunday.[52]

The boycott was a success, as more than 92 percent of all black students attended more than eighty of the freedom schools throughout the city. Once the students arrived at the schools, their curriculum centered on African and African American life, history, and culture. Also, members of CORE and NAACP youth councils spoke to the kids about their role in the civil rights movement "so that the next generation might enjoy freedom."[53] According to several observers, the afrocentric curriculum appealed to the students. Most of them appeared genuinely interested in learning about their own history. At the end of the day, each student received a "freedom diploma" stating that they participated in the "stayout" for freedom and completed the requirements for the experiment in "democratic education." Although the boycott was a success, there was one unfortunate incident. Five-year-old Randy Adkins was killed in a traffic accident on her way home from a freedom school. The grieving parents told reporters that they hoped the tragedy would remind the public of the school board's resistance to school integration.[54]

Although the boycott was a victory for the black community who interpreted it as a mandate to change the board policy of neighborhood schools, the school board still proceeded with its school construction plans. Since the court injunction had discouraged the continuation of disruptive tactics, the UFM then headed to the courts in an effort to stop construction and to change the systemwide pattern of segregation. The first battle between black residents and the court system involved an appeal against the court order restraining the use of pickets at the school sites. Judge John J. Corrigan quickly struck down the appeal in the name of public safety. The second phase of legal action against the school board came when UFM legal advisers filed a million dollar taxpayer's suit challenging the awarding of construction contracts and attacking the plans as inadequate. The suit was soon dropped. The final phase of legal action went directly to the issue of segregation. In May 1964, the NAACP filed a suit on behalf of Charles Craggett and twenty schoolchildren charging the school board with fostering school segregation. The NAACP was hoping to suspend school construction until the suit was resolved. But when a federal judge refused to suspend construction, the suit became entangled inside the legal system and was eventually dropped.[55]

Although the school board stood by its policy of neighborhood schools, the actions of the UFM did lead to the resignation of school board President Ralph McCallister. Paul Briggs of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission replaced him. On assuming his new position, Briggs immediately began to redress many of the complaints from black parents. He reorganized the school board to make it more efficient, hired outside consultants, adopted integrated teaching materials, revised the curriculum, implemented a human relations program, established an all-girls trade school, and opened libraries in every elementary school. However, he was unable to implement a systemwide plan of integration because of the city's housing patterns. It was simply structurally impossible for the school board to achieve a racial balance in all of its schools. Briggs was persistent in telling parents that it was unfair and ludicrous to take black students from the East Side across factories, railroads, through the downtown area, and across the Cuyahoga River to the West Side. Thus, the Cleveland City

Schools would remain rigidly segregated until cross-town bussing was initiated in the 1970s.[56]

While the yearlong protest failed in its quest to desegregate the schools, it was in several respects a victory in defeat because the city's black community was unified. The degree of unity within the UFM and in the broader black community during the protest was unprecedented. Although ideological divisions were always present within the coalition, members of the UFM played down their differences. Since school segregation and discrimination affected nearly every black family in the city, the entire community understood the importance of racial unity as they confronted the city's white power structure. *Call and Post* writer Charles Loeb celebrated the school boycott as a historic display of unity: "Last week was really 'The Week That Was.' Cleveland's Negro Citizens wrote for the record an epic of racial solidarity that will not soon be forgotten by the Cleveland power structure."[57]

The failed school protest also helped black Clevelanders understand the limitations of negotiation, direct action, boycotts, and the legal system in bringing about permanent change. They then looked to the political arena in realizing the potential of black political power. Furthermore, when it became clear in late 1964 that Mayor Ralph Locher would seek reelection and probably win the 1965 mayoral election, black residents knew that they could not be subjected to another two years of Locher rule.

It was precisely these two developments that inspired black residents to draft state Representative Carl B. Stokes for the 1965 mayor's race. Stokes accepted the draft confident that he could transfer the momentum from the school crisis into his mayoral campaign. Although the independent Democrat lost the election and subsequent recount by a miniscule 2,142 votes (.9 percent) to Locher, he made history two years later, and in the process his election forever changed the nature of political power in Cleveland and across urban America as well.[58]

NOTES

1. Bayard Rustin spoke of the need for this same shift in tactics during the civil rights movement in his influential article "From Protest to Politics," *Commentary* 39 (February 1965): 25-31.

2. *Call and Post*, March 17, 1951; For two studies that look at the effect of the migration on the Cleveland School System, see Alonzo Gaskell Grace, "The Effect of Negro Migration on the Cleveland Public School System" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1932); and Carolyn Jefferson, "An Historical Analysis of the Relationship between the Great Migration and the Administrative Policies and Practices of Racial Isolation in the Cleveland Public Schools, 1920-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cleveland State University, 1991). For good population statistics that chronicle the demographic change, see Ernest C. Cooper, *The Negro in Cleveland: An Analysis of the Social and Economic Characteristics of the Negro Population, 1950-1963* (Cleveland: Urban League, 1964), on file at the Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio.

3. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Cleveland, Ohio, April 1-7, 1966* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1966), 274; *Call and Post*, February 12, 1949; and Raymond Jirran, "Cleveland and the Negro Following World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1973), 275.

4. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Cleveland*, 274.

5. "School Housing Report," Cleveland Public Schools Memorandum, Container 28, Folder 4, Cleveland National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society. School overcrowding was an issue that plagued many large school districts in the Midwest and Northeast. For a good overview of the situation in the New York City schools, see Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

6. Relay Parents to School Board, Container 28, Folder 2, NAACP Papers.

7. "Available Classroom Space in Elementary School Buildings," October 1962, Container 28, Folder 2, NAACP Papers.

8. Relay Parents to School Board, Container 28, Folder 2, NAACP Papers.

9. "Looking Backward," Cleveland Public Schools Memorandum, Container 28, Folder 4, NAACP Papers.

10. "Available Classroom Space," Container 28, Folder 2, NAACP Papers; and *Cleveland Press*, August 21, 1963.

11. "Transcript of Meeting between the Cleveland School Board and the United Freedom Movement," Container 25, Folder 5, NAACP Papers.

12. "Transcript of Meeting."

13. Kenneth Rose, "The Politics of Social Reform in Cleveland: Civil Rights, Welfare Rights, and the Response of Civic Leaders" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1987), 84-5.

14. For more on the formation of the United Freedom Movement (UFM), see Lewis Robinson, *The Making of a Man: An Autobiography* (Cleveland: Green and Sons, 1970), especially chapters 5 and 6; and Lawrence Brisker, "Black Power and Black Leaders: A Study of Black Leadership in Cleveland, Ohio" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1977).

15. For an in-depth discussion on the history of the Cleveland NAACP, see Russell H. Davis, "An Account of the Cleveland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," Russell H. Davis Papers, Container 9, Folder 140, Western Reserve Historical Society.

16. William E. Nelson and Phillip Meranto, *Electing Black Mayors: Political Action in the Black Community* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 86; and Rose, "Social Reform," 45-50. For more on Cleveland CORE, see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and an interview with Cleveland CORE Chair Ruth Turner can be found in Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965), 380-90.

17. "School Board Fact Findings," Container 29, Folder 2, NAACP Papers; and *Cleveland Press*, April 18, 1963.

18. "Transcript of Meeting between the Cleveland School Board and the United Freedom Movement," Container 25, Folder 5, NAACP Papers; "Education Resolution of the United Freedom Movement to the Board of Education," Container 28, Folder 2, NAACP Papers; and *Cleveland Press*, August 21, 1963.

19. For more on this civic tradition, see Thomas F. Campbell, "Cleveland: The Struggle for Stability," in Richard Bernard, ed., *Snow Belt Cities: Metropolitan Politics in the Northeast and Midwest since World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 109-36.

20. Brisker, "Black Power and Black Leaders," 160.

21. *Plain Dealer*, September 25, 1963.

22. *Plain Dealer*, September 27, 1963.

23. "The UFM v. the Cleveland School Board: An Interpretation Paper," Container 36, Folder 5, Cleveland Urban League Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

24. *Call and Post*, January 25, 1964, February 1, 1964, February 8, 1964; Kenneth Rose, "The Politics of Social Reform in Cleveland" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1987), 89.

25. *Call and Post*, February 1, 1964.

26. *Call and Post*, February 1, 1964.

27. *Call and Post*, February 1, 1964.

28. *Call and Post*, February 8, 1964.

29. *Call and Post*, February 8, 1964.

30. *Call and Post*, February 8, 1964.

31. *Call and Post*, February 8, 1964.

32. Donald Jacobs to Mayor Ralph Locher, Anonymous to Mayor Ralph Locher, Container 19, Folder 1, Ralph Locher Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society; *Cleveland Press*, January 31, 1964; and *Call and Post*, February 8, 1964. Conservatives praised Locher for his refusal to get involved in the controversy. See Container 19, Folder 1, Locher Papers.

33. *Call and Post*, February 15, 1964.

34. *Call and Post*, February 15, 1964.

35. *Call and Post*, February 15, 1964.

36. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 28, 1964; *Call and Post*, March 7, 1964; and "School Housing in Cleveland," March 5, 1964, Container 36, Folder 5, NAACP Papers.

37. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Cleveland*, 274-6.

38. *Cleveland Press*, March 3, 1964; *Call and Post*, March 7, 1964; and *Plain Dealer*, February 29, 1964.

39. "Board of Education Building Program," Container 29, Folder 11, NAACP Papers; and "Statement," Container 29, Folder 1, NAACP Papers.

40. *Cleveland Press*, March 18, 1964; *Call and Post*, March 28, 1964; *The Informer*, April 13, 1964, Container 1, Folder 2, Bruce Klunder Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society; "Board of Education Building Program," Container 29, Folder 11, NAACP Papers; "Statement," Container 29, Folder 1, NAACP Papers; and Ruth Turner to Participating Organizations, Container 29, Folder 3, NAACP Papers.

41. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 18, 1964.

42. "UFM Press Release," Container 28, Folder 5, NAACP Papers; and *Cleveland Press*, February 28, 1964.

43. *Call and Post*, April 11, 1964.

44. *Cleveland Press*, March 3, 1964; "An Interpretive Paper of the Cleveland Public Schools vs. the United Freedom Movement," Container 36, Folder 5, Urban League Papers; *Call and Post*, April 11, 1964; and "Cleveland Civil Rights Report," June 30, 1964, Container 39, Folder 4, Urban League Papers.

45. *Call and Post*, April 11, 1964.

46. *Call and Post*, April 18, 1964; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 12, 1964; and "An Interpretative Paper."

47. *The Informer*, April 25, 1964, Container 1, Folder 2, Klunder Papers.

48. *The Informer*, April 25, 1964, Container 1, Folder 2, Klunder Papers.

49. *The Informer*, April 25, 1964, Container 1, Folder 2, Klunder Papers.

50. Robinson, *The Making of a Man*, 106-7; Brisker, "Black Power and Black Leaders," 170; and *Call and Post*, April 25, 1964.

51. UFM Education Commission, "Working Paper #1," Container 45, Folder 5, Urban League Papers.

52. *Call and Post*, April 25, 1964.

53. *Call and Post*, April 25, 1964; and *The Informer*, April 25, 1964, Container 1, Folder 2, Klunder Papers.

54. *The Informer*, April 25, 1964, Klunder Papers; and *Call and Post*, April 25, 1964.

55. Rose, "The Politics of Social Reform in Cleveland," 95-6; and Brisker, "Black Power and Black Leaders," 171-4.

56. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Cleveland*, 372-8.

57. *Call and Post*, April 25, 1965.

58. For more on Stokes's campaigns and political career, see Nelson and Meranto, *Electing Black Mayors*; and Leonard N. Moore, "The Limits of Black Power: Carl B. Stokes and Cleveland's African-American Community, 1945-1971" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1998).