

DESEGREGATION AT KANSAS CITY'S CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL:
ILLUMINATING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT
EXPERIENCE THROUGH ORAL HISTORY

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by
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2014

ABSTRACT

Central High School, the oldest high school in Kansas City, serves as an example of how radically education in Kansas City, Missouri, has changed over the course of the last 150 years. Beginning as part of Kansas City, Missouri's, segregated public school system, Central was the city's first all-white high school and remained as such for the better part of ninety years. In 1955, following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Kansas City, Missouri, School district began a process of desegregation; Central High School's student population promptly transformed from all white in 1955 to nearly all black in 1962. This project explores the history of Kansas City's Central High School, investigating how the Kansas City, Missouri School District's approach to desegregation affected Central High School and in particular, Central's black students. With an emphasis on oral history, I set out to ascertain the African American student experience at Central High School, especially during the magnet years, 1988 to 1999, a period in which the Kansas City, Missouri School District underwent the most expensive and expansive desegregation remedy to date.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled “Desegregation at Kansas City’s Central High School: Illuminating the African American Student’s Experience through Oral History” presented by Bradley W. Poos, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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This project has been a labor of love, and I would like to dedicate it to all graduates of Kansas City's Central High School past, present, and future. So here's to the students of "Dear Old Central," a school with a storied history that reveals much about race and education in Kansas City.

There are many people whom I would like to thank, but of course, my work would not have been possible without the voices of former Central students. I most certainly owe a debt of gratitude to the narrators who were willing to share with me their time and personal stories. Thank you to Gwendolyn Adams (class of 1958), Lyle Davis, Jr. (class of 1958), Forestal Lawton (class of 1962), Loretta Stewart (class of 1963), Dr. J. Anthony Snorgrass (class of 1970), Arthur Jackson (class of 1974), Marion Halim (class of 1975), Lee Barnes, Jr. (class of 1982), Connie Wright (class of 1982), Crystal Shakur (class of 1989), Daryl Norton (class of 1990), Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway (class of 1992), Christopher Slaughter (class of 1993), Melanie Evans (class of 1993), Quincy Williams (class of 1993), Terrence Lasker (class of 1995), Monika Anderson (class of 1995), Jermaine Wilson (class of 1997), Michael Watson (class of 1999), and William Winston (class of 1999). Your participation has enriched our collective understanding of Central High School's history and the African American student experience.

Thank you, too, to community members and former teachers and coaches at Central High School, Willie Mahone, Vladimir Nazlymov, Arthur Rainwater, Arthur Benson, and Alvin Brooks for sharing your valuable insight and experience.

To my professors at the University of Missouri-Kansas City who have beautifully guided me through the dissertation process and have given me the knowledge and skill to do

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I have spent countless hours in local archives and want to recognize the efforts of archivists who have made this process smooth and enjoyable. Thank you to Jeremy Drouin, Lucinda Adams, and the staff of the Missouri Valley Special Collections, as well as Nancy Piepenbring and David Boutros at the State Historical Society of Missouri on the campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Thank you, as well, to Connie Mahone, Pam O'Neal, Barbara Johnson, and Joe Louis Mattox for reaching out to the Central High School community on my behalf and aiding my efforts in locating and contacting narrators.

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CHAPTER 1
STUDY AT A GLANCE: INTRODUCTION, SCOPE AND
METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

Kansas City is a typical Midwestern city. The summers are hot. The winters are cold, and the people are generally friendly. But veiled in its normalcy hides a dirty secret. Kansas City is deeply divided. With little crossover, to the east of Troost resides a majority-black community and to the west, a majority-white. On the surface, Kansas City is interesting for its dividing line, not Troost Avenue, but State Line Road. State Line is a clear marker, a street that runs north-south through metropolitan Kansas City and identifies Kansas Citians as either residents of Missouri or Kansas. Thus, history is still relevant in Kansas City, as one's identification as either a Missourian or Kansan actually means something. While the rivalry between the Bushwhackers of Missouri and the Jayhawkers of Kansas is no longer marred in blood, it definitely lives on. The onetime slave state and the Free State certainly have their differences, but the competition has been relegated to entertaining arguments about who has the better roads, superior shopping establishments, or most importantly, the most successful athletic team. The one exception, however, is the issue of schools.

As is common in most American cities, the residents of greater Kansas City take their education seriously. The Kansas side of the metropolitan area is home to the big three: Blue Valley School District, Olathe School District, and Shawnee Mission School District, three of the highest performing public school districts in the state and all of them located in

the surrounding Kansas City suburbs.¹ Conversely, Missourians can boast of three suburban districts of their own: Liberty School District, Park Hill School District, and Lee's Summit School District, each of which is at or above eighty percent white.² All of the aforementioned suburban districts are known for their academic success and affluent student body.

Absent from both of these lists are the two oldest districts on both sides of State Line Road, the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools and the Kansas City, Missouri School District.³ As the two primary urban districts in the greater Kansas City area, it is not surprising that the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools and Kansas City, Missouri School District serve mostly students of color. Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools' demographics reveal that thirty-six percent of students are black, forty-three percent are Hispanic, and only fourteen percent are white.⁴ Sixty-three percent of Kansas City, Missouri School District's students are black, twenty-seven percent are Hispanic, and just fewer than eight percent are white.⁵ Both districts have long struggled with academic performance, but the problems on the Missouri side are particularly dire. The Kansas City, Missouri School District is currently unaccredited, having lost accreditation less than a year ago in 2013, and enrollment has experienced a steady decline. In 2003, there were nearly 30,000 students in the district,

¹ Blue Valley School District (3% black), Olathe School District (7% black), and Shawnee Mission School District (12% black); Kansas State Department of Education, "Statistics," 2013, www.ksde.org.

² Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "District and School Information," 2013, www.dese.mo.gov.

³ Although the Kansas City, Missouri School District is currently called the Kansas City Public Schools, for consistency in this dissertation, it will be referred to in its more traditional form as the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

⁴ Kansas State Department of Education.

⁵ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

but by 2012 that number had dropped to roughly 15,000. The numbers are even more alarming when considering student enrollment hovered around 75,000 in the mid-1960s.⁶ Additionally, the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch has risen by ten percent in the last decade, reaching almost ninety percent in 2012. The dropout rate has seen a similar rise, increasing from just below four percent in 2003 to just above fourteen percent in 2012.⁷ The Kansas City, Missouri School District is at a critical juncture, but this did not happen suddenly. The struggles of the Kansas City, Missouri School District have resulted from a complex interplay of many variables that can be traced through an historical analysis. Of particular importance, however, is the subject of race, which has influenced the development of both Missouri and Kansas City. Race was a defining issue in the creation of Missouri; it was also central to the development of Kansas City. Race has continued to hold great significance, especially in education.

Scope and Methodology

This interdisciplinary dissertation, which merges the disciplines of education and the social sciences, is a history of an institution, Central High School, from its inception in 1867 until 1999, that serves as a lens through which to examine efforts of desegregation in Kansas City. In particular, this study examines desegregation at Kansas City's Central High School from the perspective of African American students in order to better understand how desegregation shaped their experiences. Scholarly histories of individual public schools are limited, especially histories that specifically utilize the experiences of African American students. While race and equality in the Kansas City, Missouri School District were the

⁶ Peter Morrison, *Forecasting Enrollments during Court-Ordered Desegregation* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1994).

⁷ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

centerpiece of books by Joshua Dunn and Peter Moran, neither approaches the issue from a student perspective.⁸

Indeed, the literature surrounding federal, state, and district level efforts toward desegregation in Kansas City and elsewhere around the country is relatively stout, but there are few studies that explore the lived experiences of students at their respective institutions. This study does just that—it emphasizes the experiences of students through oral history and illuminates the stories of former Central students. Thus, this dissertation provides fresh insight into understanding how desegregation efforts affected the lived experiences of African American students, a group that has largely been neglected throughout history.

This study will explore the history of Kansas City’s Central High School within the broader context of the Kansas City, Missouri School District, focusing in particular on district efforts toward desegregation. The magnet years represent a particularly intriguing epoch, a time when The Kansas City, Missouri School District was involved in a costly magnet remedy that transformed all of its high schools into magnet schools with specialized curricula. Central High School was at the forefront of the magnet plan. Referred to as the *Taj Mahal*, Central was rebuilt as the Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School in 1991, complete with a thirty-three million dollar state-of-the-art facility. The magnet plan was merely one of many attempts undertaken by the Kansas City, Missouri School District to integrate its schools, but it represents the most costly desegregation plan to date, amounting to roughly two billion dollars in expenditures. Central High School provides a particularly salient example of these efforts. As the oldest high school in Kansas

⁸ Joshua Dunn, *Complex Justice: The Case of Missouri v. Jenkins* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Peter W. Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2005).

City, Central has a rich and storied history. Having gone from all white in 1955 to nearly all black by 1962, there is arguably no school that exemplifies the relationship between race and education in Kansas City like that of Central High School. The year 1977 marked the beginning of the *Jenkins v. Missouri* case and two decades of litigation that transformed schools such as Kansas City's Central High School into magnet schools.

While narratives of black former students at Central High School will be interwoven throughout, emphasis will be placed on the magnet years, 1988-1999. Many of Kansas City's schools were transformed into magnet schools throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, but when the Supreme Court pulled funding from the Kansas City, Missouri School District in 1995, the magnet-themed school approach quickly lost favor. Thus, the Kansas City, Missouri School District began phasing out magnet schools and returning them to neighborhood schools in 1999. This study, then, provides a history of Kansas City's Central High School and details, specifically, the African American student's experience.

Oral history is essential to this study. Oral history represents a way of ascertaining a fuller, more accurate picture of the past by augmenting the information provided by traditional archival methods. Oral history fills in the gaps in documented history and is particularly useful in exploring the stories of underrepresented peoples, such as those silenced as a result of gender, class, race, or ethnicity.⁹ This is not to suggest that traditional archival methods are not important; indeed, they are, but oral history brings depth to the understanding of history by considering experience at the individual level. Tyson suggests that, unlike written history, in which the scholar reconstructs evidence developed in the past,

⁹ Mary Larson, "Research Design and Strategies," in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, eds. Thomas Charleton, Lois Meyers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007).

oral history is “a dynamic process that creates evidence about the past and allows undocumented perspectives to emerge, perhaps for the first time.”¹⁰ Oral history is about enriching historical understanding through the use of interview, which is what I have done with former African American students of Kansas City’s Central High School. As such, this study brings a slightly different perspective to the issue of school desegregation by illuminating the voices of students, an approach that has been underutilized in the Kansas City story but offers great value in better understanding how individuals of color were affected by desegregation. Approaching the issue of desegregation in Kansas City from such a perspective re-situates the focus from the macro level to the micro level and thus represents an opportunity to understand the experiences of individual students—in this case, former African American students at Central High School.

Oral history, however, represents only one lens, albeit a vital one. Whereas oral history interviews personalize an often impersonal historical understanding, I also utilized local archives to situate, most broadly, the history of race and schooling in Kansas City, Missouri, and more specifically, the history of Central High School within the story of desegregation in the Kansas City Public Schools. Two archives, in particular, were most useful: The Missouri Valley Special Collections housed in the Central Branch of the Kansas City Public Library contains a wide array of primary documents regarding the history of public education in Kansas City, and The State Historical Society of Missouri located on the campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City is home to the Arthur A. Benson II Papers.

¹⁰ Thomas Tyson, “Rendering the Unfamiliar Intelligible: Discovering the Human Side of Accounting’s Past through Oral History Interviews,” *The Accounting Historians Journal* 23, no. 2 (December 1996): 87-109.

Maps, photos, newspaper clippings, and district board meeting notes, as well as personal communications, such as letters and memos, are all housed in The Missouri Valley Special Collections. Additionally, the *Kansas City Star*, *Kansas City Times*, and *Kansas City Call* are available on microfilm. Specific to Central High School, historical yearbooks and newspapers, as well as a variety of miscellaneous documents are accessible. Archived Central High School yearbooks, the *Centralian*, are available from 1899 and continue through, with few missing issues, to 2000. Archived Central High School newspapers, the *Luminary*, are accessible from the late 1800s and continue through 1975, with only a handful of issues missing. I diligently went through each issue of the *Centralian* and the *Central Luminary*.

The Arthur A. Benson II Papers located at The State Historical Society of Missouri consists of over five hundred boxes of archived legal records: memos, letters, newspaper article clippings, secondary sources, and depositions regarding desegregation in Kansas City, Missouri. The collection is divided among ready reference materials and primary sources. The reference materials include summary information explaining the documents available in the primary sources section. The primary sources include the actual unedited materials used in the *Jenkins* case, including depositions and exhibits. The collection is mostly unprocessed, though there is a finding aide. The information included in the finding aide, however, is not detailed. Most of the boxes exist in the condition in which they were left by the trial team, with some boxes better organized than others. I identified roughly fifty boxes of relevance and went through each box.

Additionally, there are community members, former district employees, and legal counsel whose insight, expertise, and life experiences have enhanced the data collection.

Among those are the following: Alvin Brooks, longtime community activist and currently president of the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime located at Thirty-First and Prospect on Kansas City's Southeast side; Art Rainwater, former principal of Central Computers Unlimited Magnet and lead design strategist and task force leader for the computers magnet theme at Central; Arthur A. Benson II, lead attorney for the plaintiffs during the *Jenkins* case and former Kansas City, Missouri School District School Board member; Vladimir Nazlymov, former fencing coach at Central Computers Unlimited/Greek Magnet and now head fencing coach at Ohio State University; and Willie Mahone, former assistant principal at Central Computers Unlimited/Greek Magnet.

Unstructured oral history interviews were conducted with former students of Central High School and Central Computers Unlimited/Greek Magnet. All of those interviewed were black, as the intent of this dissertation is to illuminate the African American student experience. Interviews were conducted with students who attended Central High School between 1955 and 1982 in order to gain insight into the experiences of students in the decades following district efforts of desegregation in the immediate post-*Brown* period. These narrators included the following individuals: Gwendolyn Adams, class of 1958; Lyle Davis, Jr., class of 1958; Forestal Lawton, class of 1962; Loretta Stewart, class of 1963; Dr. J. Anthony Snorgrass, class of 1970; Arthur Jackson, class of 1974; Marion Halim, class of 1975; Lee Barnes, Jr., class of 1982; and Connie Wright, class of 1982. Oral history interviews were also conducted with eleven black former students of Central Computers Unlimited/Greek Magnet between 1988 and 1999. The eleven students were selected through snowball sampling techniques and were selected randomly based on my access and their willingness. The narrators were the following individuals: Crystal Shakur, class of

1989; Darryl Norton, class of 1990; Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway, class of 1992; Christopher Slaughter, class of 1993; Quincy Williams, class of 1993; Melanie Evans, class of 1993; Terrence Lasker, class of 1995; Monika Anderson, class of 1995; Jermaine Wilson, class of 1997; Michael Watson, Jr., class of 1999, and William Winston, class of 1999.

I acknowledge my white, male, middle-class privilege in this process and have continuously worked to ensure that my life experiences and privileged status are not an impediment to the interview process and data analysis. As such, I have had each narrator review his or her interview, and I have also employed the use of a “critical friend,” a person of color who has looked over my work to ensure that my particular worldview has not served as a barrier to illuminating the experiences of black students.

Utilizing oral history interviews and supporting the interviews with archival research provides great insight into how district level efforts of desegregation were experienced by African American students at a single institution and will add to the literature about school desegregation in Kansas City.

Research Questions

What were the experiences of African American Students at Central High School between 1988 and 1999?

What structures of academic and social support existed for African American students at Central during the identified years?

What were African American students’ perceptions of efforts to integrate Central during the magnet years?

How did the magnet theme affect the subsequent lives of the individuals interviewed?

Overview of Chapters

Nine chapters comprise this dissertation, including Chapter 1, Study at a Glance: Introduction, Scope and Methodology, and Research Questions and Chapter 9, Conclusion: Interpretations and Applications of the Research. Chapter 2, The Early Years: Race and Education in Kansas City, Missouri, 1821-1867 examines issues of race and education in Kansas City, Missouri, from Missouri's conception in 1821 to the founding of public education in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1867. Beginning with considering the role of slavery in pre-war Missouri, Chapter 1 provides insight into how contentious race relations in the antebellum period intersected with education. Chapter 3, The Growth of Public Schooling and Kansas City's Central High School, 1867-1942 explores the creation and growth of Kansas City, Missouri's, dual public school system. In particular, Chapter 3 details the development of the city's first high school, all-white Central High School. Chapter 4, From Segregation to Desegregation, 1942-1962 begins with a consideration of the societal changes that occurred during and after World War II, before moving into the *Brown v. Board of Education* case and the destruction of the dual system in Kansas City, Missouri. Chapter 5, Where's the Equality? The Resegregation of the Kansas City, Missouri School District, 1962-1968 looks into the successes of all-black Central High School in the early 1960s, and then explores the controversial desegregation plan implemented in Kansas City, Missouri. Additionally, Chapter 5 explains the middle school controversy and the growing frustration of local civil rights groups and the black community with the Kansas City, Missouri School District. It ends with considering the race riots of 1968. Chapter 6,

Desegregation Averted: The Ongoing Struggle for Equality, 1968-1977 begins with exploring the changing demographics of Kansas City's southeast side before specifically exploring how a negative public perception affected all-black Central High School. The chapter concludes by considering how federal oversight and the district's growing financial problems influenced efforts toward desegregation in Kansas City, Missouri. Chapter 7, A New Direction: From Metropolitan Plan to Magnet Remedy, 1977-1988 describes how suburban growth and white flight led to district efforts to implement a mandatory city-wide desegregation plan. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the transition from mandatory to voluntary desegregation and its implications for Central High School. Chapter 8, A New Era: The African American Student Experience at Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School, 1988-1999 utilized oral history to consider how Central's dual magnet theme affected the lives of eleven former black students.

CHAPTER 2
THE EARLY YEARS: RACE AND EDUCATION
IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, 1821-1867

The Origins of a Slave State

Organized in 1812, the territory of Missouri gained statehood in 1820 and was formally admitted into the Union by President James Monroe on August 10, 1821, as the twenty-fourth state. Missouri's path to statehood was not effortless, however, as the question of slavery loomed large.¹ In 1804, the Louisiana Territory, under the direction of Amos Stoddard, commandant of the Upper Louisiana district, was divided by an act of Congress into two: the Territory of Orleans and the District of Louisiana. Missouri was included in the District of Louisiana and came under the jurisdiction of the Territory of Indiana and General W. H. Harrison. Unhappy with the new arrangement, Missourians protested their subordination to Indiana and were granted separate territorial status in 1804.² In 1817, Missourians started asking for statehood. An 1818 bill permitted formation of a constitution and state government, though the Tallmadge Amendment blocked this attempt at statehood in 1819, stating the following:

The further introduction of slavery or involuntary servitude be prohibited, except for the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall be duly convicted; and that all

¹ Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972).

² R. I. Brigham, "Negro Education in Ante Bellum Missouri prior to 1861," *Journal of Negro History* 30, no. 4 (1945), 143-157.

children of slaves born within the said state, after the admission thereof into the union shall be free but may be held to service until the age of twenty-five years.³

The amendment proposed by James Tallmadge, Jr., a Northern opponent of slavery, was enough to stop Missouri's path to statehood, though a later amendment, the Thomas Amendment, temporarily calmed the Congressional storm on the question of slavery long enough to grant permission for the Missouri Constitutional Convention of 1820.⁴ The Thomas Amendment, introduced by Jesse B. Thomas of Illinois, called for and encouraged conciliation:

And be it further enacted, That, in all that territory ceded by France to the United States, under the name of Louisiana, which lies north of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude, excepting only such part thereof as is included within the limits of the State contemplated by this act, slavery and involuntary servitude, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall be and is hereby forever prohibited...⁵

Thus, with compromise affirmed and her constitution framed, on March 6, 1820, the people of Missouri were subsequently empowered to organize a government, which they did with deliberate speed. Missouri was admitted to the Union in 1821 as a slave state.⁶ Black slavery became a defining feature of Missouri's early years as a state, but the origins of slavery in Missouri can be traced back to the early eighteenth century.

While European interest in African slavery began in the fifteenth century, the use of African slaves became widespread in the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth

³ Norman Desmarais and James McGovern, *Missouri Compromise—The Tallmadge Amendment, February 13, 1819* (Toledo: Great Neck Publishing, 2009).

⁴ Brigham, "Negro Education in Ante Bellum Missouri prior to 1861."

⁵ Norman Desmarais and James McGovern, *Missouri Compromise—The Thomas Amendment, February 17, 1820* (Toledo: Great Neck Publishing, 2009).

⁶ McCandless, *A History of Missouri*.

centuries.⁷ In Missouri, the use of black slaves began in the eighteenth century when introduced by the French. Sir Philip Francois Renault was among the first to purchase bondspersons to work the lead mines in the southeastern part of the state.⁸ Renault, director of the Company of the West, reportedly stopped in San Domingo in 1719 and purchased five hundred slaves to work the mines and then proceeded to the upper Louisiana Territory.⁹ In essence, the French viewed black slaves as a solution to a severe labor shortage encountered throughout the New World. Mining for lead and silver was tough work, and the French saw in African slaves a solution, indeed a better solution than enslaving Native Americans, who posed some potential risk.¹⁰ Conversely, African slaves were thousands of miles from home, had little, if any, familiarity with the terrain, and because they were black, they were immediately noticeable across the New World.¹¹ By the mid-eighteenth century, with the founding of St. Genevieve as the first permanent white settlement in Missouri, black slaves had become a vital and widely accepted component of the French-American economy.¹²

Slavery was further strengthened in Missouri by the passage of the Ordinance of 1787, prohibiting slavery in the Northwest Territory and resulting in slaves and slave-owners seeking refuge in Missouri. With Spanish inheritance of the Louisiana Territory following the conclusion of the French and Indian War, in which France gifted the territory

⁷ Joe Trotter, *The African American Experience* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

⁸ Harriet Frazier, *Slavery and Crime in Missouri, 1773-1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2001).

⁹ Brigham, "Negro Education in Ante Bellum Missouri prior to 1861."

¹⁰ Gary Kremer and Antonio Holland, *Missouri's Black Heritage: Revised Edition* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Earl Collins and Eugene Snider, *Missouri: Midland State* (St. Louis: Webster Publishing, 1955).

to Spain as payment for Spanish losses, slavery grew even more in popularity.¹³ France would eventually take the Louisiana Territory back from Spain in the early nineteenth century before selling the territory to the United States with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. France's empire in the Western Hemisphere was eroding as the Haitian Revolution, which resulted in the establishment of an independent Haiti in 1804, had caused grave financial constraints on the French, who had been fighting the slave revolt since 1791. As a result, the French were willing to sell the Louisiana Territory to the Americans at a heavily discounted price. Additionally, the Haitian revolution also seemed to cause Southern slaveholders to grow increasingly headstrong in their opposition to the abolition of slavery. The emancipation of slaves in America, it was reasoned, would result in race wars of the magnitude that occurred in Haiti.¹⁴

With the French sale of all of the Louisiana Territory, the population in the American-acquired territory grew rapidly. In Missouri alone, the population increased by over one hundred percent between 1803 and 1810, with the number of blacks growing from 1,320 in 1803 to 3,618 in 1810.¹⁵ Burke explains that Americans from the Upper South poured into the Missouri Territory just following the War of 1812 to enjoy the "fertile and extensive bottomlands of the Missouri River and its tributaries and the adjacent undulating prairie lands."¹⁶ These natural attractions brought to Missouri many Southern transplants, who envisioned greater economic and political opportunity than what they had experienced

¹³ Kremer and Holland, *Missouri's Black Heritage*.

¹⁴ Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Diane M. Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Houses, 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

in the South. Thus, the period just following statehood to just before the outbreak of the Civil War (1821-1860), distinguishes a time when Missouri experienced an extraordinary influx of settlers from Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia.¹⁷ These uprooted white Southerners were not the wealthy plantation owners of the Deep South. Rather, many Missouri migrants came from the backcountry areas of the Upper South and sought Missouri for its proximity and similarities to their home state, as well as for the availability of cheap land.¹⁸ These transplants created a society and culture in Missouri that was deeply influenced by their experiences in the South, one that was dependent upon the use of black slave labor.

Slavery in Missouri was characterized by small-slaveholding and not the large, plantation-style slavery of the Deep South, which led some to allege that Missouri slaves were happy and docile.¹⁹ The one exception to this was Little Dixie, an area that spanned seventeen counties in the north central part of Missouri and reflected the culture and economy of the Deep South, including the plantation system. Yet in all other parts of Missouri, slavery differed significantly from that of the southern plantation.²⁰ Missouri was a region of small farms, small slave holdings, and relatively few slaves.²¹ Seventy percent of Missouri's slaveholders owned fewer than five slaves, and the slaves were responsible for general fieldwork or house labor. Slaves typically helped clear land, worked as deck and

¹⁷ Russel Gerlach, *Settlement Patterns in Missouri: A Study of Population Origins* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*.

¹⁹ Kremer and Holland, *Missouri's Black Heritage*.

²⁰ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*.

²¹ Harrison Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri, 1804-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1914).

cabin boys on riverboats, labored in lead mines, and worked about towns and cities. Slaves in Missouri were indeed jacks-of-all trades.²² In some cases, it was not uncommon for the owner and his family to work alongside the slaves in the field.²³ As such, Missouri's small slaveholdings made for a so-called domestic form of slavery, whereby the work routines mirrored life on the farm and not on the plantation. Slaves and owners on most Missouri farms resided in close quarters, which further perpetuated the image of the Missouri slave-owner as paternalistic.²⁴ But as Burke asserts, "[i]n Missouri, as elsewhere, slavery is slavery."²⁵ In fact, the small slaveholdings of Missouri often resulted in harsher treatment than that experienced by slaves on plantations, in that the intimate living and working conditions between slave and owner in Missouri often meant violent, emotionally-charged interactions between the two.

Harriet Frazier, in her book, *Slavery and Crime in Missouri, 1773-1865*, documents incidents of heinous crimes committed against black slaves in Missouri during what she terms a "slavocracy," a time characterized as "rule by slave owners."²⁶ In reality, the circumstances of small-scale slavery existed on a continuum of treatment.²⁷ Whether in the Deep South or Upper South, slavery was a system of labor exploitation and social and racial control in which the slave owner held ultimate power over the slave.

²² Lorenzo Greene, Antonio Holland, and Gary Kremer, *The Role of the Negro in Missouri History, 1790-1970* (St. Louis: Von Hoffman Press, 1973).

²³ William E. Parrish, Charles T. Jones, Jr., and Lawrence O. Christensen, *Missouri: The Heart of the Nation* (Wheeling, WV: Harlan Davidson, 2012).

²⁴ Kremer and Holland, *Missouri's Black Heritage*.

²⁵ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 143.

²⁶ Frazier, *Slavery and Crime in Missouri*, 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

Not all black Missourians were slaves. A small percentage of the African American population was free. In 1860, Missouri had 3,572 free blacks compared to 114,931 slaves.²⁸ Most free blacks lived in cities, with over half living in St. Louis.²⁹ But life for a free black resident in antebellum Missouri was unquestionably far from comfortable. White Missourians did not look upon free blacks favorably, often viewing them as troublemakers who set a bad example for their slaves as representatives of freedom for enslaved black Missourians. As such, free blacks were confronted with many and varied restrictions and found their civil rights greatly limited: They could not testify against whites in court, had no rights of habeas corpus, could not hold public meetings unless in the presence of at least one white person, could not have any kind of weapon or ammunition without special permission, and did not have the right to vote or hold public office.³⁰ Indeed, a systematic suppression of free blacks kept them in their place.

Widespread paranoia among whites with regard to both free and enslaved blacks existed, which consisted of the fear that an uprising like the one that occurred in Haiti might occur at any moment. Such anxiety led white Missourians to enact a law in 1817 that made it illegal for blacks to assemble. Moreover, in 1835 the General Assembly cited its constitutional authority to prevent “free Negroes” and “mulattoes” from coming to and settling in Missouri, thus sanctioning a law that required free blacks to obtain a license from the county court by posting a bond just in case the resident became a menace to society.³¹

²⁸ Parrish, Jones, Jr., and Christensen, *Missouri: The Heart of the Nation*.

²⁹ Greene, Holland, and Kremer, *The Role of the Negro in Missouri History*.

³⁰ Parrish, Jones, Jr., and Christensen, *Missouri: The Heart of the Nation*.

³¹ Greene, Holland, and Kremer, *The Role of the Negro in Missouri History*.

Additionally, slave patrols were utilized to prevent riots and unlawful assemblies by slaves; in practice, they were vigilante committees that terrorized blacks.

Despite all of the obstacles, some free blacks found success in Missouri. There were river stewards, engineers, firefighters, servants, barbers, ministers, and even property-owners. Free blacks were particularly concerned with the spiritual and educational welfare of their community. As Trotter, Jr. notes, “[a]s African Americans confronted racial hostility in the antebellum city, they increased their institution-building activities.”³² Not surprisingly, whites resisted both independent black churches and black schools and subsequently used their institutional influence and power to deny such opportunities. Education for blacks prior to the Civil War was a rarity all over the country, but in antebellum Missouri, in particular, education for blacks was rife with obstacles.

African American Schooling in Antebellum Missouri

In 1915, Carter Woodson, the so-called “father of black history” published *A History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War*, a seminal piece on the origins of African American education in the United States. In it he writes the following:

Brought from the African wilds to constitute the laboring class of a pioneering society in the new world, the heathen slaves had to be trained to meet the needs of their new environment ... The questions, however, as to exactly what kind of training these Negroes should have, and how far it should go, were to the white race then as much a matter of perplexity as they are now.³³

³² Trotter, *The African American Experience*, 221.

³³ Carter A. Woodson, *A History of the Education of the Colored People of the United States from the Beginning of Slavery to the Civil War* (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1915), 1.

According to Woodson, by 1835, Southern slaveholders had determined that “[t]he more you cultivate the minds of slaves, the more unserviceable you make them.”³⁴ As the plantation system grew in the Deep South, slaveholders decided that education would unfit slaves for a life of servitude, and the fear that knowledge would incite insurrection among African slaves was growing more widespread.³⁵ Yet despite the collective effort to prevent the education of slaves during the antebellum period, both free and enslaved blacks recognized the importance of education and found ways to educate themselves. The struggle for schooling during enslavement, according to David Freedman, offers insight into the values and beliefs of black communities prior to 1861.³⁶ Literacy was equated with freedom, both political and economic, and represents the value that African American communities placed on education in light of threats and impending punishment.³⁷

The majority of Missouri slaves were not educated, as Missouri slaveholders, like those in the Deep South, aimed to keep their slaves in ignorance so as not to rouse an uprising:³⁸

Down to 1860, the farm house [sic], the rural neighborhood, and the rural church were by all means the most important educational forces in the lives of most Americans. They were almost the only educational forces in the lives of black Americans...The educated Negro was a rarity. The more usual sight was the entirely untutored and ignorant Negro or the Negro who had used his native ability to take advantage of the only learning available to him, the learning of the plantation, the

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ David Freedman, “African American Schooling in the South prior to 1861,” *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 1 (1999): 1-47.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Donnie Bellamy, “The Education of Blacks in Missouri prior to 1861,” *The Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (1974): 143-157.

completely extra-curricular, omnipresent education that is within arm's length of a man awake to life around him."³⁹

Even so, some black Missourians did receive an education and substantial degree of literacy. In April of 1818, prior to statehood, John Mason Peck, a white Baptist Missionary, opened a Sunday school for the instruction of black children and adults. The school supposedly began with an enrollment of fourteen but quickly grew to one hundred, most of them slaves who had permission from their masters to enroll. Peck's school served as the nucleus for the creation of the black Baptist church in St. Louis that was organized around 1827.⁴⁰ Peck was a powerful advocate for the education of blacks and whites, which he regarded as equipment for the tasks of life.⁴¹ White churches were largely responsible for efforts to educate black Missourians during the antebellum period, especially the Catholic Church. Efforts among Missouri Catholics to educate blacks began in the 1830s, but in 1847 the General Assembly's enactment of the anti-education bill made it illegal to educate blacks in Missouri. This certainly hampered efforts to educate free and enslaved blacks, but the law's threat of a fine or possible imprisonment did not convince everyone to abandon their efforts to educate Missouri's African American population, especially the black churches.

Former slave and Missourian, Reverend John Berry Meachum, minister of the first African American Baptist Church in Missouri, was a vocal proponent of education for blacks.⁴² Meachum's St. Louis church housed Peck's school in the basement, as the church

³⁹ C. A. Arrowood, "The Education of American Plantation Slaves," *School and Society* 5, no. 3 (1941): 377-378.

⁴⁰ Brigham, "Negro Education in Ante Bellum Missouri," 405-420.

⁴¹ Rufus Babcock, ed., *Forty Years of Pioneer Life: Memoir of John Mason Peck* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1965).

⁴² John Meachum, *An Address to All of the Colored Citizens of the United States* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1846).

was infused with a deep spirit of education. It was through unity that Meachum envisioned the growth of education for African Americans:

When this union of sentiment, feeling, and affection is formed and established among us, we can by the organization of societies, the erection of schools and establishment of colleges, institutions and seminaries of learning, soon arrive to the same scale of being which those considered our superiors have attained ... Shall we not, I then ask, attain this end—ought we not? Surely none will say, Nay. Then let us be united.⁴³

By 1860, there were five black churches in St. Louis that housed educational programs, despite the anti-education bill, enacted for the purpose of eliminating such institutions. These churches would disguise their schools as Sunday Schools and teach both free and enslaved blacks.⁴⁴ The church became the center of the black community in Missouri, as it did elsewhere. It was more than a place of worship; the church was a place to go without suffering and humiliation. Beyond education, the church provided social cohesion and sponsored festivals, protest meetings, and conventions.⁴⁵

Those willing to teach African Americans in the mid-nineteenth century, both black and white, were confronted with the possibility of imprisonment or fine if caught. Meachum's basement school was closed by law enforcement and resulted in the arrest of one of its white teachers, which was not an uncommon occurrence. But Meachum's efforts were not dampened.⁴⁶ Knowing that legally there was no jurisdiction over the Mississippi River waters, Meachum cleverly built a schoolhouse aboard a steamboat in order to sidestep

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴ Bellamy, "The Education of Blacks in Missouri prior to 1861."

⁴⁵ Greene, Holland, and Kremer, *The Role of the Negro in Missouri History*.

⁴⁶ Helen Baldwin, et al., *Heritage of St. Louis* (St. Louis: St. Louis Public Schools, 1964).

the law.⁴⁷ Indeed, Missouri's black population, both free and slave, did share in the educational experience of antebellum Missouri, though only in a limited capacity. Education of African Americans during this time required a certain courage and commitment, as well as ingenuity that limited the scope and availability of educational opportunities for black Missourians. Additionally, the mindset of Southern whites, the notion that educating African Americans was dangerous, ensured that education for blacks in antebellum Missouri and beyond remained narrow. However, civil war and subsequent emancipation would bring, at the least, the prospect of greater educational opportunity for Missouri's African Americans.

A City Developed

Missouri incorporated the City of Kansas on March 28, 1853, more than thirty years after the state joined the union.⁴⁸ With a population of roughly 2,500 in the 1820s, the small fur-trading post was well behind St. Louis, which could boast of roughly 4,000 residents and served as a booming commercial center for Missourians in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The area that comprises present-day Kansas City was viewed by many in the early nineteenth century as simply an unremarkable part of the *Great American Desert*, hostile and uninhabitable. In 1819, Stephen H. Long was commissioned by the United States Army to assess the value of the land just west of the Missouri river. His official report declared the following: "In regard to the extensive section of the country, we do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation and, of course, uninhabitable by a

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ George Green, *A Condensed History of the Kansas City Area, Its Mayors and VIPs* (Kansas City, MO: Lowell Press, 1968).

⁴⁹ Diane M. Burke and John Herron, *Kansas City, America's Crossroads: Essays from the Missouri Historical Review, 1906-2006* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence.”⁵⁰ With certainty that the territory was of little value, the United States Government was even content to remove the American Indians to the Kansas City area. It was not until a Frenchman, Francois Chouteau [whose family established St. Louis in 1764] squatted on the land and established a fur trading post in 1821 that white Europeans saw a reason to settle in the area.⁵¹ Chouteau and several dozen French families formed the beginning of a first white settlement, *Kawsmouth*, a successful central trading post that resulted in the area’s first church, Chouteau’s Church. The area would remain mostly French until American settlers started arriving in 1828. Americans came en masse, including Joseph Smith and John Calvin McCoy, after a land office was opened following the Osage tribe ceding rights to their land.⁵²

In the early 1830s, Joseph Smith and the Mormons envisioned a city located in the center of the continent called Zion. They began to buy land in Jackson County around 1832 and to arrive shortly thereafter, even establishing the first school in Jackson County near Troost Lake.⁵³ Yet not long after their arrival, angry locals forced them out. They fled across the Missouri River and eventually eastward before turning west and settling in Salt Lake City.

Isaac McCoy, John Calvin McCoy’s Baptist missionary father, set up a mission in the northernmost portion of what is today Johnson County and resettled there with his

⁵⁰ Henry C. Haskell, Jr. and Richard B. Fowler, *City of the Future: A Narrative History of Kansas City, 1850-1950* (Kansas City, MO: Frank Glenn Publishing, 1950).

⁵¹ Rick Montgomery and Shirl Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story* (Kansas City, MO: Kansas City Star Books, 1999).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Theodore A. Brown and Lyle W. Dorsett, *A History of Kansas City, Missouri* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1978); Haskell and Fowler, *City of the Future*.

family.⁵⁴ Interested in profiting from westward trade, John Calvin McCoy saw an opportunity in the area that the French and Mormons left behind and in 1833 opened a store along a road that eventually led to Santa Fe. He called it West Port.⁵⁵ By 1845, Westport Landing was indeed connected with the Santa Fe Trail and booming with blacksmith shops, wagon factories, and supply houses of all kinds⁵⁶ and by 1857 was home to a permanent population of two thousand.⁵⁷ John C. McCoy would later be among the historic fourteen who in 1838 purchased plots of land for just over four thousand dollars, land that would become the Town of Kansas, a municipality in 1850, and a city in 1853.⁵⁸

The City of Kansas, which was shortened by nearly everyone to Kansas City soon after its inception and referenced henceforth as such, was home to fewer than five hundred residents in 1855, but by 1857 that number had grown to over three thousand and by 1859 had reached more than seven thousand.⁵⁹ Much of the growth can be attributed to the opening of Kansas Territory in 1854 and the hope of a transcontinental railroad linking cities such as St. Louis and Kansas City to the West. But Kansas City's growth at the end of the 1850s was severely hampered by the financial panic of 1857, as well as by the growing hostility between Kansans and Missourians. Not surprisingly, the newly incorporated Kansas City was swept into the divisiveness of the prewar period and the issue of slavery.

⁵⁴ James Shortridge, *Kansas City and How it Grew, 1822-2011* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012).

⁵⁵ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story*.

⁵⁶ Haskell, Jr. and Fowler, *City of the Future*.

⁵⁷ Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*.

⁵⁸ Brown and Dorsett, *A History of Kansas City, Missouri*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Soon after its formation, Kansas City found itself in the center of the slavery dispute. With the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, literally boatloads of anti-slavery Northerners and pro-slavery Southerners came pouring into the region.⁶⁰ Most Kansas Citians believed they had a right to own slaves, though slavery in Kansas City mirrored that of the state; it was small in scale and largely consisted of domestics and helpers. By 1860, Jackson County held 3,944 slaves, though the size of the slave population never reached that of St. Louis.⁶¹ Beginning in 1855, Bushwhackers and Jayhawkers terrorized residents of Kansas City. As a result, newspapers were suspended, business houses closed, and the population decreased by nearly half, as many citizens left the city for quieter surroundings.⁶² Even trade was diverted from Kansas City and instead was sent through Leavenworth. While the Battle of Westport ended the Confederate threat in the West, it would not be until well after the war that Kansas City would experience a revival. It came in the form of a steam train.

Dirty, ugly, and smelly, Kansas City in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War looked as though it would barely survive. Leavenworth and St. Joseph were both more populated than Kansas City in the late 1860s, and Atchison looked to surpass it as well. “Kansas City,” it was written during that time in the *Western Journal of Commerce*, “is by the laws of God and physical geography the great commercial depot of the plains...and nothing but a disruption of nature can stay her destiny.”⁶³ Such optimism gave way to reality in 1869 when the Hannibal Bridge opened, which crossed the Missouri River and allowed

⁶⁰ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story*.

⁶¹ Charles Coulter, “*Take Up The Black Man’s Burden*”: *Kansas City’s African American Communities 1865-1939* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

⁶² Theo Case, *History of Kansas City Missouri* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason and Company, 1888).

⁶³ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story*, 68.

the train great access to the West. The Hannibal Bridge was the gateway between the Northeast and the Southwest.⁶⁴ As a result, Kansas City's population boomed as investors arrived en masse, and the period between 1869 and 1890 was one of tremendous growth. In 1865, Kansas City's population totaled 4,000, and in 1870, it reached 32,000.⁶⁵ By 1880, Kansas City, Missouri, was the nation's twenty-fourth largest city with a population of 132,716, and if Kansas-side residents were added to the overall population, Kansas City would have ranked as the nation's eighteenth largest city.⁶⁶ Similarly, Kansas City's black population increased from 190 in 1860 to 3,770 in 1870—by 1880 it reached 8,000, nearly ten percent of the total population.⁶⁷ Clearly, the post-war period signified new beginnings for both Missouri and Kansas City, including the creation of a formal system of public education.

Missouri's Dual School System

Prior to 1865, the state of Missouri had seen fit to prohibit the education of the slave. Although an educated slave was potentially more efficient, it was reasoned by the white slave-owning class that an educated slave was also more dangerous. Training and education might aid in revolt. The Emancipation Act of 1865, passed on Tuesday, January 11, 1865, abolished slavery and included the following language: "hereafter in this State there shall be neither slavery or involuntary servitude, except in punishment of crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted; and all persons held to service or labor as slaves, are hereby

⁶⁴ Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*.

⁶⁵ Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story*.

⁶⁶ Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*.

⁶⁷ Coulter, "Take Up The Black Man's Burden."

‘declared free.’”⁶⁸ With the declaration of freedom came a new state constitution, as well, which was ratified the same year, 1865, and provided for the establishment and maintenance of free public schools for all persons in the state between the ages of five and twenty-one.⁶⁹ As stated in Article IX of the Emancipation Act of 1865, “all funds for the support of the public schools should be appropriated in proportion to the number of children without regard to color.” Yet the rule of law was in advance of the people, as at the beginning of this period, popular opinion regarding free public schools in general and “Negro schools” in particular, was not favorable.⁷⁰ As such, public schooling in Missouri was slow to gain popularity, which can be seen in Lucien Carr’s unpleasant characterization of the early public school in Missouri:

Perhaps owing also in some degree to the sparseness of population and to a feeling of prejudice which still lingered in certain quarters against the use of schools that were wrongly called ‘free’ the cause of public education was anything but a flourishing condition. In some portions of the State, especially in the remote and thinly populated districts, schoolhouses were necessarily few and far apart; and in those regions where they were more common they were often nothing more than log huts, unplastered and unceiled, with chimneys constructed of sticks, mud, and straw, and without school furniture, unless long, backless benches, made of inverted puncheons, and wide planks fastened to walls for writing desks, can be called furniture. Rude and unsuitable as these buildings would now be considered, they were all that could then be afforded, and not unfrequently [sic], it is to be feared, they were in keeping with the qualifications of the teachers and the elementary character of the instruction given.... Indeed when regarded from this point of view, it must be confessed that Missouri, despite the positive injunctions of her constitution to the contrary, had done but a little to forward the cause of popular education.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Nathan Parker, *Missouri as It Is in 1867: An Illustrated Historical Gazetteer of Missouri* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1867), 424.

⁶⁹ Henry S. Williams, “The Development of the Negro Public School System in Missouri,” *The Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 2 (1920): 137-165.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Lucien Carr, *Missouri: A Bone of Contention* (New York: Houghton & Mifflin, 1888), 237-238.

There is no doubt that Missourians were uncertain of the new system of public schooling that had been established, in part a result of the old paupers' schools reserved for the poor, but they also remained skeptical, if not fearful, of providing an education to black children.

Ultimately, the legislature made it the duty of the school boards in each respective township in Missouri to establish one or more separate schools for African American youth, provided the number of black children exceeded twenty, which was changed in 1869 to fifteen and in 1929 to eight.⁷²

The Township Boards of Education in this State in their respective townships, and the several other Boards of Education, and the trustees and directors or other officers having authority in the premises in each city or incorporated village, shall be, and they are hereby, authorized and required to establish within their respective jurisdictions one or more separate schools for colored children, when the whole number, by enumeration, exceeds twenty.⁷³

As part of the new law, it was stated that if the monthly average attendance dropped below twelve—changed in 1869 to ten and in 1893 to eight—for any given month, the school could face closure for a period of up to six months.⁷⁴ Resistance to educating African Americans followed, and many communities found ways around the law, despite J. Milton Turner's report on the condition of black education in 1869, which suggested that the general disposition of the community in Missouri was favorable to the education of black children when compared to other former slave-holding states.⁷⁵ Turner spent seven months travelling about and covered an estimated eight to ten thousand miles on his journey. By

⁷² Sherman W. Savage, "The Legal Provisions for Negro Schools in Missouri from 1865-1890," *The Journal of Negro History* 16, no. 3 (1931): 309-321.

⁷³ Twenty-Fourth General Assembly, Section 20, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

⁷⁴ Williams, "The Development of the Negro Public School System in Missouri."

⁷⁵ Lawrence O. Christensen, "Schools for Blacks: J. Milton Turner in Reconstruction of Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 36, no. 2 (1982): 121-135.

1870, the Commissioner of Education reported that Missouri had more schools for black children than any other former slave state. Indeed, Missouri did establish schools for black children at a faster rate than most of the states in the Deep South. Yet the reality of public schooling in Missouri for black children was not good. In 1872 it was estimated that there were over 37,000 black children of school age in Missouri; of those, roughly 4,500 were attending school.⁷⁶ The discouraging number of black students in attendance in Missouri public schools was a result, in large part, of a failure in enumeration and an unwillingness among enumerators to accurately count the number of black school-aged children, thus depriving large numbers of black children of education. Such was the case in Missouri's Pettis County, where the enumerator falsified the number of black school-aged pupils, cutting the number in half from over twenty to ten so as to ensure that the board would not have to provide a separate school for the black children of the county.⁷⁷ Eventually, the Pettis situation came before the State Court of Appeals, which ruled that the enumeration had indeed been falsified, but many instances of a similar nature went on without recourse.

In Article IX, Section 2 of the Missouri State Constitution of 1865, it was stated that separate schools “may” be established in Missouri: “Separate schools may be established for students of African descent. All funds provided for the support of public schools shall be appropriated in proportion of children without regard to color.”⁷⁸ Thus the original law left open the possibility that white and black children “may” attend the same school. In 1870 the State Superintendent in the General Assembly, in referencing a particular situation in which

⁷⁶ Savage, “The Legal Provisions for Negro Schools in Missouri.”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Missouri State Constitution, Article IX, Section 2, 12, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

a separate school did not exist in a remote county of Missouri, stated that “the principle of admission to any public school be recognized according to the first article of the Constitution,” thereby leaving “the adjustment of the principle to the majority of the people.”⁷⁹ Just three years later, in the Twenty-Seventh General Assembly, 1873, the State Superintendent said the following:

One of the present insuperable difficulties attends all attempts to develop the colored children of the State. About half of them are so widely scattered that it is impossible to collect them in sufficient number to warrant the expense of a school. The colored people themselves are forcing a question upon us which sooner or later must be faced: that is, whether the two or three little dark faces isolated in any subdistrict may slip into some corner of the white school. This question has in several instances been brought to me for decision... The official opinion I have given is, that the law contemplates separate schools, and whether colored children shall be admitted to white school is a question which confronts prejudice, and appeals to benevolence more than to law. I commend this subject to the calm and reflective sense of the people.⁸⁰

The issue was soon to become a matter of law. The sentiment of the state had transformed by 1875, and so too had the governing body. In 1874 the Democratic Party gained control of the state legislature and almost immediately called a constitutional convention.⁸¹

Consequently, the language of the state constitution regarding the establishment of separate black schools was changed from “may” to “shall,” a seemingly minor adjustment but with major implications.

Article XI, Section 3 of the Missouri State Constitution of 1875 reads, “Separate free public schools shall be established for the education of children of African descent.”⁸² It

⁷⁹ Twenty-Fifth General Assembly (1870), 37.

⁸⁰ Twenty-Seventh General Assembly (1873), 45.

⁸¹ Williams, “The Development of the Negro Public School System in Missouri.”

⁸² Missouri State Constitution of 1875, Article XI, Section 3, 54, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

appears that the harsher language implicit in the word “shall” as opposed to “may” was the white response to a rural population of black pupils who were being deprived entirely of an education, not least a separate education. Black rural parents began to question why their children, too few in number to necessitate a separate school in the state of Missouri, could not enter the white schools. After all, prior to 1875, constitutional law did not explicitly forbid a black pupil from enrolling in a white school. As a result, some rural black children did enter white schools, but such a tactic was short-lived as legal justification for doing so was removed with Article XI, Section 3.

With the new law, the office of the County Superintendent was abolished and each district became independent. Moreover, it became the State Superintendent’s duty to ensure separate schools statewide, and school officials who refused to comply could be fined:

The new law, like the old, is very stringent in the requirement of school directors to establish colored schools where in any district the number of children exceeds fifteen, or where the whole enumeration in the township reaches that number ... For failure to provide suitable accommodations for the colored children, school directors may be subjected to a fine ... in case of such failure, the law gives the State Superintendent the full power of local boards to levy tax, build school houses and perform any other duty necessary.⁸³

Despite threat of a fine, in 1876 schools for African American children, “in many places,” had not been established, causing complaints of ignorance of the law and willful disobedience regarding education of black pupils.⁸⁴ The greatest difficulty was faced in the rural areas of the state, locations that the State Superintendent commented in 1874 were “not favored with modern conveniences for the speedy transmission of news, and where it is

⁸³ Twenty-Eighth General Assembly (1875), XI, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

⁸⁴ Williams, “The Development of the Negro Public School System in Missouri,” 142.

humorously said the people are still voting for General Jackson.”⁸⁵ Hardly a humorous situation, many rural black students well into the twentieth century were attending inadequate one-room schools.⁸⁶

By 1889 it was unlawful in the public schools of Missouri for “any colored child to attend a white school or any white child to attend a colored school.”⁸⁷ Thus, after 1889 there was a law in place making it a crime for black and white children to attend the same school, and the mandate was most certainly enforced by school officials. One such example is the case of Unionville, a rural area in the north central part of Missouri. In 1910, Attorney General Major was informed that some of the local black children were being permitted to attend the white public school. Upon hearing the news, Attorney General Major directed the County Superintendent to revoke the license of any teacher who permitted the practice of teaching both black and white children in the same school and ordered the Superintendent of Unionville Schools to immediately refuse admittance to black children.⁸⁸ The black rural population of Missouri continued to face difficulties in school access well into the twentieth century, despite a law passed in 1907 allowing for a consolidated school in areas with less than twenty-five black children and a 1909 law that made it possible for a black child to attend any black school in the county at the home-district’s expense.⁸⁹ Despite alleged

⁸⁵ Superintendent to the Public Schools, of the State of Missouri to the Adjourned Twenty-Seventh General Assembly (1874), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

⁸⁶ Seventy-Fifth Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, of the State of Missouri (1924), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 304.

⁸⁷ Law of 1889, Revised Statutes (1889), 1861, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

⁸⁸ *Kansas City Star*, January 23, 1910, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

⁸⁹Forty-Third General Assembly (1907); Forty-Fifth General Assembly (1909), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 304.

efforts to improve the rural school experience for black children in Missouri at the turn of the century, the quality of education was undeniably bad—so bad, in fact, the State Superintendent addressed the matter in the Sixty-fifth General Assembly:

It should be reasonably apparent now that the state of Missouri has entered into a full participation with its rural districts to meet some of their needs, and that these serious problems will be faced fairly and solved jointly ... A considerable portion of the state has a laboring population eminently fitted to the task by nature and training, happy in their surroundings and easily contented when wisely dealt with. These people are negroes and most people are glad to have their help in working their farms ... In many places their just needs are met, but some shortsighted people are driving these people to towns in order to educate their children. Their conditions in the towns is often deplored but no one can blame them for a desire to attend to their children's needs. A wiser policy in providing schools and teachers for them would have much to do in keeping them on the farms where they are happy and useful.⁹⁰

While the State Superintendent's reasoning was obviously flawed—African Americans were not treated well in rural Missouri nor were they “happy” to be there—he was right in the fact that black Missourians were leaving the rural areas for the cities in the late 19th century, many of them travelling to Kansas City seeking greater opportunity.

Black Enclaves and Growth of Kansas City's African American Population

Kansas City was, by most accounts, an unattractive town well into the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, at least until the City Beautiful Movement was completed in 1915. But as late as 1908, Henry Holt had described Kansas City as busy, smoky, and an unsuitable place in which to live.⁹¹ An intricate system of over two thousand park acres and twenty-six miles of boulevards, which was the most elegant demonstration of City Beautiful design in the country at the time, transformed the unsightly city but also

⁹⁰ Sixty-Fifth Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools, of the State of Missouri (1914), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 304.

⁹¹ Henry Holt, “A Foreign Tour at Home.” *Putnam's Monthly and the Reader* 3 (1908): 154-161.

began to reconfigure black residential patterns.⁹² Not surprisingly, only some enjoyed the beautification of Kansas City, as the unskilled laborers, many of whom were African American, resided in areas that remained dirty, ugly, and unsanitary, despite efforts to improve the aesthetic beauty of the city. In fact, opportunities for African Americans to escape areas of high poverty or so-called slums or racial enclaves actually decreased in the early twentieth century as lines of segregation hardened.

The African American population in Kansas City grew from just shy of two hundred individuals in 1860 to nearly fourteen thousand by 1890, and between 1880 and 1890, in particular, the black population grew by almost seventy percent.⁹³ The overall population growth of Kansas City during the housing boom of the 1880s was impressive, expanding from just fewer than fifty-six thousand residents in 1880 to over one hundred and thirty thousand residents in 1890.⁹⁴ Kansas City experienced rapid expansion of office buildings and houses, roughly four thousand per year.⁹⁵ In the late nineteenth century, in the absence of zoning laws, building codes, city planning, and subdivision and building regulations, the neighborhoods of Kansas City were race- and class-mixed, with cheap tenements erected next to mansions.⁹⁶ While the rich were not keen on the arrangement, in many instances the wealthy viewed it as necessary. After all, it was important for servants to live in proximity to

⁹² Sherry L. Schirmer, *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002); Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*.

⁹³ Kevin Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822-2011*.

⁹⁶ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

their employers' estates.⁹⁷ Despite the relatively even distribution of the black population across Kansas City neighborhood wards, several enclaves of black settlement did emerge near the turn of the century.

As many blacks left rural Missouri and settled in Kansas City, many of them ended up in Hell's Half Acre, Church Hill, Belvidere Hollow, or Vine Street Corridor, all of which were home to noticeable concentrations of the black population. Evidenced by its name, life in Hell's Half Acre, located in the West Bottoms, was unforgiving. Thirty-three percent of the population was black, and nearly all were poor and longed to escape.⁹⁸ Church Hill was the cultural core of Kansas City's black community in the 1880s and was home to nearly four hundred black residents, fifteen percent of the enclave's population.⁹⁹ Church Hill was east of downtown and bounded by Eighth and Twelfth Streets, Holmes and Troost and named for two prestigious black churches in the area, Allen Chapel A.M.E. and Second Baptist.¹⁰⁰ Church Hill was also home to Lincoln School, which was established at Eleventh and Campbell in 1869.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Church Hill was a step up from Hell's Half Acre and was home to a considerable number of domestics who worked in the adjacent mansions of McGee's Addition. Belvidere Hollows, or simply The Hollows, developed northeast of Church Hill and was also a mixed community with African Americans comprising thirty-eight percent of the 4,531 residents.¹⁰² As was the case with Hell's Half Acre and Church

⁹⁷ Schirmer, *A City Divided*.

⁹⁸ Ibid; Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

⁹⁹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*; Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*.

¹⁰⁰ Schirmer, *A City Divided*; Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*.

¹⁰¹ Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*.

¹⁰² Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

Hill, the majority of Belvidere Hollows' black occupants were semi-skilled or unskilled laborers.

Vine Street Corridor or Lincoln-Coles District, located east of Church Hill and south of Belvidere Hollow, in contrast to the other enclaves, afforded its residents, including black residents, more spacious homes in the aftermath of the housing collapse in the 1890s.¹⁰³

What was true of all of the aforementioned enclaves, and all housing and residential patterns in general, at least in the late nineteenth century Kansas City, was an absence of residential segregation. Blacks were not separate from whites in housing, though the same cannot be said of schooling. A firm dual system began in Kansas City with the creation of its first public schools in 1867.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI'S, DUAL SYSTEM AND
GROWTH OF PUBLIC SCHOOLING, 1867-1942

Kansas City, Missouri's, First Black Public Schools, 1867-1920

Kansas City's first black public school, the Lincoln School, was originally opened as a privately funded Sabbath elementary school around 1865, before becoming part of the Kansas City School District in 1867, the district's inaugural year.¹ The black Sabbath schools typically operated during evenings and weekends and served as an educational system of, by, and for African Americans.² Certainly, Sabbath schools enjoyed much popularity in the antebellum and immediate postbellum period; the Lincoln School is but one example of this. The Sabbath School for African Americans was first established in the Second Congregational Church at Tenth and McGee Streets, the same church that housed the Lincoln School.³ The school board rented the basement of the building from the trustees of the Second Congregational Church.⁴ Thus, with two hundred and fifty enumerated school-aged black children, one teacher, Mrs. M. J. Copeland, was appointed but resigned

¹ Carmen Jones, "Lincoln First Schools for Blacks in Kansas City," *Kansas City Star*, 2000, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical File, Lincoln.

² Marvin Aaron, "The Higher Education of African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri: A History of Lincoln Junior College" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1999).

³ Jones, "Lincoln First Schools for Blacks in Kansas City."

⁴ Aaron, "The Higher Education of African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri."

on September 24 before the school year had even begun.⁵ James Dallas Browser, who was reportedly the head of a private mission primary school in 1865, became the school's and city's first black teacher of the newly acquired district school.⁶

Attendance among Kansas City's black youth was initially spotty. Because it was the city's only black school, students were required to find their own way to and from school, regardless of their place of residence. In 1873, there were over four hundred black children of school age in Kansas City, and the average attendance was a dismal 165.⁷ Fifty-seven percent of eligible white children were enrolled in the Kansas City Public Schools in 1877, while only forty-seven percent of black school-aged children were enrolled.⁸ Browser suggested that the distances that black students had to travel, especially in rainy or cold weather, accounted for the considerable absenteeism.⁹ Browser was most certainly correct. By 1885, black enrollment had increased to nearly sixty-four percent, a result of newly constructed black schools in Kansas City.¹⁰ Throughout the late nineteenth century, the Kansas City Public Schools constructed many new schools to support their growing dual system, and among them were many all-black elementary schools: Cherry Street School (1883), Douglass School (1886), Page School (1890) Attucks School (1893), Bruce School

⁵ W. R. Howell, "The Colored Schools of Kansas City, Missouri." *Your Kansas City*, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 302.

⁶ "The Spirit of Freedom: A Profile of the History of Blacks in Kansas City, Missouri," Office of Housing and Community Development (1978), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 301.

⁷ Williams, "The Development of the Negro Public School System in Missouri."

⁸ Earl Martin, *Our Negro Population: A Sociological Study of the Negroes of Kansas City* (Kansas City: Franklin Hudson, 1913).

⁹ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools (1876-1877), Missouri Valley Special Collections.

¹⁰ Timothy L. Smith, "Native Blacks and Foreign Whites: Varying Responses to Educational Opportunities in America, 1860-1950," *Perspectives in American History* 6 (1972): 304-310.

(1898), and Penn School (1899).¹¹ It was in the late nineteenth century, as well, that Kansas City opened its first black high school, Lincoln High School.

In January 1882, a high school course of study was introduced into the Lincoln School as a department within the elementary building. David Victor Augustus Nero, principal of the Lincoln School, had campaigned hard for an African American high school in Kansas City and gave the following rationale for its beginning:

The greatest good derived from the public schools of our country, [sic] is their influence upon the character of the pupil. The cultivation of will-power begun in the common school, and of such vital importance to the moral condition of each individual, is carried on more effectively in the high school, for the pupil has reached a greater maturity of mind, and can be led to see the necessity of the power of self – control, and greater opportunities for the exercise of such power are hereby extended to him.¹²

Nero, however, would not be afforded the opportunity to see his vision in practice. Amidst controversy, Nero was transferred to Sumner High School in Kansas and was succeeded at Lincoln by Samuel Robinson Bailey. Under Bailey’s leadership, Lincoln survived its experimental phase and was formally created as a stand-alone high school in 1890, existing in a building connected to the elementary before moving to Nineteenth and Tracy in 1908 and eventually Twenty-first and Woodland in 1936.¹³

Lincoln High School served as a defining feature of the African American community from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. As Kansas City’s preeminent black high school, Lincoln was staffed with a superbly qualified faculty and administration, teachers and principals of tremendous quality, many of whom were

¹¹ Howell, “The Colored Schools of Kansas City, Missouri.”

¹² Tenth Annual Report of the Kansas City Public Schools, Kansas City, Missouri (1880-1881), 82-83, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

¹³ Phillip O’Connor, “Finding a Solution to Lincoln’s Future,” *Kansas City Star*, 11 March 1999, 10.

overqualified for their positions. A *Kansas City Star* article made note of the impressive progress of Lincoln in a 1915 article: “Lincoln High School is becoming the center of the interests of the negro communities under the influence and work of J. R. E. Lee, principal of the school. He was sixteen years a professor in Tuskegee Institute under the late Booker T. Washington.”¹⁴ This was not only true of Lincoln High School, as the quality of education and educator was high across all of Kansas City’s black schools. But this is not to suggest that Kansas City’s black students received an equal education; they did not.

Earl Martin noted in 1913 that, as of the end of the year in 1911, Kansas City’s black schools were valued at just over four hundred and fifty thousand dollars and white schools, close to six million dollars.¹⁵ Such discrepancies can be seen in the upkeep and maintenance of the district buildings as well. Of the nearly two million dollars expended for maintenance of district school buildings, just over one hundred thousand dollars was spent on the black schools. By 1918, there were eight African American elementary schools and one high school in Kansas City, and by 1920, Lincoln High School was overcrowded and lacked equipment. Among some of the most egregious complaints included classes being held in stairwells, many teachers without desks; no gymnasium or library; and leaky gas lines to the stove of the Domestic Science Department classroom, which required windows to be open at all times.¹⁶ Despite public recognition of the deplorable conditions at Lincoln beginning in 1920, it would take fifteen years before Lincoln High School would have a new home.

¹⁴ *Kansas City Star*, 26 December 1915, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

¹⁵ Martin, *Our Negro Population*, 171.

¹⁶ Coulter, “*Take Up the Black Man’s Burden.*”

Vanessa Siddle Walker, though recognizing the inequalities of segregated schools, identifies four common themes among black schools that made them particularly strong: exemplary, dedicated, and demanding teachers; a rich curriculum and active extracurricular program; an involved parental and community support system whose members served as advocates; and an involved and active principal—a true leader. It is what she calls institutional caring. In her review of the research on segregated schooling, Siddle Walker concludes that the depiction of African American schooling as “unilaterally inferior” is misleading: “What emerges in these accounts is a particular kind of schooling born of the struggles associated with inequality, but nevertheless associated with successful schooling practices in the minds of constituents and on some limited objective criteria.”¹⁷

According to James Anderson, the African American community’s commitment to their schools and the education of black youth is a result of the push during the postbellum period of ex-slaves who had been denied such opportunities prior to the Civil War.¹⁸ Black schools, like black churches, served as the backbone of the community. They were gathering places where community members would often come together to exchange ideas and concerns.¹⁹ But despite the successes of schools like Lincoln High School in Kansas City, they were a byproduct of an unequal system, a system that relegated African Americans to a secondary status.

¹⁷ Vanessa Siddle Walker, “Valued Segregated Schools for African American Children in the South, 1935-1969: A Review of Common Themes and Characteristics,” *Review of Educational Research* 70, no. 3: 235-285, 277.

¹⁸ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

¹⁹ Coulter, “*Take Up the Black Man’s Burden.*”

By the early 1900s, segregation had become entrenched in the social fabric of Missouri, despite the fact that Missouri, unlike Jim Crow states of the Deep South, did not create ordinances of separation other than those that applied to the public school.²⁰ Missouri, in fact, was one of only three former slaveholding states—Delaware and West Virginia being the others—that did not adopt Jim Crow.²¹ Yet in Missouri complete segregation was the custom, and it was widely enforced.²² The turn of the century brought with it a certain vigor among whites to portray African Americans as not only inferior but evil, which can be seen in a number of popular books published in the first decade of the twentieth century.²³ Most certainly, beginning in the early 1900s, a concerted effort among whites in Kansas City was undertaken to reduce blacks to a secondary status; a tightening of segregation and erosion of social gains was occurring.²⁴ After 1900, Kansas City’s black workers were losing hold on occupations once open to them. Most labor unions in skilled trades refused blacks, whereas before 1900 contractors might have been willing to hire blacks at lower wages than whites. The growth of collective bargaining between contractors and labor unions after 1900 resulted in the exclusion of skilled black laborers.²⁵ By 1907, Kansas

²⁰ Greene, Holland, and Kremer, *The Role of the Negro in Missouri History*.

²¹ Thomas Baker, “Human Rights in Missouri: The Legislative, Judicial, and Administrative Development of Black Liberties” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1975).

²² “Local Jim Crowism,” *Kansas City Sun*, 12 April 1919, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

²³ See the following: Charles Carroll, *The Negro Is a Beast* (St. Louis: American Book and Bible House, 1900); Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Leopard Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1902), and Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Clansman; An Historical Romance of the KKK* (New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1905); Robert W. Shufeldt, *The Negro, A Menace to American Civilization* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1907).

²⁴ “Meager Accommodations for Negro Theater Goers,” *Rising Son*, 30 October 1903, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

²⁵ “Passing of Negro Servants,” *Rising Son*, 3 May 1906, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

City's African Americans were experiencing firsthand the cruelties of segregation: black teachers who had associated freely together at teachers' meetings were assigned to segregated areas of the auditorium; blacks could not rent public halls for meetings and public events; blacks could not secure places to bury their dead; black physicians were being denied clinics at Kansas City hospitals; and residential segregation was becoming rigid, including the emergence of congested black slums characterized by poorly constructed, unsanitary houses divided into two or three apartments, often without sewers, and a high percentage of sickness and disease.²⁶

Kansas City, Missouri, by the early 1900s was fast becoming a divided city, aided in part by a growing school district educating black and white children in separate schools. Public education, by the turn of the century, had grown tremendously in popularity among Kansas City's black and white populations. Though originally viewed as elitist and unnecessary, secondary schooling, in particular, had enjoyed ever-increasing acceptance by the early 1900s. Perhaps there is no better example of the growth and popularity of Kansas City's schools, in particular its high schools, than the city's first secondary school, the Central School.

The Formation of All-white Central High School, 1867-1893

“Here's to dear old Central High,
For her we'll live, for her we'll die,
We'll always love the white and blue,
And to old Central e'er be true.”
—Harold Slaughter, 1912

²⁶ *Rising Son*, 22 January 1904; 2 March 1907; “Negroes Want Old Hospital,” 19 October 1907; 29 June 1907; “Divided We Fall,” *Kansas City Star*, 3 July 1925, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

All-white Central School or Kansas City High School [later called Central High School] opened with a total of four students and only one employee, J. B. Bradley, who served as both principal and teacher for a handsome salary of \$133 per month, plus three dollars extra for sweeping out the classrooms.²⁷ The first high school teacher to be hired was in 1869, when E. R. Weeks, a seventeen year-old girl wrapped in a green woolen shawl arrived at the Kansas City, Missouri School District's Board of Education office for her interview. Her skills were rigorously tested. Mrs. Weeks was required to locate capitals, identify the bones of the body, recount the uses of the transitive verb, solve a radical equation, and explain the origins of America. Though there were initial concerns about her age, Mrs. Weeks impressed enough to get the job at the high school and so began the growth of the Kansas City, Missouri School District's secondary schools and the rapid development of the city's first high school, Central High School.²⁸

The school was originally opened in the basement of the Starke Building on the corner of Eleventh and Locust, which served as the Board of Education and office of the Superintendent of Schools as well.²⁹ There was not a public school building in 1867 and little money for public education in general. Conditions were less than ideal; in many cases, classes were held in unoccupied storerooms. The only accessible stairwell at the old Starke building was attached to the outside and exposed to the elements, a shaky flight of wooden steps sloping at a steep angle.³⁰ This, however, did not hinder the school's popularity and

²⁷ *Central Luminary*, 26 May 1921, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

²⁸ *Central Luminary*, 12 February 1925, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

²⁹ *Kansas City Star*, 9 October 1938, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public Central High. History, Early.

³⁰ Bingham, "Alumni Article," *Central Luminary*, January 1906, 9, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

rapid growth, despite opposition among many who opposed the idea of a high school altogether. The “pullbacks,” as they were known, objected to the high school, as they claimed it pampered young, impressionable youth and emphasized foolish ideas about the need for higher education, an education they alleged fell on poor tax payers but benefited only rich people’s children. The criticism was so widespread, in fact, that the school board, upon Central’s founding, left the word “high” out of the school’s name, instead naming it the Central School.³¹

Central, however, was always a high school and was referenced as the Kansas City High School by the Board of Education, despite the reluctance among some to refer to it as such. While the first graduating class, honored in 1873, consisted of only five students: four girls and one boy.³² The number quickly grew; Central graduated more students than any other high school in the United States in 1898, with a graduating class of 250.³³ Among the first high schools to be opened west of the Mississippi, the Kansas City High School would become one of the nation’s finest.

In the beginning, Central offered courses in Latin and Greek, as well as German, French, Arithmetic, English, astronomy, mental and moral science, the derivation of words, and natural philosophy, and literary societies were all the rage. One student recounted his first literary program and the apprehension that accompanied such an honor:

I was elected into a Literary Society. Proud, of course. It was a great honor. I held up my head. From that time on I was more of a man. It gave me a great start in school life. The first day that I was to appear before the society on the literary program, was

³¹ *Kansas City Star*, 9 October 1938, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public Central High History, Early.

³² “Kansas City’s First High School, Central at 11th and Locust Was Opened in 1867.” Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical (Old) Files.

³³ *Central Luminary*, May 1898, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

a memorable one. I was very nervous, and though the committee had assigned a reading to me, nothing could be easier, but I was terrified. I thought each member of the society a cruel and careful critic. At last my name was called. I arose and read, my voice trembled, my head shook, but I read.³⁴

In addition to coursework and literary societies, Principal J. B. Bradley emphasized the importance of hygiene, beginning each day lining up students to inspect the cleanliness of their hands, and upon dismissal, he was known to watch the students until out of sight so as to ensure the boys and girls remained separated, for walking with the opposite sex was strictly forbidden.³⁵ Reverend W. G. Pratt, a Baptist minister turned principal who was known to prod his horse with a nail-tipped stick from his farm in Independence Avenue to school, succeeded Bradley. But Pratt was recognized for more than his mistreatment of his horse; he was widely recognized for his talent in Latin, gaining acclaim from universities nationwide for Central's students' preparation and training in Latin.³⁶

Growth in the Central School's student body necessitated more space soon after it was opened. Thus, on June 9, 1868, a small lot at the southeast corner of Eleventh and Locust in downtown Kansas City measuring 240 by 132 square feet was purchased for \$5,882.³⁷ The Washington School at Eighth and Cherry opened in April of 1868 and was the first Kansas City public school erected, but the city's first high school was built shortly thereafter, consisting of a two-story brick building of two rooms. This facility underwent greater expansion in 1872 and served as the high school until 1875, when a one-story frame building of three rooms was erected just south of it. The two buildings were connected by a

³⁴ *Central Luminary*, October 1893, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

³⁵ *Kansas City Star*, 8 May 1938, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public Central High History, Early.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Central Luminary*, 26 May 1921, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

passageway, the so-called “rope walk,” which served as a thoroughfare that allowed students to access both buildings.³⁸

Twelve year-old Rollins Bingham, a small, self-described tow-headed boy, entered the city’s only high school as part of the freshman class in 1873. In 1906, Bingham chronicled his remembrances of his days as a student at the high school, a time when gas lighting illuminated rooms, the telephone was yet to be known, mules hauled streetcars, and the phonograph and typewriter were future inventions. Yet, Bingham lovingly recalled his days in the “sturdy, plain, wooden-tailed brick” high school: “Whether ‘Central High’ was the official designation of the school in 1873 I do not know, but I do know that the pupils then never used the name, ‘Central’.”³⁹ Bingham explains that as the only high school, Central was referred to at the time as simply “The High School,” a designation that most certainly signifies the fact that it was the city’s only high school option but also indicates the high esteem the school was afforded—“[t]o those below it was in truth and in fact most high, so high as to seem almost inaccessible.”⁴⁰

The high school was indeed inaccessible to many but especially to African American, school-aged children. In 1873, African American students were still not afforded a high school option and would not be until the creation of Lincoln High School in 1888. Meanwhile, white students, such as Rollins Bingham, saw dreams realized as they donned long trousers, well brushed clothes, and perpetual collar and cravat as they found themselves among the high school elite.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Bingham, “Alumni Article,” *Central Luminary*, January 1906, 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The number of whites seeking to be among the high school select continued to grow over the course of the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, and by 1875 the additional space created by the 1872 additions would no longer suffice. Central was growing, and so too was the district—the combined white and black enrollment increased from a total enrollment of 2,150 in 1867 to 8,144 in 1875.⁴² Subsequently, Central’s frame building, built just a few years before, was torn down, and the original brick building was enlarged to accommodate nine additional rooms; but in 1884 a brand new three-story brick structure was constructed to accommodate five hundred students. The new facility had wide halls and five classrooms on the first and second floors, in addition to an assembly room that adorned the top floor.⁴³ Yet by 1889, the newly constructed building, built to house five hundred students, had to meet the needs of over seven hundred.⁴⁴ Student numbers were growing so fast that the total enrollment jumped by fifty-seven students between December of 1889 and February of 1890.⁴⁵ While Central’s numbers were particularly impressive, the district as a whole experienced continued growth throughout the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This posed a problem for district leaders, who were confronted with an almost constant need for new buildings and building additions. The district, however, benefited from a supportive constituency willing to carry the burden, as shown in the continued support of tax levies:

The fine equipment of the public schools, the buildings, the apparatus, the plentiful provision for doing all that schools are called to do represents a great expenditure of the peoples’ monies and shows that the people are willing always to bear the burden,

⁴² Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1867-1947, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁴³ *Central Luminary*, 24 May 1885, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁴⁴ *Central Luminary*, December 1889, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁴⁵ *Central Luminary*, December 1889; February 1890, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

to pay the taxes if they are satisfied that the end sought is good and the expenditure therefore honestly made. There is no holding back, no grudging in regard to the support of the public schools of Kansas City.⁴⁶

Year after year, tax levies for the purchase of ground and erection of buildings found favor among the voters in impressive fashion: for example, in the April 1887 election, 6,472 votes were cast for the levy and a mere 197 against it.⁴⁷

Central High School was among the district's schools that benefited from the generous taxpayers. In April of 1892, district voters approved a one hundred thousand dollar initiative for a new high school facility.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, in October, just following district approval for a new high school, a four-story addition was completed, which added eight rooms; yet additional quarters were needed to serve the swelling population of students. Students eagerly awaited the completion of the new building, anticipating that the new high school would result in greater educational opportunity, as is evidenced by one student's comments in 1893:

The High School pupil of future years will have a much more pleasant time than does he of the present. A beautiful school building, well-equipped with every appliance for the best work, situated on a broad, well paved thoroughfare; opposite, a handsome park, a breathing place and a recreation ground. All these and many more will contribute to his happiness and to his soul's elevation. But will he be stronger, mentally, than those of the present and the past? We hope and believe so.⁴⁹

Dreams became a reality when the new building was finished in December of 1893, a three-story building with a basement and large assembly hall. The new high school was complete with a revolving copper-domed observatory atop the southwest corner and a 140-foot tower

⁴⁶ "The Opening of the Schools," *Kansas City Star*, 16 December 1895, 4.

⁴⁷ Ella Wiberg, "The History of the Development of Public Education in Kansas City, Missouri" (Master's thesis, 1925).

⁴⁸ *Central Luminary*, 24 May 1895, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁴⁹ *Central Luminary*, November 1893, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

adorning the front.⁵⁰ The assembly hall seated two thousand, and it had excellent facilities for the natural sciences—it was most certainly an ornament and credit to the city.⁵¹

Down at Eleventh and Locust: Central High School, 1893-1915

Just two years after the new building was constructed, School Board President Robert Yeager claimed: “We think we can say without fear of successful contradiction that there is no high school in the country superior to the Kansas City High School.”⁵² There was unquestionably an atmosphere of confidence that accompanied attendance at Central High School that seemingly was carried forward by generations of students. Such pride led one student to write the following in a *Central Luminary* editorial:

[E]very year in the history of Central High School adds something to its already brilliant record, every year brings forth achievements and accomplishments which make for her unsurpassed reputation. We of the present Central should congratulate ourselves upon our good fortune, for we have received a richer inheritance than any other class...does it not make you proud that the best of all high schools is your own?⁵³

A sense of privilege can be seen routinely in the early years of the school newspaper, the *Central Luminary*. The pride that Central students took in their school was not unsubstantiated. Indeed, Central High School and her students had gained national recognition by the late nineteenth century as one of the best high schools in the nation. Central students were attending college in large numbers. In 1897, forty students were headed to college, including one to Harvard, four to Princeton, and five to Yale.⁵⁴ The

⁵⁰ “Sunset Glow on Old Central High,” *Kansas City Star*, 31 August 1952, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public Central High History, Early.

⁵¹ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1894, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁵² Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1895, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 18.

⁵³ *Central Luminary*, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁵⁴ *Central Luminary*, May 1897, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

publicity necessitated one student to playfully ask in 1894, “[W]hat’s the matter with Central?” only to offer a quick rebuttal, “[F]rom the vast number of visiting teachers, principals and departments that descend upon us every week we should judge that we are all right. Why not have a reception committee.”⁵⁵ Central was, in fact, welcoming educators from around the country who were interested in seeing firsthand the course of study offered at the high school. In February of 1897, Central received two visiting superintendents of public schools in New York who claimed that Central High School was “one of the finest in America.”⁵⁶

The early success of Central seems to have been in large part a result of several visionary and exemplary administrators, especially John T. Buchanan. It was under Buchanan that Central grew from 567 to nearly two thousand. Beginning his tenure in the nine-room building, Buchanan ended his principalship in the grand new building of 1893. As a true testament to his successes and Central’s progress under his leadership, Buchanan left Central to assume responsibilities as the Principal of the Boys’ Latin High School in New York as appointed by the New York School Board.⁵⁷ So impressed was New York by Buchanan, that Dr. Murray Butler of Columbia University stated publicly in 1897, “[i]n Mr. Buchanan New York gains for its schools and for its citizenship the man who is in my judgment the best all-around public high school principal in the United States.”⁵⁸

The growing demand for high school resulted in the creation of a second all-white high school in 1897, The Manual Training High School. The new school was opened in

⁵⁵ *Central Luminary*, March 1894, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁵⁶ *Central Luminary*, February 1897, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁵⁷ *Centralian*, 1934, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁵⁸ “Dr. Butler of New York Pays Tribute to the Kansas City Educator,” *Kansas City Star*, 9 May 1897, 1.

September of 1897 and was welcomed by the Central administration. Conditions were so crowded at Central that Principal Buchanan had sent a report to the Superintendent in 1896 suggesting that classes were “greatly in excess” of thirty students, as he claimed: “The new Manual Training High School is coming just in the ‘nick of time.’”⁵⁹ Thus, Manual would serve to relieve the crowding at Central and was designed to provide a broad course of instruction “for college or for the practical duties of life.”⁶⁰ Manual was also to present students with knowledge about certain trades but not to turn out skilled carpenters, machinists, or dressmakers.⁶¹ Manual’s opening, however, did not harm Central’s development, as Central continued to flourish in the end of the nineteenth century:

Indeed few schools furnish such splendid opportunities for individual development. Our widely diversified course of study, our Thursday morning exercises, our society programs and open sessions, and our contests all afford facilities equaled only by schools and academies of much higher grade.⁶²

The diversity of the course of study at Central included both United States history and art, which were added to the curriculum in 1897 and 1899 respectively. Both courses were somewhat forward-thinking, as the addition of United States history, especially, made Central one of only a few in the country to offer such a course of study.⁶³ Moreover, an athletic association was formed in 1898, laying the foundation for organized sport in football, baseball, and track for boys only and establishing a connection between good

⁵⁹ “Central High School Report,” *Kansas City Star*, 11 December 1896, 2.

⁶⁰ *Central Luminary*, December 1896, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁶¹ *Central Luminary*, September 1897, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁶² *Central Luminary*, May 1897, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁶³ *Central Luminary*, September 1897, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

health and scholarship.⁶⁴ Central was, as one student suggested at the turn of the century, fast developing “all of the symptoms of a college.”⁶⁵ Central, indeed, had gained a reputation for producing “well instructed, reliable pupils, supplied with an extensive stock of general information.”⁶⁶

In 1908, the same year that Westport High School was opened, Central at Eleventh and Locust underwent construction yet again. This time, a new wing on the east side was added and the building was remodeled and connected, making a spacious sixty-two rooms.⁶⁷ To the students’ delight, as part of the additional space, a basement gymnasium free of columns and rods to interfere with basketball was added, along with additional classrooms for art and business classes, as well as a dining hall.⁶⁸

At last we are to have our new building....A new building! No more will you be able to touch the top of the gym when you are jumping. No more will you be forced to study art in half the necessary space. Let us trust that next year we may have a new building, with more lockers for girls’ wraps, etc., more halls for our enthusiastic floor walkers, more room for vocal aspirants, more breathing space for gymnastic experts or otherwise more space for prospective artists.⁶⁹

But the additions of 1908 would only suffice for so long, as the school and city continued to grow.

The district had even employed a night school, which was under serious consideration as early as 1906 to meet the needs of children who, despite the compulsory

⁶⁴ *Central Luminary*, May 1898, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁶⁵ *Central Luminary*, March 1899, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁶⁶ *Central Luminary*, January 1901, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

⁶⁷ Sam Ray. “A Postcard from Old Kansas City,” *Kansas City Star*, 11 May 1968, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Central (Old) Vertical File.

⁶⁸ *Kansas City Star*, 12 December 1908, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Central (New) Vertical File.

⁶⁹ L.W. Fifield, *Central Luminary*, December 1907, 25.

nature of education established in 1905, were employed during the day.⁷⁰ By 1911, the night school, which had been moved from Washington Ward School to Central High School because of its large numbers, had exceeded two thousand students; this surpassed the aspirations of even the most ardent supporters of night school.⁷¹ Thus the night school began accommodating all students and offering courses in all of the commercial branches, manual training, domestic science, elementary and higher mathematics, as well as additional elementary subjects.⁷² In 1912, the *Kansas City Times* noted that four of Central's classrooms were not enough to hold the large numbers of students who desired to take mechanical drawing, and in 1913 the enrollment had grown to over three thousand.⁷³ By 1914, four additional night schools were added, including one for Mexican-Americans at Adams and one for African Americans at Douglas.⁷⁴ Indeed, the numbers were suggesting that Kansas Citians were hungry for formal education and would take advantage of the public schools in both conventional and unconventional ways.

Central, with an enrollment of 1,200, was soon to occupy a new plot of land in the southeastern-most portion of the city—the southeastern corner of Linwood Boulevard and Indiana Avenue.⁷⁵ By 1911, Central, Westport, and Manual, the city's white high schools,

⁷⁰ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1905-1906, Missouri Valley Special Collections; *Kansas City Journal*, 9 December 1906, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Night Schools.

⁷¹ *Kansas City Times*, 9 December 1911, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Night Schools.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Kansas City Star*, 28 October 1913; *Kansas City Times*, 15 October 1912, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Night Schools.

⁷⁴ Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1913-1914, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁷⁵ *Kansas City Star*, 11 November 1915, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

were all enrolling record numbers.⁷⁶ Lincoln High School, still the city’s only black high school, was overcrowded as well, though judging by the media coverage at the time, was all but an afterthought. Meanwhile, talk of new schools to accommodate the growing popularity of public schooling was getting louder and calls for a new high school centered around an area east of Troost and South of Eighteenth Street—the southeast district. It was reasoned that Kansas City’s population was moving toward the southeast part of the city, which necessitated a high school to house the increasing number of school-aged children.

In 1913, I.I. Cammack, former principal of Central High School turned superintendent, requested eleven new schools and eight additions to existing schools. Among the list of new schools was a new Central High School relocated to the southeast district.⁷⁷ So with bonds approved, the district initiated a massive plan that included both brand new buildings and additions to old ones. Such an undertaking prompted a journalist to ask in 1915, “[D]id you know that Kansas City had spent nearly 5 million dollars on your little Johnnie and Susie in the last five years?”⁷⁸ Central High School and all-white Northeast High School were the two high schools where “Johnnie” and “Susie” would enjoy new lavish surroundings.

New Building; Same Ol’ Central, 1915-1922

While many welcomed the idea of a new Central, students at Central High School approached the news with hopeful skepticism:

The tidings have come from the Board of Education that Old Central is to live after 1913-1914 in a new habitation amidst new and happier surroundings. The incessant

⁷⁶ “Rush to Enter High School,” *Kansas City Star*, 31 August 1911, 7.

⁷⁷ “Asks for Eleven New Schools,” *Kansas City Star*, 8 June 1913, 2.

⁷⁸ *Kansas City Star*, 12 September 1915, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Buildings New, 18.

demand for a trade school will then probably be satisfied, and our present building will go for that purpose. What concerns us, however, is the removal of Central to Linwood and Indiana. All her trophies, her traditions, and, we hope, her faculty, will go with her. The name 'Central' has always stood for the best in high school standards, and when she takes up her abode in what will be one of the finest high school buildings in the West, with all the modern conveniences and advantages, to what glories will she not rise?...Everything is propitious, and we predict a glorious future for a school that has had a most glorious past.⁷⁹

After roughly five hundred thousand dollars in expenditures, the new Central High School that occupied the center of a tract of land at Linwood Boulevard and Indiana Avenue was opened in 1915.⁸⁰ The old building would become the Kansas City Polytechnic Institute and Junior College, originally led by E. M. Bainter, former Principal of Central High School, 1911-1912 and appointed Commissioner of Education for Puerto Rico by President Taft, 1912-1915.⁸¹ The Polytechnic Institute and Junior College was an outgrowth of the teacher-training department founded at Central High School in 1911. The program would enjoy steady growth and by 1931 became a four-year college awarding diplomas.⁸²

Certainly as the reality of the move to the new building set in, nostalgic students proclaimed their affinity for dear old Central: "Lo, though the walls are old and dirty, and the stairways narrow and worn, we shall carry away the most cherished memories of old Central High at Eleventh and Locust."⁸³ The nostalgia was soon washed away by the

⁷⁹ *Central Luminary*, March 1913, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 27.

⁸⁰ *Kansas City Star*, 11 November 1915, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

⁸¹ "E. M. Bainter to Porto Rico," *Kansas City Star*, 8 April 1912, 1.

⁸² In 1953, the old building at Eleventh and Locust was razed and used as a parking lot, later to become the site of Kansas City's Municipal Courts building in the early 1970s.

⁸³ *Central Luminary*, March 1915, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 6.

modernity and newness of the building in the southeastern part of the city. By December of 1915, memories of old Central were distant:

Did you ever stop to think of the care the school board has taken to insure our health and comfort? Did you ever stop to think of the advantages we, the Central students, have over the students of other schools? Let us pause a moment and think about some of the comforts given us in our new building.⁸⁴

Considering the extravagance of the new building, it is no wonder students were willing to embrace their unfamiliar surroundings.

The impressive new building was fronted on Linwood Boulevard with a large athletic field and six-lap track. Elevated behind the field was the rectangle-shaped four-story school. The school itself was, as described by one journalist in 1915, “beautiful in simplicity and suggestiveness.”⁸⁵ Indeed, the building was somewhat factory-like in appearance, but its amenities were far from pedestrian—it had a 1,432-seat ventilated and well-lit auditorium with a large stage, dressing rooms, and a drop curtain; it had spacious restrooms, a matron’s apartment with hospital furnishings, a laundry room, intercommunicating telephone system with eighty-seven telephones, a large dining hall and kitchen, as well as a branch of the public library. The gymnasium, too, was designed to impress, with a twenty-four-lap indoor track in the balcony and enough room to accommodate indoor tennis matches, in addition to a large swimming pool.⁸⁶ With such lavishness, it is no surprise that in 1919, Central High School at its new Southeast location led enrollment among the city’s high schools,

⁸⁴ *Central Luminary*, December 1915, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 29.

⁸⁵ *Kansas City Star*, 11 November 1915, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

outnumbering Manual Training School, Westport High School, Lincoln High School, and Northeast High School.⁸⁷

The new high school ushered in a new era. In particular, there appears to have been a growing interest in sports during this time, especially basketball and football. While organized athletics at Central began with the formation of the boy's athletic association in 1894, interest among the community was hardly impressive.⁸⁸ Sports seemingly assumed a second-class citizenship, a backseat to the literary societies. But by the turn of the century, a girl's athletics association had been formed and there appears to have been a growing interest, most generally, in the role of athletics at Central High School. Yet, academics and society life still reigned supreme: "In a purely academic institution like the Central High School such training is especially required to give wise relaxation, and to so maintain the bodily health as to enable the student to use to the best advantage his intellectual attainments."⁸⁹ Athletics, however, continued to gain gradual esteem, and with the beginning of the principalship of H.H. Holmes in 1912, the athletic association had found an enthusiastic advocate: "it is evident in our current principal," one Central student noted, "we have found a man who does not deem it beneath the dignity of a principal to get out and root at a basketball game."⁹⁰ To be sure, sports did grow in popularity during Holmes's tenure. Football was reintroduced at Central and all of the Kansas City high schools after an eleven-year hiatus, a result of a Manual player fracturing his skull during a game in 1906. A successful basketball team gained a widespread following, and track and baseball expanded

⁸⁷ "A Large Senior Enrollment," *Kansas City Star*, 2 December 1919, 6.

⁸⁸ *Central Luminary*, April 1894, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁸⁹ *Central Luminary*, March 1915, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 15.

⁹⁰ *Central Luminary*, November 1912, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 20.

as well for boys, while girls continued to participate in club sports. Holmes was so instrumental in growing athletics at Central, in fact, that upon his untimely death from influenza in 1920, an athletic field was dedicated in his honor in 1922 just east of Central, Holmes Athletic Field. It was the first of its kind in Kansas City.⁹¹

The first years at the new building, however, were not without challenges. World War I resulted in changes in the course of study. The sewing classes devoted their efforts to making Red Cross relief garments, and cooking classes, as a result of rationing, placed emphasis on the use of cooking substitutes. German was even formally suspended in 1918 at Central and all Kansas City, Missouri School District public schools following a vote by the board. German had been under fire prior to the 1918 school year, as boys in 1917 who quit German during the second semester of the school year to work on farms as a way of promoting production and conservation were still given credit for the class.⁹² As if the war effort were not enough, the flu epidemic caused major disruption in the lives of students and teachers. As was the case across the district, Central High School closed its doors during the fall period, and many would succumb to influenza, even claiming lives, Central's principal, H.H. Holmes among them.

The curriculum, too, was undergoing some unwelcomed changes. The ancient language department came under attack, as Greek was dropped from Central High School's curriculum and Latin too faced the threat of termination: "It seems a pity that Central, after running an ancient language department for years that could bring forth jealousy from many

⁹¹ *Central Luminary*, 19 January 1922, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

⁹² *Kansas City Post*, 17 May 1918, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, German Language.

a college should allow these languages to drift away from it.”⁹³ So while the classics were under attack, the domestic science department was thriving, turning out “scores of housekeepers every year.”⁹⁴ Central was not the only school, however, that was undergoing a shift from a classical education to a more vocational one. Lincoln High School was as well. All of the Kansas City, Missouri School District public schools, in fact, were placing a greater emphasis on the industrial arts, and pre-vocational and vocational schools grew in popularity, a means of making the worker more efficient and preparing the student for the workforce. Education was changing in light of the growing industrial sector, and the purpose of education had shifted from one that educated a few in the classics to a system that educated the masses for the occupations of a new industrial order.

Such changes in the curriculum were likely, in part, a result of the growing popularity of the Gary system. The Gary system, which originated in Gary, Indiana, was led by William A. Wirt and designed to mold the individual student’s cognitive and manual training.⁹⁵ While the Gary system was gaining favor across the country in the second decade of the twentieth century, it was not without its critics. Kansas City did, in fact, open an experimental Gary school as early as 1913, but it was subsequently transformed back into a traditional ward school in 1917.⁹⁶ The high school parents of Kansas City were particularly troubled by the new system: “High school eligibility means more than the training for one line of work, it means the open door to an infinite amount of productiveness. This is a city,

⁹³ *Central Luminary*, February 1919, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁵ Ronald Cohen and Raymond Mohl, *The Paradox of Progressive Education: The Gary Plan and Urban Schooling* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press Corp., 1979).

⁹⁶ *Kansas City Star*, 28 April 1917, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Gary System.

not a town specializing on one line of labor, with children brought up to one destiny only, as in Gary.”⁹⁷ Although the Gary system in the schools of Kansas City, Missouri, only operated on an experimental basis, most certainly, the curriculum, in the post war years, began to move away from a classical education in favor of a more vocational one.

Despite the hardships that accompanied the inaugural years of the new building, Central High School’s student population continued to grow. By 1920, Central graduated 270 students and in 1922 the number of graduates was up to 407.⁹⁸ Growth was occurring so fast, in fact, that half-day school sessions were employed. The morning session, as of 1921, housed 1,582 students and the afternoon 821 for a total of 2403.⁹⁹ While the two-session approach was not ideal, it was necessary to accommodate the huge numbers. Students, however, expressed their displeasure with the organization of the double session:

One of the evils existing in Central at the present time is the lack of proper relationship between students. This is a well known fact do to the double session. The students are not allowed to remain at school after they have finished their classroom work and do not even get to see each other except during school hours.¹⁰⁰

With enrollment having increased by two hundred students annually since the new building was constructed in 1915, it had reached a critical juncture by 1922. Despite the building of a fifty-thousand-dollar annex in 1921 adding eight classrooms and 182 lockers, Central was growing too fast to accommodate the increasing population of students. Overcrowding was not just a problem at Central, however, as many district schools were facing similar issues. Both Westport and Lincoln High Schools were forced to build annexes

⁹⁷ *Kansas City Star*, 25 January 1914, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Gary System.

⁹⁸ “Central to Graduate 270,” *Kansas City Star*, 5 June 1920, 2; “Central to Graduate 407,” *Kansas City Star*, 3 June 1922, 4.

⁹⁹ *Central Luminary*, 4 March 1921, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Central Luminary*, 24 March 1921, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 2.

as well.¹⁰¹ Yet, the growth at Central was particularly challenging, a result of the sheer number of students—four thousand.¹⁰²

In 1922, the tremendous growth in the Central attendance area resulted in the design of two new junior highs, Central Junior High and Westport Junior High, as well as another new high school, Paseo High School, to relieve the crowding at Central High School and Westport High School. Central Junior High School was to be built just east of the high school building, and the new junior high would be no slouch—it was designed with sixty-five classrooms, two gymnasiums, swimming pool, and manual training shops.¹⁰³ The junior high school was necessary; the congestion at Central limited school activities and qualified Central High School as one of the largest high schools in the country. Central exceeded Westport High School's enrollment by 971, Northeast High School by 1,263, and Manual High School by 1,942.¹⁰⁴ Lincoln High School experienced continued growth during this period as well, and while an annex was added to Lincoln just as it was at Central, Lincoln would not get a much-needed new building until 1936.¹⁰⁵ It is clear that under Kansas City, Missouri School District's dual system, the white schools were a priority. But it was not only in education that whites were enjoying great privilege; the housing boom in the southeastern corridor where the new Central High School resided was exclusively white. Large-scale building by investment companies catering to white families looking to find

¹⁰¹ *Central Luminary*, 22 September 1921, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹⁰² *Central Luminary*, 21 1922, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹⁰³ *Kansas City Star*, 14 December 1924, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Junior High, Central.

¹⁰⁴ *Central Luminary*, 12 November 1922, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Phillip O'Connor, "Finding a Solution to Lincoln's Future," *Kansas City Star*, 11 March 1990, 10.

housing in the nearest open territory to town resulted in many families settling within Central High School's attendance zone, which can be seen in the rising numbers of Central students. Thus, the southeastern part of Kansas City, the immediate area surrounding Central High School, south of Twenty-Seventh Street, was fast-becoming an exclusively white territory.

Growth in Kansas City's Southeast Corridor, 1922-1929

Ninety houses a month were being built in the Central attendance area in 1921, and for every six houses built, one new student entered Central, equaling about 180 per year.¹⁰⁶ The area around Central was booming, in large part a result of available land that was nearest to town. New businesses accompanied the growth of the area, many of them lining the streets surrounding the new Central High School, and the growth of the area is evident by the thriving commercial industry that sprang up around Central.¹⁰⁷

The families that funneled into the neighborhoods surrounding Central High School were exclusively white, yet the black population of Kansas City was increasing tremendously as well. Between 1910 and 1930, the black population grew from 23,566 in 1910 to 38,754 in 1930, but the indices of black isolation increased as well, from roughly twenty-one percent in 1910 to just over thirty percent in 1930, signifying a distinct

¹⁰⁶ *Central Luminary*, 13 October 1921, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

¹⁰⁷ By 1922, establishments included the following: Mann Bros Market (East Thirty-first), Just-rite (Twenty-seventh and Prospect), Lucky's Bakery (Twenty-sixth and Prospect), Japan Florist (Thirty-fourth and Prospect), Wolfe's Modern Dance Studio (Twenty-ninth and Brooklyn), T.A Linck Drug Company (Thirty-first and Prospect), Myerson Book Store (Thirty-first and Indiana), Indiana Cleaners and Tailors (Twenty-eighth and Linwood), Kaifetz Delicatessen (East Thirty-first Street), Model Cleaners (Thirty-third and Prospect), Justus Plumbing Company (East Thirty-first), KL Perkins Prescription Specialist (Thirty-first and Indiana), Stamp Photos (Thirtieth and Prospect), TA Link Drug Company (Thirty-first and Prospect), Greens School Supplies and Food (Thirty-first and Agnes), Southeast State Bank (Thirty-first and Prospect), Mitchell's Drugstore (Twenty-ninth and Prospect), K.L. Perkins Prescription Specialist (Thirty-first and Indiana), Schneider Dry Goods Company (Thirty-first and Indiana), and Lott and Von Drug Store (Thirty-first and Brooklyn) (*Central Luminary*, 1920-1922, Missouri Valley Special Collections).

separation of the residences of blacks from whites.¹⁰⁸ Racial tension in Kansas City was on the rise in the early 1920s, and much of it had to do with housing. An Anti-Ugly Movement launched in 1922 and approved by the city council that same year preceded the first zoning ordinance of Kansas City, which was enacted in 1923.¹⁰⁹

Kansas Citians were growing increasingly concerned with their property values, and as the black population's numbers continued to swell, the black eastside neighborhoods began to expand and press ever so close to the white eastside neighborhoods. The black commercial center near Eighteenth and Vine, the Lincoln-Coles area, was most certainly attractive to arriving black families, but it was crowded with an average of four and one-half families per residence and plagued by increasing health and sanitation problems. Death rates climbed and sickness spread.¹¹⁰ Thus, middle-class black families began seeking to relocate out of the crowded black eastside and turned to realtors for assistance.

As Kansas City's black population increased, white residents of the southeast side began to associate the presence of blacks with declining property values and neighborhood instability.¹¹¹ Ambitious block-busting realtors capitalized on whites' fears and blacks' desire for more spacious homes. When neighborhood blocks on the eastside fringe were "busted," whites fled. But by 1926, improvement associations had been formed among white

¹⁰⁸ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

¹⁰⁹ Schirmer, *A City Divided*.

¹¹⁰ "Divided We Fall," *Kansas City Call*, 3 July 1925, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

¹¹¹ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

residents on the eastside to restrict the sale of their homes to “Negroes.”¹¹² In 1927, The Linwood Association, an improvement association headquartered near Central High School, held a meeting to discuss making the association national in scope. A reporter recounted the events of the evening:

At the meeting which was sponsored by the Linwood Improvement Association steps were taken toward the formation of a national protection association whose purpose is to be to improve property of the members and protect it against encroachments. The real purpose of the new organization, however, is the restriction of property against sale, lease or rental to Negroes. Speakers at the meeting Friday night urged the necessity of restriction against Negroes, asserting that property values would go down if Negroes were allowed to buy there. Hence, the “protective association” members of the organization in KC hope to make the association a national one “to keep Negroes where they belong.”¹¹³

The struggle faced by black families looking to find adequate housing near or in white residential neighborhoods during the 1920s was rife with struggle. The National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) founded in 1908 set out to convince whites that all-white racially homogenous neighborhoods were “a superior atmosphere for residential life and a requisite for protecting the homeowner’s investments.”¹¹⁴ Such a line of reasoning became official policy by 1924 and was institutionalized with the publication of real estate textbooks, the first of which surfaced in 1923 and stated: “Colored people must recognize the economic disturbance which their presence in a white neighborhood causes and forego their desire to split off from the established district where the rest of their race lives.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² “Improvement Association Moves to Restrict against Colored Owners,” *Kansas City Call*, 24 December 1926, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 343.

¹¹³ “Linwood Association Takes Lead in National Association,” *Kansas City Call*, 29 July 1927, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 343.

¹¹⁴ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 34.

¹¹⁵ Stanley McMichael and Robert Bingham, *City Growth and Values* (Cleveland: The Stanley McMichael Publishing Organization, 1923).

Whites seemingly took heed of the warnings and began protecting the homogeneity of their neighborhoods with fervor. Between 1921 and 1928, bombings of black-occupied homes became commonplace, with seven bombings occurring within a single year.¹¹⁶ Lines were being drawn, and where deed restrictions, homeowners' associations, and scare tactics were unsuccessful in keeping blacks out of white southeast-side neighborhoods, violence would follow. Whites were becoming increasingly insistent on the homogeneity of their neighborhoods, just as they always had been with their schools.

Meanwhile, Central High School continued to grow. Like the school, the white neighborhoods surrounding Central were steadily expanding as well, safely south of Twenty-Seventh Street, which in the 1920s came to represent the division between white residential areas and black residential areas. In 1924, Central became the largest high school in the state, not least the district, welcoming ninety-four new students from eleven different states and averaging nearly forty students per classroom.¹¹⁷ Westport was the only other high school that even came close to Central's numbers, and it was nearly five hundred students shy of Central's mark.¹¹⁸ Such expansion led Otto F. Dubach, principal of Central, to remark in 1925 that the greatest progress Central had made during his tenure was the "tremendous increase in enrollment."¹¹⁹ In Dubach's five years as principal, from 1920 to 1925, Central had grown from 1,300 students to 2,400.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Schirmer, *A City Divided*.

¹¹⁷ *Central Luminary*, 25 September 1924, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 2.

¹¹⁸ *Central Luminary*, 18 September 1924, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹¹⁹ *Central Luminary*, 12 November 1925, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

The new Central Junior High, targeted for a 1925 opening, would relieve some of the crowding. It was to accommodate 1,500 and in 1924 was said to be the most modern school in the city. The stand-alone junior high school, although beginning in controversy, had by 1924 gained widespread approval, as it was seen as most necessary to isolate the seventh-grade student from the child-like atmosphere of the grade school and the adult-like atmosphere of the high school.¹²¹ The acceptance of the junior high concept and the continued growth of the district led the school board in 1924 to begin plans for five new secondary schools: three high schools and two junior high schools—Paseo High School at Forty-Eighth Street and Paseo, East Side High School between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets at Van Brunt, Southwest High School at Sixty-Fifth Street and Wornall, Northeast Junior High School on Independence Avenue east of Van Brunt, and West Side Junior High School with a location that had yet to be determined.¹²² This too was news welcomed by Centralites, as the new Paseo High School would further relieve crowded conditions by taking roughly five hundred Central students.

The period between 1913 and 1925 became known as the “Era of Construction,” as thirty-nine Kansas City, Missouri School District school buildings were erected and additions and equipment were added to forty-three buildings. Moreover, the schools of Kansas City, Missouri, had increased at a rate of one room full of pupils each week in this same twelve-year timeframe: “The schools of Kansas City,” Superintendent Cammack announced in 1926, “are now on par with those of other American cities.”¹²³ The prosperity

¹²¹ *Kansas City Star*, 15 December 1931, Missouri Valley Special Collections, School-Public, Junior High Schools.

¹²² *Central Luminary*, 11 December 1924, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹²³ *Central Luminary*, 28 January 1926, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

of the 1920s would be tested, however, as the depression that ushered in the 1930s would also challenge the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

Financial Crisis and the Kansas City, Missouri School District, 1929-1942

Kansas Citians had supported schools in impressive fashion since their inception, routinely supporting tax levies and bond initiatives that both contributed to and assisted with the tremendous growth of the district and seemingly constant need for new buildings and additions to existing ones. But toward the end of the 1920s, the district was facing cutbacks. In 1928, automatic increases in teacher salaries were suspended, the bonus system was cut, and necessary building maintenance and repair was restricted as well.¹²⁴ The demands on the Kansas City, Missouri School District had indeed become more far-reaching.

By 1930 Superintendent Melcher submitted an editorial to the *Kansas City Star* to outline for taxpayers the changing responsibilities of the schools, an apparent attempt to justify an increase in taxation. In the editorial, Melcher explained that the valuation of the district had grown to twenty-seven million dollars, a far cry from the seven million dollar valuation in 1915. Moreover, the number of pupils over the same time period, he explained, had increased from 43,000 to 70,000, and the annual cost to run the schools had gone from three million dollars to seven million dollars. He concluded with the following:

In spite of this increased expenditure, tax rates in Kansas City have not increased. From 1914 to 1918 the tax rate was 12 mills; from 1919 to 1921 it was 13 mills; and for the last five years it has been 11 ½ mills. This rate has yielded revenue sufficient, when supplemented by state and federal funds, to meet the needs, including retirement of bonds ... The increase in enrollment, of course, increases the task greatly, but there are also added duties from new kinds of services demanded...¹²⁵

¹²⁴ "Pay-as-you-go Plan," *Kansas City Star*, 24 January 1928, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Revenue.

¹²⁵ *Kansas City Star*, 3 January 1929, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Revenue.

The “new services” referenced by Melcher included the 1913 law requiring public schools to supply free textbooks and the Smith-Hughes law of 1919, which placed greater emphasis on vocational education, in addition to the dedication of a small portion of the budget for special education classrooms, open air classrooms, a school for the deaf, a school for the so-called “crippled,” a teacher’s college, and a junior college. But the most costly undertaking was the modernization of school buildings that occurred between 1912 and 1927, which included the construction or improvement of roughly seventy buildings at a cost of approximately fifteen million dollars. Only two of the buildings, however, were black schools.¹²⁶

There were 19,910 high school pupils in Kansas City, Missouri, as of 1932, and district-wide daily attendance was 60,025, an increase of nearly fifteen thousand students in ten years. Additionally, by 1930, Kansas City, Missouri School District’s course offerings were expanding. Industrial arts courses for boys and home-making courses for girls became more readily available, and fine arts courses, such as drawing, sketching, design, band, orchestra, and piano were added.¹²⁷ At Central, 1930 ushered in new high school requirements whereby a student could choose one of two lines of study: getting ready for living or getting ready for college.¹²⁸ A student’s elective course selections were thus determined by his or her future aspirations. Moreover, a comprehensive health and physical education system had been supplied to the schools by the early 1930s, requiring school

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Kansas City Service Bulletin, Executive Department of the Kansas City, Missouri Public Schools (November 1932), Missouri Valley Special Collections, 14.

¹²⁸ *Central Luminary*, 14 March 1930, 1.

nurses, gymnasiums, and playgrounds.¹²⁹ In addition to all of this, the district had incorporated special schools and a junior college while attempting to keep costs low.

There is complexity in attempting to cut costs while maintaining quality and quantity, and the Kansas City, Missouri School District, in the 1930s, was confronted with just such a dilemma—the unenviable task of trying to reduce expenditures but sustain high standards for which it had become widely recognized. The district attempted to save money by increasing class sizes, combining small schools, eliminating certain services, reducing the number of supervisors, decreasing the quantity and quality of school supplies, postponing repairs and improvements of property, and using reserve funds.¹³⁰ But despite these efforts, the district continued to face fiscal challenges. The cost to the district of educating Kansas City’s school-aged population had increased by thirty-one percent in the ten years between 1922 and 1932, but the district was reducing costs:

The reduction made by the Board of Education of Kansas City, MO, in per pupil cost and in the total cost of schools for the year 1932-1933 is relatively greater than the reduction made by any other agency having taxing power over the property and people of Kansas City or any other agency having spending power over the revenues of Kansas City.¹³¹

By 1934, district expenditures were on average twenty percent less than what other cities of comparable size were spending, and the tax rate for school purposes was unimpressive as well. At nine mills, Kansas City, Missouri, ranked at the bottom in the state with 262 other towns and cities having a higher levy rate than Missouri. When compared to other cities of comparable size, the levy rate for school purposes in Kansas City, Missouri,

¹²⁹ Kansas City Service Bulletin, 13.

¹³⁰ Kansas City Service Bulletin (April 1939), 262.

¹³¹ Kansas City Service Bulletin (November 1932), 16.

was alarmingly low. Even Kansas City, Kansas schools were levying over twice as much—twenty-two mills as compared to nine.¹³²

Despite the district's shortage in revenue, Centralites were dreaming of a new gymnasium and cafeteria, and plans were drawn for a two-story extension. Such improvements became a reality in 1938 when Central benefited from a federal government authorized school improvement plan and got the eighty-five by fifty-one foot extension that had been in the works since 1935.¹³³ In addition to the Central Annex, during the second half of the 1930s, a new all-black Lincoln High School was completed, and Southeast High School was constructed, as was the R. J. DeLano School for "crippled" children located across Linwood Boulevard from Central High School. The Kansas City, Missouri School District was in fact a beneficiary of New Deal efforts and public works projects, in part a result of "Boss Tom" Pendergast, chairman of the Jackson County Democratic Club, who held significant local, state, and national political influence. Pendergast had given Franklin Delano Roosevelt early support in his presidential bid, and FDR rewarded him with control of virtually all federal relief expenditures in Missouri.¹³⁴ Not surprisingly, Kansas City benefited from the connection, as a disproportionate amount of relief money made its way into the city.

Despite the fact that the Great Depression did not hit Kansas City as hard as many other cities, the school district continued to find itself in the midst of financial struggle.¹³⁵ The board recognized in 1935 that failure to reduce salaries would soon leave the school

¹³² Kansas City Service Bulletin (November 1935), 18.

¹³³ *Central Luminary*, 5 November 1937, 1.

¹³⁴ Schirmer, *A City Divided*.

¹³⁵ Brown and Dorsett, *A History of Kansas City, Missouri*.

district insolvent.¹³⁶ In 1936, teachers' salaries, for the first time, were significantly reduced. Cuts ranged from five to twelve percent depending on one's salary and were implemented as cost-saving measures. According to a survey by the University Women's Club, part of an educational project sponsored by the state department of education, the situation in Kansas City had reached crisis proportions:

Something must be done to raise Kansas City from its low rank of eighteenth in a list of twenty-one cities of comparable size in median salaries paid elementary classroom teachers and seventeenth in median salaries paid in high schools.... This is a matter not only for the board of education to consider but parents of every child in the public schools....¹³⁷

Most certainly, the fiscal problems confronted by district leaders throughout the 1930s would create problems for many future years. Yet in the face of the financial obstacles, the Kansas City, Missouri School District, Central High School included, continued to enjoy a period of steady growth during the 1930s, as more and more students were entering the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

In 1940, the Kansas City, Missouri School District had a new leader, Dr. H. C. Hunt, and he, like his predecessor, was committed to emphasizing occupations in the schools.

Upon his appointment as superintendent of schools, Hunt promptly proposed an occupational survey to aid the schools in readying graduates for the job market.¹³⁸

Superintendent Hunt was clearly continuing a district-wide emphasis on vocational education. At Central, a fourth year of shop work was added to the boys' curriculum in 1941, an extension of metal work, woodwork and printing. In contrast, girls were given the

¹³⁶ *Kansas City Star*, 15 May 1938, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public.

¹³⁷ "Survey of Financial Situation in K.C. Schools," *Kansas City Star*, 9 November 1938, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public.

¹³⁸ *Central Luminary*, 4 October 1940, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

option for an extra year of clothing, which began with the course, Beginning Homemaking, which taught girls to be “diligent homemakers and intelligent consumers.”¹³⁹ But the most pressing issue in Hunt’s new role was the ongoing and worsening financial situation. By 1942, the Kansas City, Missouri School District confronted further cuts in maintenance and building repairs, educational supplies, and teacher salaries. Moreover, students faced a shortened school year, a six-month term, which would result in students having to extend their schooling in order to meet requirements for graduation. Resolution of the crisis hinged on a ten-mill tax levy, which required a vote every four years.¹⁴⁰ Voters approved the levy on March 31, 1942, and the schools, consequently were saved from pending financial ruin, at least for the moment.¹⁴¹

By 1942, financial woes of the Kansas City, Missouri School District were secondary. World War II and the war effort took its toll on the secondary schools of Kansas City, Missouri. Air-raid drills were occurring with some frequency, pictures were taken down as an air-raid precaution, a ban on typewriters made it impossible to purchase new ones, and repairs of broken typewriters were difficult as well. Food substitutes were used in cooking classes, food prices for school lunches had increased, and even fuel rationing and oil quotas were having an impact.¹⁴² Individual schools were feeling the full weight of the war as well. In January of 1943, Central High School suffered its first casualty of the war when Wyatt Hundley, a Central student, was killed in action in the Southwest Pacific, and

¹³⁹ *Central Luminary*, 6 February 1942, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Central Luminary*, 20 March 1942, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹⁴¹ *Central Luminary*, 10 April 1942, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹⁴² *Central Luminary*, 25 September 1942; 2 October 1942; 16 October 1942; 6 November 1942, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

Hundley would not be the last Centralian to lose his life. By 1944, 21 Central alums had been killed in action.¹⁴³ Many Central students hit the job market as well to help in the war effort. Over the Christmas holiday in 1942, three hundred Central students were working. With more and more students seeking outside employment, O. F. Dubach, principal of Central High School, made the following declaration “to all Central students” in 1943:

If you must work and go to school next year, be sure to notify us early in August, so that we can arrange your program properly. If you possibly can do so, complete your education doing no more outside work than you can readily carry. At the same time, try to make the kind of grades that society is now demanding for success. Our best wishes to all of you for the summer. To those who enter the armed forces, may you return safely to civilian life in the near future—to a world made secure for all time to come and based on the four freedoms for which we are fighting today.”¹⁴⁴

The war effort was clearly affecting the schools and the lives of students, but there were larger societal implications of the war as well, especially for African Americans.

¹⁴³ *Central Luminary*, 20 January 1943, 1; 1 December 1944, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Central Luminary*, 26 May 1943, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

CHAPTER 4

FROM SEGREGATION TO DESEGREGATION, 1942-1962

World War II and Hope for Equality, 1942-1948

A black American Corporal stated in 1945,

I spent four years in the Army to free a bunch of Dutchmen and Frenchmen, and I'm hanged if I'm going to let the Alabama version of the German kick me around when I get home. No sirree-bob! I went into the Army a nigger; I'm comin' out a *man*.”¹

Such sentiment can be seen among many in the African American community after World War II, especially in brave black soldiers who put their lives on the line in the name of freedom despite the injustices being confronted daily on the home front. In some ways the seeds of civil unrest were planted in the 1930s, as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1910, began seriously challenging the legally segregated South.² One such dispute involved the University of Missouri and Lloyd Gaines's attempt to enter the university's all-white law school. *Missouri ex rel Gaines v. Canada*, heard before the Supreme Court, established that the state of Missouri could not deny Gaines's admission to law school because a separate all-black law school did not exist at the time.³ Hence, Lincoln University's law school was established, though Gaines never attended. By all accounts, Lloyd Gaines disappeared into obscurity, but a legal precedent

¹ James Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.

² Stephen J. Caldas and Carl L. Bankston, III, *Forced to Fail: The Paradox of School Desegregation* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005).

³ *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*, 305 U.S. 337 (1938).

had been established, and the Gaines case in some respects paved the way for the *Brown* decision of 1954.

Prior to outbreak of war, the Depression had disproportionately affected African Americans across the nation, including Kansas City. In 1925, roughly twenty-five percent of Kansas City's black families were on welfare.⁴ Blacks during the years of the Depression were the last to be hired and the first to be fired, as whites began to take so-called "nigger jobs," menial positions that they formerly would have disdained.⁵ Indeed, the New Deal offered blacks some relief. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), in particular, employed thousands of young black Kansas Citians and set them to work reforesting barren lands. The federal programs, however, were most definitely limited in scope, and many African Americans continued to languish in the sluggish economy of the pre-war period.

As the war machine kick-started the economy, unemployment rapidly declined from just over eight million individuals in 1940 to roughly two and-one-half million in 1942.⁶ Not surprisingly, the economic uptick that preceded war benefited whites greatly but left African Americans out. War-related jobs were simply not available to blacks, as many were reserved for whites only. The Executive Order 8802 banned employment discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin for employers with defense contracts, labor unions, and civilian agencies of the federal government. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established an executive agency, the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), to

⁴ "The Spirit of Freedom."

⁵ Greene, Holland, and Kremer, *The Role of the Negro in Missouri History*.

⁶ Andrew E. Kersten, "African Americans and World War II," *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (Spring, 2002), 13-17.

expose prejudice in war industries.⁷ There is some disagreement as to the effectiveness of the agency. It employed a staff of only 128 to monitor all of the United States and operated with a budget that started at a measly eighty thousand dollars, but it appears that the FEPC did open some new opportunities for Blacks where there previously had been none.⁸ Nevertheless, the agency's limited scope did not have a major impact on job bias in American society. Yet under President Roosevelt's executive order and with the help of organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League, many blacks did find war jobs, often well paying, which meant some African Americans could buy a better lifestyle than they were able to before the war.⁹

Initially, the armed forces discouraged black enlistment, but the draft law passed in September of 1940 contained an antidiscrimination clause, consequently opening the door for many. Ultimately, more than one million black men and women entered various services, and roughly one-half million of them served abroad in Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, and Asia.¹⁰ Yet once in the service, blacks discovered that discrimination was widespread. Blacks received inferior training and served in segregated units, and black troops were disproportionately assigned to service units or menial work. In fact, the navy only accepted blacks as mess attendants or stewards.¹¹ But perhaps the most egregious example of the racism so entrenched in society, as well as the armed forces, was the Red Cross's

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "The Spirit of Freedom."

¹⁰ Michael L. Levine, *African Americans and Civil Rights: From 1619 to Present* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1996).

¹¹ Ibid.

segregation of a black individual's blood from that of a white individual. In many respects, World War II seemed a mere continuation of World War I for the black soldier, and as in World War I, a spirit of disillusionment led to a wave of riots and violence, most notably the 1943 riot that unfolded in Detroit.¹² Unlike World War I, however, World War II seemingly marked an increasing awareness of enforced inequality among African Americans.

African Americans fought bravely in World War II but were forced to do so in segregated units. In 1946, President Truman formed a group of distinguished black and white citizens to serve on the President's Committee on Civil Rights. The committee's 1947 report, *To Secure These Rights*, called for extensive government action to ensure equal rights and end segregation in schools, the military, public accommodations, and employment practices.¹³ Later that same year, President Truman addressed a large crowd assembled for the NAACP national convention and called for ending "insult, intimidation, violence, and prejudice," and called for defending the "rights and equalities of all Americans."¹⁴ As part of his ten-point, civil rights plan and Executive Order 9981, Truman in July of 1948 proceeded to call for the desegregation of the armed forces, a mandate that provided for the first racially integrated combat units in the Korean War.¹⁵ Moreover, President Truman's executive order supplied the foundation for ending state-imposed segregation in the civilian sector.

¹² Neil A. Wynn, "War and Racial Progress," *Peace & Change* 20, no. 3 (July 1995): 348-364.

¹³ Jeffery A. Rafflel, in *School Desegregation in the 21st Century*, eds. Christine Rossell, David Armor, and Herbert Walberg (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 17-39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁵ Caldas and Bankston, III, *Forced to Fail*.

World War II had aroused a spirit of change in Kansas City, as it had across the nation, although the process was occurring at an exceedingly slow pace. In 1942, thirteen thousand black Kansas Citians gathered at Municipal Auditorium to protest discriminatory practices of the war, an action that contributed to the adoption of the Fair Employment Practices Committee.¹⁶ Indeed, the protest did effect change, but by 1946, as war production fell off, nearly all black employees had been laid off, and employment percentages had reverted back to 1940 levels. Considering that there were nearly one million more black workers in civilian jobs in 1944 than in 1940, the fact that the numbers had reverted back to those of the pre-war years was sobering. An editorial in a 1946 issue of the *Kansas City Call* asked, “Is Kansas City North or South?” only to follow up the rhetorical question with the following:

In some matters, tax-paying for instance, Negroes are 100 per cent, full fledged citizens. In other matters, housing for example, they are definitely second-or-third class citizens. In still other matter such as eating and entertainment, Negroes do not know where they stand. Sometimes they are treated as citizens and human beings and at other times they are not welcome to a drink of water.¹⁷

Kansas City, Missouri, was an anomaly of sorts. Unlike cities of the Deep South, Kansas City never did legally mandate Jim Crow laws, though custom most certainly positioned African Americans in inferiority. Schools had been separate since they had been created in 1867, and separate was the standard in both the public and private sector. Yet, there was a sense of hopeful optimism among Kansas City’s African American community in the aftermath of World War II:

¹⁶ “The Spirit of Freedom.”

¹⁷ “Is Kansas City North or South,” *Kansas City Call*, 29 November 1946, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

Little by little since World War II, our growing city has thrown off the shackles which have burdened its citizens of color for generations. First employment policies at the City Hall were broadened and Negro applications were given an opportunity to fill a greater variety of jobs. There is still much to be desired along this line, but the first and hardest step has been taken.¹⁸

While World War II had seemingly ushered in a new era in the struggle for racial equality, the housing industry was proving particularly difficult to penetrate.

Racial Homogeneity and Housing, 1948-1952

Adequate and fair housing had long been a struggle for Kansas City, Missouri's, black population. The 1940s, however, seemed to set the tone for later decades. By 1940, J. C. Nichols had used deed restrictions with effectiveness since he had first put them into practice in 1913 with the Mission Hills Homes Company.¹⁹ Nichols proceeded to build dozens of racially restricted subdivisions for upper and middle-income whites, specifically prohibiting all housing sales to blacks. Nichols also protected his residential developments by implementing mandatory homeowner associations to enforce racial restrictions. Such an organization created a base for maintaining neighborhood cohesion as a means of preventing breaches of restrictive covenants.²⁰ By 1940, ninety-four percent of the 41,574 total black residents of Kansas City, Missouri, lived in the Lincoln-Coles community, but between 1940 and 1950, many blacks looked to escape its confines, in large part a result of inadequate housing and the fact that fifty-seven percent of the rentals in the area lacked a private bath and a toilet that flushed.²¹ Moreover, the influx of black workers to Kansas City during

¹⁸ "Another Step Nearer to Real Democracy," *Kansas City Call*, 18 April 1952, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

¹⁹ William S. Worley, *J.C. Nichols and the Shaping of Kansas City: Innovation in Planned Residential Communities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993).

²⁰ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

²¹ "The Spirit of Freedom."

World War II contributed to further crowding, and wartime wages and high employment meant that some black families could afford better housing and began to look outside of the established neighborhood jurisdictions. Thus racial tensions were heightened as whites perceived such movement as a threat to their homogenous neighborhoods.

Shelley v. Kraemer signified a turning point, as the Supreme Court ruled that explicitly racially restrictive covenants were unenforceable in court.²² Yet the damage had been done, at least in the psyches of whites who had become convinced that a black presence in a white neighborhood would lower the value of their homes. *Shelley v. Kraemer* would be tested in Kansas City, Missouri, soon after the Supreme Court's decision. A case was filed that involved fourteen owners of eight properties on East Twenty-Ninth Street who alleged the sale of property to a black family, Mr. and Mrs. Rueben S. Street, lowered the value of their homes. As such, the aforementioned fourteen homeowners were seeking over one hundred thousand dollars in damages from James Leason and his former wife Erma Leason, the white family who sold their property to the Streets.²³ The case, which eventually made its way before the Missouri Supreme Court, was significant. The state Supreme Court ruled that the Leasons could be sued for breach of contract, in effect suggesting that the restrictive covenant was not enforceable against the Streets, but the Leasons could be sued for breach of contract in selling the property to the Streets in violation of the restrictive covenant: "under the facts of this case, we hold that according to the law as we now understand it, the trial court may hear and determine an action for damages for the breach of the restriction agreement in question between plaintiffs and defendants without violating any

²² *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

²³ "Delay in Home Suit," *Kansas City Star*, 14 June 1948, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 343.

provision of the federal or state constitutions.”²⁴ Following the Missouri Supreme Court’s ruling, Carl R. Johnson, president of the Kansas City, Missouri, NAACP, suggested that whites would refuse to sell their homes to blacks out of fear of being sued by their neighbors. Indeed, just days after Johnson’s comments, a white woman, Ms. Flinn, brought suit against another white woman, Mrs. Clark, on the grounds that she was in breach of the Santa Fe Place neighborhood agreement when she sold her property to a black family, Mr. and Mrs. E. S. Dottrey.²⁵ Violence and intimidation, too, continued as whites seemed to stop at nothing in order to prevent blacks from ruining the homogeneity of their neighborhoods.

Further complicating the African American quest for fair housing was downtown redevelopment or what was otherwise known as “black removal,” which destroyed black-owned small businesses and black residences and displaced blacks into crowded and deteriorating housing.²⁶ In 1948, the City Plan Commission recommended redevelopment.²⁷ Spurred by the Housing Act of 1949, which provided federal financing for slum clearance and urban renewal, Kansas City was, as were many American cities, swept into the redevelopment fervor. It became clear soon after the passage of the Housing Act of 1949 that there were no houses available for persons displaced, a group consisting almost entirely of people of color, whose access to housing was severely limited.²⁸ Kansas City redevelopment resulted in bulldozing low-income housing and replacing them with new

²⁴ “To Appeal Housing Decision,” *Kansas City Call*, 23 December 1949, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 343.

²⁵ “Sues over Home Sale,” *Kansas City Call*, 31 December 1949, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 343.

²⁶ Alvin Brooks, conversation with author, 31 October 2012.

²⁷ “The Spirit of Freedom.”

²⁸ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

public facilities and middle-income housing. At the conclusion of the first eleven urban renewal projects, over eleven thousand persons had been displaced from their homes, and over half of them were low-income blacks. The Office of Housing and Community Development noted that housing difficulties resulting from urban renewal were never satisfactorily decided: “The failures of urban renewal redevelopment projects are the personal and family histories of people who were forced out and could find no better place to live.”²⁹ As part of the redevelopment, Kansas City subsequently used public housing, segregated public housing no less, to accommodate the displaced downtown residents. Thus, blacks were placed primarily at T. B Watkins Homes and Wayne Miner.³⁰ Wayne Miner, in particular, would become infamous for its dilapidated features and crime-ridden existence; it was a vertical slum of sorts.³¹ Housing would remain a profoundly problematic domain for African Americans for decades beyond the Housing Act of 1949, but by the early 1950s there was hope among many in the African American community that the public sector, including schools, might be ripe for change.

Brown v. Board of Education and Destruction of the Dual System, 1952-1954

During the first Kansas City Conference on Human Relations in March of 1953, a topic of serious consideration was how to work out, in advance of court order or legislative enactment, the smooth transition to integrated schools.³² As part of the discussion, “subordinate problems” were many and varied, such as considering how to integrate all of

²⁹ “The Spirit of Freedom,” 38.

³⁰ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

³¹ Alvin Brooks, conversation with author, 31 October 2012.

³² “Inventory of Intergroup Education Problems,” Paper presented at the Kansas City Conference on Human Relations (March 1953), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 306.

the black teachers into the integrated school system and how to prepare both white and black children for integration. To be sure, the early 1950s were ushering in some significant societal changes, but they were not without resistance. In 1952, a *Kansas City Call* article covered the opening of public facilities to blacks:

In granting that Negroes have the same right to enjoy public facilities as other citizens, the decision is another in a growing list of court rulings against the “separate but equal” philosophy. It is another indication that there is no practical method by which separate facilities can achieve actual equality.³³

The one exception to the integration of public facilities was the Swope Park Pool, which was ordered integrated after three black citizens filed suit in federal court. Upon the decision of Judge Albert A. Ridge, the Board of Park Commissioners voted to close the pool for the 1952 season rather than admit African Americans.³⁴ The following year, however, the pool was opened to blacks and whites on an integrated basis, and the Swope Park Pool operated without incident, which eventually led to the integration of all swimming and wading pools “to all persons of all races.”³⁵ So with the integration of the swimming pools, the last of the public facilities to integrate, all public-owned facilities in Kansas City were theoretically open to all races and operating without racial discrimination. The public schools of Kansas City, Missouri, as well, were undergoing a transformation from a dual system to an integrated one following the groundbreaking *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.³⁶

³³ “Another Step Nearer Real Democracy,” *Kansas City Call*, 18 April 1952.

³⁴ “City Sets Poor Example for Citizens,” *Kansas City Call*, 6 June 1952, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

³⁵ “All Pools Are Open,” *Kansas City Call*, 27 May 1955, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 303.

³⁶ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347, U.S. 483 (1954).

In the late 1940s, under the leadership of Legal Defense Fund Director Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP began a struggle to end the segregation of American educational institutions. But the thought of confronting segregation in the white-dominated courts was resisted among some in the NAACP leadership, and questions lingered: What would desegregation of schools really mean in practice? Would desegregation destroy black teachers and black institutions, including schools?³⁷ Such thinking largely stemmed from the notion that the NAACP should challenge inequality and not segregation, instead working to ensure the equal part of separate-but-equal. W. E. B. Du Bois, a founder of the NAACP, was initially in favor of integration, but by the mid-1930s had come to question the logic of combating segregation, which he expressed in *Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?*:

The question which I am discussing is: Are these separate schools and institutions needed? And the answer, to my mind, is perfectly clear. They are needed just so far as they are necessary for the proper education of the Negro race. The proper education of any people includes sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class group.³⁸

Du Bois's ideas about schools, however, never commanded majority support, and the NAACP committed itself to fighting Jim Crow and segregated schools, emphasizing that segregated schools featured glaring inequalities.

In *Sweatt v. Painter* and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, the Supreme Court essentially banned racial separation in state colleges, suggesting that it violated the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.³⁹ Yet, there was uncertainty at the time as

³⁷ Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

³⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools," *Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935), 328.

³⁹ *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* 339 U.S. 627 (1950); *Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 (1950).

to whether such a principle could be applied to elementary and secondary education. In 1952, however, five cases—originating in Kansas, Delaware, Virginia, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia—challenged segregation within school systems that required segregated schools by constitutional or statutory mandate or provided for permissive segregation at the behest of local school boards⁴⁰ Each of the five cases was appealed to the Supreme Court, and in 1952, the cases were combined into *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.⁴¹ The named plaintiff, Oliver Brown, had a daughter, Linda Brown, who had to walk blocks to her segregated elementary school in Topeka, Kansas, but a white school was nearer her house. When Oliver Brown pushed for his daughter to be admitted into the white school, she was denied entry. Thus, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was initiated.

On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren read the Court’s unanimous opinion, in which he stated: “Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.”⁴² It was a decision that gave credence to the NAACP’s trial strategy, whereby they relied mostly on the testimony of social scientists to bolster the claim that separate schools were harmful in a variety of ways. The arguments stemmed from the harm and benefit thesis and the work of Kenneth Clark, which included the following: self-esteem of black children was low in segregated schools and that segregation led black children to be prejudiced toward whites; segregation had negative effects on learning, as black children achieved at

⁴⁰ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*.

⁴¹ Levine, *African Americans and Civil Rights*.

⁴² *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

lower levels than white children; segregation placed a physical burden on black children, as the distance traveled to attend school was often far; segregation was psychologically damaging for black children because it caused frustration, apathy, and hostility; segregation established a necessary precondition for prejudice; and, classifying students by race was not justifiable.⁴³ With the High Court's ruling that segregated education violated the black citizens' constitutional right to equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment, the dual school systems of more than half of the United States, including, Missouri, were drastically altered.

Not surprisingly, the Deep South began to criticize the *Brown* ruling almost immediately following the Court's decision. In fact, Southern governors, in anticipation of desegregation and well before the Supreme Court ruling even occurred, were vowing to defy desegregation. Upon the Court's decision, Georgia Governor Herman Tallmadge assumed a clear stance of non-cooperation, stating, "I am calling the State Education Commission into immediate session to map a program to ensure continued and permanent segregation of the races."⁴⁴ In South Carolina, lawmakers had been empowered by public referendum to convert the public schools to private schools where they saw fit. Governor Hugh White of Mississippi said that he was "sad" and "disappointed" with the Court's ruling, and Walter Sillers, speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, suggested the state get out of the education business altogether. An Alabama lawmaker recommended that a television be

⁴³ Walter Stephan, "A Brief Historical Overview of School Desegregation," in *School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future*, eds. Walter Stephan and Joe Feagin (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), 3-22.

⁴⁴ "Mississippi Governor 'Sad, Disappointed,'" *Kansas City Call*, 21 May 1954, 1.

used to teach Alabama children so as to avoid the physical integration of white and black students in Alabama.⁴⁵

Clearly, the so-called Solid South's general reaction to *Brown* was one of open disobedience. *Brown II*, in which the Court convened to order its directives, did little to enforce compliance in the South, leaving implementation to be settled by local federal district courts—courts that were operated by native white Southerners.⁴⁶ Moreover, a vague and ambiguous timetable was presented, in which the Court suggested desegregation be done “with all deliberate speed.”⁴⁷ The flexible standard of implementation was a result of recognition among the Court that local circumstances varied considerably, but by leaving it to the discretion of the states, reaction varied from immediate compliance to complete obstinacy. In the South Carolina case, *Briggs v. Elliott*, a South Carolina District Court stated the following:

It is important that we point out exactly what the Supreme Court has decided and what it has not decided in this case. It has not decided that the federal courts are to take over or regulate the public schools of the states. It has not decided that the states must mix persons of different races in the schools or must require them to attend schools or must deprive them of the right of choosing the schools they attend. What it has decided, and all that it has decided, is that a state may not deny to any person on account of race the right to attend any school that it maintains....[I]f the schools which it maintains are open to children of all races, no violation of the Constitution is involved even though the children of different races voluntarily attend different schools, as they attend different churches. Nothing in the Constitution or in the decision of the Supreme Court takes away from people freedom to choose the schools they attend. The Constitution, in other words, does not require integration. It merely forbids discrimination.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁶ Brian J. Daugherty and Charles C. Bolton, *With All Deliberate Speed: Implementing Brown v. Board of Education* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008).

⁴⁷ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

⁴⁸ *Briggs v. Elliott*, 132 F. Supp. 776 (1955), 777.

Freedom of choice plans would most certainly prove to be an effective means by which many states in the South were able to avoid real desegregation.⁴⁹ It became clear almost immediately following the *Brown II* implementation decision that the South was going to resist desegregation, whether through outward resistance or more covert methods veiled in misleading language, such as freedom of choice.

The response outside of the South was decidedly different, most notably in the Border States. The Border States, Southern states that did not secede from the union, included Missouri, West Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Delaware. It took Baltimore, Maryland's Board of Education only two weeks to unanimously approve a desegregation plan, and Washington, D.C., and Wilmington, Delaware, also commenced desegregation almost immediately following the *Brown* decision.⁵⁰ In Missouri, a similar pattern was followed.

Missouri State Commissioner of Education, Hubert Wheeler, like many, began planning for the *Brown* ruling before it had been decided. In March of 1954, Wheeler wrote a memo, in which he said:

In Missouri we shall most certainly want to examine carefully the ruling of the United States Supreme Court in regard to white and negro education. Any statement previous to the study of the ruling of the Court must be general in nature. Should the Supreme Court rule that the states may continue the segregation of negro and white students, our Constitution and statutes now make provisions for such segregation. If the United States Supreme Court rules against segregation, it would, I suppose, nullify that portion of our Constitution and our state laws as now established in Missouri.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

⁵⁰ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*.

⁵¹ Hubert Wheeler, "U.S. Supreme Court Ruling on Segregation in the Public Schools" (March 1954), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 310.

Then, just following the Supreme Court's decision on June 15, 1954, in a letter to county and district superintendents, Wheeler expressed the board's desire to implement the *Brown* decision "to the fullest extent of its authority and jurisdiction" but cautioned that a decision by Attorney General John M. Dalton would be necessary before proceeding.⁵² Just days after Wheeler's letter, Attorney General Dalton stated the following regarding desegregation in Missouri:

[I]t is the opinion of the office that the provisions of the Missouri Constitution and statutes, relating to separate schools for white and colored children are superseded by the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States and are, therefore, unenforceable, and that school districts may at the present time permit white and colored children to attend the same schools.⁵³

For most Missouri towns, by virtue of the small numbers of black students, the decision to desegregate did not involve any major realignment. In fact, the cost of maintaining a dual system for these small rural towns was often burdensome, so it is likely that in some ways, at least from a sheer financial position, the *Brown* decision was a bit of a relief. For larger cities, St. Louis and Kansas City in particular, desegregation would require forethought and planning. St. Louis was especially quick to announce its desegregation plan, which it began implementing in September of 1954 and continued in phases through September of 1955.⁵⁴ As St. Louis announced its plan, the Kansas City, Missouri School District Research Department began considering its options.

⁵² Hubert Wheeler, Missouri State Commissioner of Education, to District and County Superintendents (15 June 1954), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 310.

⁵³ Hubert Wheeler, Missouri State Commissioner of Education memo to District and County Administrators, regarding "Opinion of Attorney General John M. Dalton in reference to Decision of U.S. Supreme Court on Segregation in the Public Schools" (1 July 1954), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 310.

⁵⁴ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*.

A July 15, 1954 report titled, “A Study of the Problems Involved in the Desegregation of the Public Schools in Kansas City” presented district leadership with three possible options: delay desegregation until further word from the Supreme Court, desegregate all schools beginning in September of 1954, or initiate a program of gradual desegregation in September 1954 and proceed systematically over a period of time.⁵⁵ At the time of the report, the Kansas City, Missouri School District had already desegregated summer school classes. Despite the fact that summer school was only offered at two schools, Westport and Lincoln High Schools, and that the vast majority of black summer school students—all but three—would attend Lincoln, the act was small but symbolic, revealing that Kansas City was going to take the *Brown* decision seriously.⁵⁶ With regard to the larger desegregation plan, like St. Louis, the Kansas City, Missouri School District opted for a gradual approach and consequently initiated a desegregation plan with two phases. The first phase was to commence the 1954-1955 school year by transferring students at the previously all-black Lincoln Junior College to the Kansas City Junior College at Thirty-Ninth Street and McGee. Additionally, the vocational divisions of R. T. Coles Vocational School would be transferred to the formerly all-white Manual Vocational School. The R.T. Coles building, then, would become the site for an integrated seventh and eighth grade junior high.⁵⁷ It was noted in the annual reports to the superintendent for the 1954-1955 school year that initial

⁵⁵ “A Study in the Problems Involved in the Desegregation in the Public Schools of Kansas City,” Kansas City, Missouri School District Research Department (July 1954), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 310.

⁵⁶ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*, 14.

⁵⁷ Policies for Transition from System of Separate Schools to Desegregated School System, Superintendent’s Office (March 1955), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 310.

efforts of desegregation “were managed very successfully on both the student and faculty levels.”

The second phase, then, was planned to begin in September of 1955, meaning the 1955-1956 school year would be the first official year of full-blown desegregation. Phase two, therefore, was to include the desegregation of the entire Kansas City, Missouri School District. Lastly, the school district emphasized the need to establish and publicize boundary lines of all schools “as soon as possible.”⁵⁸

Not everyone was satisfied with the district’s course of action. Lewis Clymer, Chairman of the Education Committee of the Kansas City Urban League, and Lee Reader, Chairman of the Commission on Human Relations, made several suggestions to the Kansas City School Board, and both individuals offered their respective organization’s services, only to be told that they were not needed. In a letter dated May 25, 1954, from Lewis Clymer to Ray Joslyn, President of the Kansas City, Missouri School District’s Board of Education, Clymer formally offered support in planning the desegregation plan, but Kansas City, Missouri school officials declined. It appears that district leadership relied solely on their own people to devise the desegregation plan, a strategy that would routinely be employed and a policy that continued to especially anger black Kansas Citians. Despite their unwillingness to consult with anyone on the outside, the Kansas City, Missouri School District had decided on a course of action, and in the fall of 1955, it was time for implementation.⁵⁹

Desegregation in the Kansas City, Missouri School District, 1955-1962

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Lewis Clymer, Urban League of Kansas City, to Lewis Clymer, Chair Education Committee (May 1954), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 306.

As Gwendolyn Adams prepared for her first day of school in September of 1955, her sophomore year, a feeling of dread overcame her. This was not the sense of uncertainty or trepidation that often accompanies a first day of school. This was different. Adams was angry. She was angry because she felt as though she was being forced to leave a school and community that she knew and enjoyed only to attend a different school, a school that seemed ever so distant. Adams was among the first of Kansas City's black students to enter a formerly all-white high school, as she was transferred from Lincoln High School to Central High School in 1955. The importance of the moment was of little concern to fifteen-year-old Gwendolyn Adams. Foremost on Adams's mind was the school, as well as teachers and friends, whom she would leave behind at Lincoln:

When you are outside of it now and looking in that was, well... a piece of history. My mother talked to me, you know, and she told me how to behave and how to, you know, what it was all about and this is a big step for you. That went in one ear and out the other because I was of the mindset I don't want to be here; I don't want to go. So all of the positives that were given to me, they weren't registering at all. And I'm used to all black teachers and people that I know and I could go to Mrs. Fox—I remember this one teacher. She was just... I loved her to death. She would send out for lunch to get French fries and hamburgers and stuff. You're not going to get that at Central. Come on! But the first year I was very angry, and my grades failed. But I wasn't a failing student.... And so my mother sat down and she talked to me again about it and she had been talking to me all along.... But my life was too peaceful—I was happy where I was, you know⁶⁰

Adams was describing what many black students felt at all-black institutions, a very real feeling of comfort and belonging, a sense of community. It was the institutional caring she became accustomed to at Lincoln High School that she feared losing when she was transferred to Central in the spirit of desegregation, and with good reason. Adams noted feeling uncomfortable or out of place at Central during her first couple of years, and it had much to do with her teachers:

⁶⁰ Gwendolyn Adams, conversation with author, 18 September 2012.

I don't think it was just me, but I didn't feel a lot coming from my teachers....I'm not used to teachers being aloof and just handing paper and do this. No communication. No nothing outside of school....I think that there were teachers who were there that did not want to because of the way they interacted with us.⁶¹

While the transition for Adams was most certainly a difficult one, aside from the occasional tiff or argument, it was not violent, something Kansas City's district leaders had feared.

With the initiation of widespread desegregation in the fall of 1955, Kansas City, Missouri School District emerged as one of the examples of successful desegregation. In recounting the 1955-1956 school year, a 1956 *Kansas City Star* article suggested that, despite some tension, racial integration had "proceeded smoothly."⁶² A *Kansas City Call* article expressed similar sentiments:

The public schools of Kansas City, Missouri are more integrated than it was anticipated last spring they would be. Forty-three out of a total of 92 schools have both white and negro pupils enrolled. The Kansas City school board has done well as far as the integration of students is concerned.⁶³

Desegregation in Kansas City avoided a major incident and did, in fact, unfold rather uneventfully throughout the fall of 1955. However, the quality and extent of the early efforts of Superintendent James A. Hazlett, the school board, and district leadership were questionable.

The public face of Kansas City's desegregation effort, whether rightly or wrongly, became Superintendent Hazlett, who was hired in 1955 after serving as Director of the Kansas City, Missouri School District's Research Department from 1951 to 1955. Hazlett's rise to superintendency was described by a 1955 article in the *Central Luminary* as a

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "A Big Year for the Schools," *Kansas City Star*, 4 June 1956, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public.

⁶³ "43 Integrated Schools," *Kansas City Call*, 22 September 1955, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 306.

“success story.”⁶⁴ A Kansas City native, Hazlett attended Kansas City, Missouri School District schools from kindergarten through junior college, before obtaining his master’s degree at Kansas City University. Hazlett then went on to serve as both a teacher and principal in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. He taught at various elementary schools between 1938 and 1945 and then was principal from 1945 to 1951. As a result of his intimate relationship with the Kansas City, Missouri School District (as student, teacher, and building-level, as well as central office administrator) Hazlett did indeed know the problems of the Kansas City schools, and it appears that he was honing his leadership skills from an early age, having participated as Paseo High School’s senior class president, student council president, and member of the National Honor Society.⁶⁵ He most certainly needed leadership acumen to navigate the challenges of desegregation in Kansas City, and he would be tested early and often in his tenure.

Among the first of the challenges Hazlett faced was the plight of the black teacher. Interestingly, when asked in 1955 the biggest problem facing the Kansas City, Missouri School District, Hazlett suggested that it was the teacher shortage.⁶⁶ The fact that Hazlett did not claim desegregation as the biggest problem is likely a result of the fact that he did not view desegregation at that point as problematic. After all, reports in 1955 were that desegregation in Kansas City was proceeding as well as could have been expected. Thus, the teacher shortage, which was resulting in substitute teachers in full-time assignments, was in

⁶⁴ *Central Luminary*, 23 September 1955, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

part seen as an issue of teacher pay. An Independent Educational Association, Inc. report noted in 1953 the need for an increase in teacher pay:

In the late 1920s and the 1930s a number of school systems paid maximum salaries for classroom teachers up to \$4500 and \$4600. Today, about \$8650 would be needed to equal in purchasing power a pre-war salary (1935-39) of \$4500....The proposed minimum scale of \$3600 to \$8200 represents what a range of \$1872 to \$4264 would have meant in pre-war years.⁶⁷

The issue of teacher pay was particularly acute in Kansas City. Teachers in the Kansas City, Missouri School District were, as of 1960, paid less than teachers in all of the thirteen districts in and around Kansas City, except Lee's Summit, and on a national stage, Kansas City, Missouri, ranked 78th out of 121 of the largest American cities in beginning teacher pay. Beginning teachers in the thirty-three highest-paying cities were making over one thousand dollars more than Kansas City's beginning teachers.⁶⁸ The teacher shortage, which was certainly a result of low compensation, infuriated black Kansas Citians. While Hazlett was claiming there were not enough teachers to fill Kansas City, Missouri's, classrooms, Kansas City's black teachers, many of whom lost their jobs with the closure of black schools, were having great difficulty in finding work in the newly desegregated Kansas City, Missouri School District.

Following the *Brown* decision, black teachers across the country lost their jobs. Many of these teachers were better educated and more experienced than their white counterparts, yet black teachers were the first to be dismissed and the last to be hired. This was most certainly true in Kansas City, which sparked a flurry of articles and editorials written in the *Kansas City Call* in 1955 addressing the black teacher's struggle. One such

⁶⁷ Kansas City, Missouri School District Research Department, "To Respondents to Our Salary Questionnaires" (December 1953), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Hazlett Papers.

⁶⁸ "City is Losing Top Teachers," *Kansas City Star*, 28 September 1960, 1A.

article in January of 1955 posed the question, “How much longer is the Kansas City board of education going to fail to employ new Negro teachers?”⁶⁹ Another such article stated the following:

The Kansas City board of education is not being fair. For more than a year now, it has failed to hire new Negro teachers on a regular basis, although hundreds of new white teachers have been brought into the system. The excuses given this time last year for not hiring Negro teachers was that a large number of regular teachers were on leave and their places had to be held open for them. New Negro teachers brought into the system were given “reserve” status and served all year without contract... Apparently, the board has adopted a policy of hiring no more Negro teachers, no matter how well qualified they might be.⁷⁰

A variety of tricks were employed to keep black teachers out of classrooms. In the South, particularly in Virginia, thirty-day contracts were implemented, whereby a teacher would have to sign a new contract every month, empowering the school district to get rid of black teachers at will. A similar technique, though not a thirty-day contract, was used in Kansas City, Missouri, where many black teachers were placed on “reserve” and thus not offered a contract. In many cases, however, black teachers were simply dismissed.⁷¹ By 1961, the Missouri Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights estimated that 125 to 150 black teachers in Missouri had, as a result of initial desegregation, lost their employment. Understandably, Kansas City’s black community was angered at the Kansas City, Missouri School District’s unwillingness to meaningfully address the issue. While the struggle of black teachers and black administrators would continue for years, it

⁶⁹ “Time to Hire Teachers,” *Kansas City Call*, 24 January 1955, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 306.

⁷⁰ “Are Our Teachers ‘Frozen’ Out,” *Kansas City Call*, 8 July 1955, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 306.

⁷¹ “All Kinds of Tricks against Teachers,” *Kansas City Call*, 6 May 1955, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 306.

was one of two major complaints in the immediate aftermath of *Brown* and would eventually become one of many criticisms confronted by the school district.

The other issue originating with initial desegregation efforts was that of student transfers. School officials in Kansas City determined that desegregation could be most readily achieved through the dissolution of the dual attendance zones, which under de jure segregation kept black and white students separate. Often, black students lived closer to white schools than the black schools, but black students would have to walk past the white schools in order to get to their respective black school. Alvin Brooks vividly recalled his days walking past the neighborhood white school, which was only several blocks from his house, to get to Dunbar. He described how he and his black friends would often walk to school with white kids from the neighborhood: “They’d [white students] stop, and we’d keep on going...and catch the Thirty-First Street street-car and then go to Vine and catch the bus.”⁷² With the destruction of the dual system and the insistence of the Kansas City, Missouri School District to keep a neighborhood concept intact, theoretically Kansas City, Missouri’s, black students would attend the school nearest their house. As was the case with Brooks, many black students would attend formerly all-white schools, and conversely, many white students would be slotted to attend former all-black schools. While the district did spend months considering and re-drawing district attendance lines, much of it was veiled in secrecy. In the end, however, the Kansas City, Missouri School District did rely on geographical zoning in their attempt to integrate the schools, a decision that upheld the *Brown* mandate to dissolve the former system of segregation and provide assignment of

⁷² Alvin Brooks, conversation with author, 31 October 2012.

students on a non-discriminatory basis. Such an approach, nevertheless, seriously limited the effectiveness of the effort.

The district desegregation plan included the continuation of the longstanding and liberal transfer policy: “The Board approves the continuation of the established practices of granting transfers, provided that no transfers shall be issued to schools where, in the judgment of the Superintendent of Schools, capacity of the building has been reached.”⁷³ Transfers were subsequently granted for a variety of reasons, including the following: to take a course of study not offered at the school of the resident district; to take advantage of convenient transportation; to complete one’s senior year or part of any year, where a pupil was previously enrolled; to avoid perilous traffic situations; to make for a better pupil adjustment; and to permit continuation in the junior high school.⁷⁴ Indeed, the district did close schools that were above capacity, but students who wanted to transfer to schools that were below capacity, were essentially free to do so, regardless of race. The school district, in fact, did not inquire about a student’s race on the application so as to avoid preferential treatment.⁷⁵ As such, the liberal transfer policy became the primary vehicle by which white students avoided initial desegregation efforts. Although the *Brown* decision seemingly ushered in a new age in American schooling, the transfer policy, coupled with the district’s shifting of boundaries and growing residential segregation, all but guaranteed that the students of the Kansas City, Missouri School District would remain segregated. Central High School, which went from one hundred percent white during the 1954-1955 school

⁷³ Policies for Transition from Separate Schools to Desegregated School System, Superintendent’s Office (6 March 1955), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 310, 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷⁵ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*.

year, the last year of segregated schooling, to just under ninety-eight percent black during the 1961-1962 school year, reveals the complexities of the situation and the importance of the schooling-housing nexus, in particular, in the southeastern neighborhoods of Kansas City, Missouri.⁷⁶

Central High School and Its Neighborhoods, 1955-1962

In Central's first year as a desegregated school, 1955-1956, it was twenty-eight percent black. This increased to just over forty-one percent black during the 1956-1957 school year, and in 1957-1958 Central was for the first time majority black, nearly fifty-eight percent. The trend continued until in 1960, when the formerly all-white Central High School reached over ninety-five percent black, and would remain thereafter at least ninety-eight percent black or more for the next three decades.⁷⁷ The rapid transformation of Central High School from all white to all black in a short five-year span was largely the result of a dramatic shift in residential patterns.

The Census data between 1940 and 1960 for the Central High School census tract, an area at the time that extended one-half square mile and included a population of nearly 9,000 people, mirrored that of the school. In 1940, the area was 99.6 percent white, and in 1950 it was 99.8 percent white. But by 1960, the neighborhoods around Central High School at Linwood Boulevard and Indiana Avenue were eighty-two percent black and 17.9 percent white.⁷⁸ Alvin Brooks, a police officer and resident of the Central High School attendance area in 1960 at 3336 Agnes just several blocks from Central, remembered how whites

⁷⁶ Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-1955—1983-1984, Arthur Benson, unpublished demographic data, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 567.

⁷⁷ Nineteenth Annual Report on Desegregation in the Kansas City Public Schools (1973-1974), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 452.

⁷⁸ Social Explorer Professional, 1940-1960, accessed October 12, 2013, www.socialexplorer.com.

reacted in fear to blacks moving into the area. He specifically recalled a meeting that he attended at an all-white church at Twenty-Ninth and Prospect in 1960, which he estimated attracted some four hundred people, mostly whites, to discuss the neighborhood transformation. Brooks explained that he had endured enough. He was tired of listening to his white neighbors insist that the arrival of black families were causing their property values to fall. So while at the neighborhood meeting, Brooks went to the microphone to address the crowd, a bold move considering he remembered being only one of fifteen African Americans at the meeting, but he was fed up:

Let me tell you what...you are accusing us, what, twenty-five or thirty percent of us causing your property values to go down. May I see the hands of those of you who a black person knocked on your door to buy your house? May I see your hands? How about was there a black person who came and said I'm going to shoot you with gun in hand unless you get out?...We didn't cause your property values to go down. You caused it to go down....You fell right into the racist trap. And when they said to you 'look who's coming in. You better move out.' We didn't tell you 'you better move out.' None of us knocked on your door and said we're going to sell your home or you got to sell your home. Nobody knocked on your door with a gun in their hand and said you better get out.⁷⁹

Brooks was right. White residents were not being forced out; they were choosing to leave, but their decisions were being influenced by the tactics of realtors looking to make fast money. Despite the efforts of those like Brooks who were willing to confront whites seeking to leave the area at any cost, the flight continued at a rapid pace throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1954, Thomas L. Gillette, a master's student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Kansas City, wrote a master's thesis titled, "Santa Fe: A Study of the Effects of Negro Invasion on Property Values." Gillette stated the impetus of the study was the "recent and quite rapid expansion of the Negro population in the city and the accompanying

⁷⁹ Alvin Brooks, conversation with author, 31 October 2012.

increase in awareness of intergroup hostility.”⁸⁰ The Santa Fe neighborhood of Kansas City is currently and was historically bound by Twenty-Seventh Street to the north, Linwood to the south, Prospect to the east, and Indiana to the west.⁸¹ In the early 1950s, as it had for decades previously, Twenty-Seventh Street served as a division between white residents and black residents. Very few blacks lived south of Twenty-Seventh Street prior to the 1950s, but in the 1950s, the Twenty-Seventh Street divide began to dissolve. Between 1950 and 1960, the white population of southeast Kansas City, Missouri, went from 126,229 to 88,986. The total population during the same time period, however, only decreased from 169,047 to 163,119, but the white population fell from roughly seventy-five to fifty-five percent of the total.⁸² Conversely, the black population in the same area expanded from 41,348 to 73,788, growth that resulted in a percentage increase from twenty-four to beyond forty-five.⁸³ As whites fled the southeast area of Kansas City, Missouri, and blacks moved in, Twenty-Seventh Street no longer served as a dividing line. In its wake, however, a new and equally stringent line of demarcation occupied its place: Troost Avenue.

As the first black families moved south of Twenty-Seventh Street and into the southeastern part of Kansas City, Missouri, white residents reacted with violence. In fact, the house of the first black family to move to Twenty-Seventh and Paseo was bombed in May of 1952. The May bombing resulted in only minimal damage, but the house became a target again in September of the same year. The second bombing caused considerable damage, and

⁸⁰ Thomas Gillette, “Santa Fe: A Study of the Effects of Negro Invasion on Property Values” (Master’s thesis, 1954), 1.

⁸¹ Kansas City, City Planning and Development Department, City of Kansas City, Missouri, “Santa Fe Neighborhood Assessment Report” (July 2001), Missouri Valley Special Collections.

⁸² Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 95.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

the black family who had moved into the 2700 block of Paseo was under a constant barrage of threats and torments.⁸⁴ The white response to black families crossing Twenty-Seventh Street was obviously one born of racism and prejudice, where whites viewed homogenous white neighborhoods as superior. The fear, then, among whites that blacks would devalue their property resulted initially in pushback in the way of violence and threats, but eventually whites simply left. White flight was in large part the result of the actions of deceitful realtors.

Beginning in the 1950s, Troost Avenue became a racially identifiable boundary between white and black. This was, in part, a result of the discriminatory actions of Kansas City, Missouri School District leaders who used Troost Avenue as a school boundary between black and white schools, whereby black schools were located to the east of Troost and white schools to the west.⁸⁵ This separation occurred almost immediately following the *Brown* decision in 1954, and by 1970, all elementary and secondary schools east of Troost Avenue were ninety percent or more black, and every elementary and secondary school west of Troost was less than fifty percent black.⁸⁶ By virtue of its location, just south of Twenty-Seventh Street and east of Troost, Central High School was one of the first schools to undergo a swift transformation from all white to all black. With the school district's use of Troost Avenue as a racially identifiable school boundary in the post-*Brown* period, residents began to associate neighborhoods east of Troost as black neighborhoods and neighborhoods west of Troost as white neighborhoods. Realtors, too, in the mid-1950s began using Troost

⁸⁴ Gillette, "Santa Fe," 3.

⁸⁵ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

as a racial dividing line and thus marketed houses for sale east of Troost to blacks only, further solidifying the notion that black neighborhoods were more unstable than white neighborhoods and thus needed to be separate. It was the use of blockbusting techniques among Kansas City realtors however, that ultimately led to large numbers of whites leaving the neighborhoods of southeast Kansas City, Missouri.

Realtors literally went door-to-door to encourage whites to sell their homes and flee the impending black movement and subsequent racial succession of the neighborhood, and whites took the bait. Almost immediately following the sale of a single house to a black family, the entire block of whites would follow, vulnerable to realtors' fear tactics as a result of prejudice and racism—truly believing that the presence of a black family in a white neighborhood would result in declining property values, crime, and general neighborhood malaise. Blockbusting, indeed, proved to be a useful and lucrative tactic, and it was no secret to residents of the southeast area. A 1955 editorial in the *Kansas City Call* claimed that the over-zealousness of realtors was a central factor in the inability to build interracial neighborhoods.⁸⁷ While blockbusting and panic selling were having a profound impact on neighborhoods throughout the southeast area in the 1950s and 1960s, some residents decided to take on the real estate industry themselves, including one neighborhood around Central High School.⁸⁸

In 1955, a pastor of the Southeast Presbyterian Church, Pastor Earl T. Sturgess, attempted to halt white flight from his neighborhood near Central High School by placing a

⁸⁷ "A Good Plan Sabotaged," *Kansas City Call*, 7 October 1955, 20.

⁸⁸ Brown and Dorsett, *A History of Kansas City, Missouri*.

sign in his yard and his neighbors that read “not for sale.”⁸⁹ The My Home is Not for Sale campaign, which promoted interracial neighborhoods, gained appeal in various neighborhoods around Kansas City and even received national notoriety at one point, but the forces of racism and prejudice were too great. Sturgess’s campaign was relatively short-lived, and despite efforts of opposition to panic selling, whites continued to leave the southeast area in search of homogenous neighborhoods in the suburbs, and blacks kept moving into the area in search of better and bigger houses. Thus, Central High School, situated prominently in Kansas City, Missouri’s, southeast side just beyond Twenty-Seventh Street, became the first school to undergo a total resegregation: all white in 1955, Central was all black in 1962.

It was business as usual at Central during the 1955-1956 school year. Interestingly, very little about desegregation is covered in the student newspaper, *The Luminary*, over the course of the entire academic year. The only mention of race in the paper occurs in the March 1956 edition, in which a section titled “Human Relations Ledger” was introduced. The ledger was seemingly created to cover both the good and the bad, or so-called “Liabilities” and “Assets” of the school.⁹⁰ The March 23, 1956 ledger includes four separate “liabilities,” each occurring on a different day and having to do with a racial incident involving Central students. One incident involved a junior high student having thrown a firecracker that exploded near a white boy, which then led to a fight on school grounds; another had to do with a group of white male students who resented the presence of blacks at Central and tried to organize a strike to protest integration; still another resulted in unknown

⁸⁹ Ibid., 256.

⁹⁰ *Central Luminary*, 23 March 1956, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 3.

persons affixing a “Ku Klux cross” to Central’s flagpole and setting it ablaze; lastly, a group of black students, both boys and girls, allegedly tried to “cause trouble” as home-going students left Central at the end of school.⁹¹ The “Asset” portion, like the “Liability” section, included separate incidents having involved Central students, but this time they are celebratory: the first “Asset” described how a black student was applauded by Central students for her solo performance; the next discussed how a black student in the girls’ choir performed a solo at a performance at the First Baptist Church in Independence; and the last explained how black and white band members at Central cooperated to make the Annual Band Festival a success.⁹² The absence of substantial coverage regarding desegregation in the student newspaper at Central High School is interesting and most likely a deliberate effort to downplay its significance. Presumably, Central’s white administrators, faculty, and student body were not interested in highlighting stories about Central’s new black students.

Meanwhile, Central’s black students, a mere ten percent of the student population during the 1955-1956 school year, were trying to adapt to their new and unfamiliar surroundings. Lyle Davis, Jr., a sophomore in 1955 and one of the pioneering black students at Central, recalled the peculiarity of his new, mostly white school: “I walk in that first day, and I see all these white kids. They look so much older. Here I am a little black kid walking in there.”⁹³ Davis, Jr. did settle in at Central and befriended white classmates, friends with whom he still keeps in touch with today, but he did not have a single black teacher during his three years at the school and remembered the first couple of years at Central as

⁹¹ Ibid., 3.

⁹² Ibid., 3.

⁹³ Lyle Davis, Jr., conversation with author, 7 November 2012.

“tough.”⁹⁴ The academic education, however, Davis, Jr. described as “great.”⁹⁵ Indeed, the social and emotional support that Davis, Jr. received from his black teachers at all-black R. T. Coles School before desegregation, he explained, was lacking among the white teachers of Central. In reference to his experiences at all-black schools with black faculty, Davis, Jr. said: “You knew the teachers [and they] seemed to be more interested.”⁹⁶ But the academic instruction at Central was “excellent,” according to Davis, Jr. He elaborated: “You asked me about the overall quality of education. It was fantastic. They [teachers] put it on you and, and they expected you to know this.”⁹⁷ Central students had long prided themselves on academic excellence, and the spirit of such continued forward after 1955.

In 1960, the Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences listed Central High School first in high schools within the state of Missouri in numbers of its alumni among 1958 doctorates and in the top seventy-five high schools in the United States.⁹⁸ Moreover, in 1959 three Centralites placed among the highest ten thousand scores in the National Merit Qualifying Test given to more than one-half million students, and Central graduates were making names for themselves at Harvard, Yale, and MIT, as well as other top colleges.⁹⁹ This continued success led to a student editorial that stated:

How does Central rate? Let’s look for ourselves:…Central High School is the oldest in Kansas City, and as far as campus goes, it is one of the prettiest. The school’s equipment and facilities are more than adequate. It also has a wide range of subjects.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ *Central Luminary*, 1 April 1960, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

⁹⁹ *Central Luminary*, 23 October 1959, 1; 6 November 1959, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 2.

We offer four languages and six courses in English. Scholastically we rate in the top five in Kansas City and can hold our own in the state as well. Forty percent of our students attend college although a great many more have the entrance requirements, thanks to our marvelous faculty. Forty scholarships were awarded last year out of a class of 390, as compared to ten years ago when three or four scholarships were awarded out of a class of 500.¹⁰⁰

Despite the dotting students, white students were leaving “dear old Central” rapidly. The fact that Central was one of only a few schools in the Midwest offering four years in Latin, German, and Spanish, as well as courses in college-level chemistry, math, biology, and drafting, was not enough to entice white students to stay.¹⁰¹ As black families moved into the Central attendance area and black students in increasing numbers began attending Central High School, white families either found ways to transfer their children out of Central High School or simply left the area. On average, Central lost white students at a rate of roughly twenty percent per year between 1957 and 1960.¹⁰²

In September of 1958, Central’s first black administrator, Girard T. Bryant, took up his new post. Bryant was the former vice-principal at Manual High School. He had also taught in Bangkok, Thailand, and he came to Central with impressive credentials. Bryant had a bachelor’s degree from the University of Chicago and a master’s from the University of Kansas, and when he took the position as vice-principal at Central, Bryant was working toward his PhD at Washington University in St. Louis.¹⁰³ Bryant would precede Central’s new white principal, James Boyd, by a year. Boyd, a former Chemistry teacher at Central who had left Central to become Northeast High School’s vice-principal, became Central’s

¹⁰⁰ *Central Luminary*, 14 February 1958, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 3.

¹⁰¹ *Central Luminary*, 6 November, 1959, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 2.

¹⁰² Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-55—1983-1984.

¹⁰³ *Central Luminary*, 19 September 1958, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

principal in 1959, the same year that Central curiously lost twenty of its teachers to transfer.¹⁰⁴ There is no mention in the *Central Luminary* as to why the teachers left, just that “three teachers retired; three have taken a year’s leave of absence for advanced study; and 20 have transferred to other schools in Kansas City or further away.”¹⁰⁵ Many of the white teachers who transferred did so as a result of the growing number of black students who were calling Central their own. Central was over seventy percent black at the beginning of the 1959-1960 school year, and it would be ninety-nine percent black by the beginning of the 1962-1963 school year.¹⁰⁶ Central’s black students continued to perform at a very high level into the 1960s, but new challenges of growing inequalities at the behest of district leaders would confront Kansas City, Missouri’s, black students and families throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁰⁴ *Central Luminary*, 25 September 1959, Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-55—1983-1984.

CHAPTER 5

WHERE'S THE EQUALITY? THE RESEGREGATION OF THE KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI SCHOOL DISTRICT, 1962-1968

Success at Central High School, 1962-1964

Loretta Stewart, a graduate of the class of 1963, proudly and fondly remembers her time at Central High School, but Stewart's path to Central was far from easy. Her first years in Kansas City's desegregated school system were ones of extreme isolation. In reference to that first year, Stewart remembered how she was the only black student in her fifth grade class during the 1955-1956 school year immediately following Kansas City, Missouri School District's desegregation effort:

It's just the memory of the isolation, of not having anyone like me to talk to. I'll never forget the one thing that really made me understand that I really wasn't part of that school. They had a girl scout troop and I had made friends with a young lady and she and I would go to the library. She would come to my house and I would go to her house, and she was in girl scouts [too]...and, so I was like, I was all excited about joining girl scouts. This was something totally new to me. We didn't have girl scouts in my church. So, you know, I was like okay. Great! Well, a few days later she came back to me and she said: 'I'm sorry, my mom said you can't be in the girl scouts'....She told me because I wasn't white.¹

In striking contrast to her first year in a mostly all-white classroom and school, Stewart's years at segregated Kansas City, Missouri's, Charles Sumner Elementary School were anything but isolating:

I had great teachers. Everybody was concerned about us. They made sure that we understood that we were expected to give our best and to do our best....and you

¹ Loretta Stewart, conversation with author, 2 November 2012.

know we were all sort of family. Even though we might not have been actually related, there was a family atmosphere to that time.²

Stewart, explained, as well, that the collective, family atmosphere extended beyond the school walls and enveloped the community. She described that all members of the community—teachers, church leaders, parents, and neighbors—were responsible for watching out for children in the neighborhood. As a child, Stewart had visions of attending Lincoln Junior High School and Lincoln High School, the one-time segregated junior high and high school in Kansas City, Missouri, and continuing to benefit from the robust neighborhood community she so cherished. But like many black families in the mid- to late-1950s, Stewart’s family moved to a bigger house on Twenty-Ninth Street:

We were not allowed to move past Twenty-Seventh Street until I guess I must have been in seventh grade. And then we moved to Twenty-Ninth Street, which was wow! You know, we moved out South! I had my own room and the neighborhood was just...it was a nice neighborhood, and all of a sudden we looked around and all of the white people were gone. And it was a black neighborhood....In a blink of an eye.³

It was the move to Twenty-Ninth Street that ended Stewart’s dream of attending Lincoln Junior High School and Lincoln High School, and took her to Central Junior High School and Central High School instead.

Referencing her time at Central High School and the changing demographics, Stewart claimed that “there were white kids all over the place” her freshman year, in 1959, but by 1963, her senior year, she remembered two.⁴ Stewart admitted that she was not thrilled about attending high school at Central, in large part because, despite her family’s

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

move, she still hoped to reunite with her friends at Lincoln. Yet, her time at Central proved to be most enjoyable:

My, they [her teachers] were hard. They were hard on us and they pushed us. They really pushed us....I was in the upper-level classes, and so you know, they didn't give us any breaks. You did the work. I never really had a problem with my teachers...there were a good mix of instructors who were nonwhite, which makes a difference, you know. If somebody was not treating us fairly we would go in and talk to the counselor, Mr. Paulson, and talk to the principal, Mr. Boyd. Mr. Boyd listened to what we had to say."⁵

James F. Boyd, who Stewart remembered fondly, was Central High School's white principal from 1959 to 1969. In 1969, Boyd was appointed Director of Secondary Education for the Kansas City, Missouri School District and was replaced by Central's first black head principal, Cornelius Settles.⁶ Indeed, Boyd was recognized as a progressive educator by those inside and outside of the Kansas City, Missouri School District. In 1962, Boyd was one of sixty administrators chosen to receive the John Hay Fellowship at Colorado College.⁷ Additionally, that same year, Boyd was invited to speak to a Dallas, Texas school administrators' group regarding his success in leading a high school with a predominately black student population. The organization's president, Mr. S. A. Cain, said that Boyd was sought as a result of his "unusual accomplishments" with black students.⁸ The recognition was not lost on Central's students: "Because of the wonderful record that Central students have made, Central has become nationally known. For Mr. Boyd to have been chosen to speak before this organization is an honor that all in the Central-Linwood Community

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Central Luminary*, 25 September 1959; 26 September 1969, 1.

⁷ *Central Luminary*, 11 May 1962, 1.

⁸ *Central Luminary*, 21 September 1962, 1.

should be proud.”⁹ Most certainly by the early 1960s, all-black Central High School, just as it had done when it was all-white, was proving itself to be one of the best high schools in the state of Missouri.

There were two national publications in the spring and summer of 1961 that explored the successes of Central High School: *Harper’s Magazine’s* “The Good Slum Schools” and *Time Magazine’s* “Everything’s Up to Date in Kansas City.”¹⁰ Both articles were premised on the notion that there was something uniquely intriguing about Kansas City’s Central High School, a school that went from all-white to all-black and not only maintained its record of excellence, but exceeded it:

In its last years as an all-white school, Central never sent more than 15 per cent of its graduates to college, and only four or five Central kids won scholarships in an average year. Now, despite the great drop in socio-economic level, 150 out of 350 graduates go on to college, 50 of them with scholarships...In recent years, Central has sent its Negro graduates to Yale, Vassar, Smith, Oberlin, Northwestern, and Chicago, among others.¹¹

Forestal Lawton, a member of the 1962 graduating class, was one of the aforementioned successful African American students at Central. Lawton had been class president at Central Junior High School, and he carried forward to high school his leadership aspirations. At the high school, Lawton was forced to choose between class president and student council president. He chose student council president. Richard Tolbert filled the class presidency, and both Lawton and Tolbert were selected as Victor Wilson Scholars and subsequently had the opportunity to attend Yale University. Tolbert did, in fact, attend Yale,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Martin Mayer, “The Good Slum Schools,” *Harper’s Magazine* (April 1961), 46-52, Missouri Valley Special Collections, SC 73; “Everything’s Up to Date in Kansas City,” *Time Magazine* (July 1961) 78, no. 4, 38, Missouri Valley Special Collections, SC 73.

¹¹ Martin Mayer, “The Good Slum Schools.”

but Lawton, as a result of family obligations, never made it to New Haven, instead staying close to home and attending Kansas City University. Upon graduating from college, Lawton spent thirty-four successful years with the juvenile justice system from 1968 to 2002; he describes his time at Central High School as formative, shaping him into the person he has become. Lawton credits his former Central teachers for his accomplishments, most notably a teacher by the name of Dr. Jeremiah Cameron.¹²

Dr. Cameron, Lawton's memorable English teacher, was also recalled by Stewart, and, interestingly, was highlighted in the *Harper's* article, "The Good Slum Schools." In the article, Dr. Cameron was described as "handsome" and "athletic," wearing a "white shirt and tie under a half-zippered Eisenhower jacket."¹³ Dr. Cameron eventually came to be known as the "dean of Kansas City's black intellectuals," having had a successful career as both a social critic and educator.¹⁴ Stewart described Dr. Cameron as "exceptional":

Dr. Jeremiah Cameron was my English teacher. He was the roughest, hardest teacher I ever had in my life. He would embarrass us in front of everybody....He would use words that we would have to go look up in the dictionary. Because, I mean his vocabulary was that expansive.¹⁵

Like Stewart, Lawton remembered Dr. Cameron with great affection, claiming that "Jeremiah Cameron...had a lot of impact on me."¹⁶ Both Lawton and Stewart, however, explained that Dr. Cameron was one of many teachers at Central who excelled. Stewart

¹² Forestal Lawton, conversation with author, 7 November 2012.

¹³ Martin Mayer, "The Good Slum Schools."

¹⁴ Mary Beveridge, "Biography of Jeremiah Cameron," *Kansas City Star*, 2009, Missouri Valley Special Collections.

¹⁵ Loretta Stewart, conversation with author, 2 November 2012.

¹⁶ Forestal Lawton, conversation with author, 7 November 2012.

claimed that many of her teachers, black and white alike, exhibited characteristics like those of Dr. Cameron:

They [Teachers] were hard on us. They really pushed us...I never really had a problem with my teachers. One reason being because by the time that I came around, there were a good mix of instructors who were nonwhite, which makes a difference. If somebody was not treating us fairly, we would go in and talk to the counselor, and talk to the principal...and when you went to school, you were ready for it. There were no excuses. No exceptions.¹⁷

Lawton, too, expressed regard for his black and white teachers:

With the black and white teachers, there was a lot of stress towards being academically prepared, and so...that was another big influence on me. We had a lot of students who had college scholarships. Went off to college and things of that nature. So high school was really a very positive experience for me. Like I said, I attribute some of the things that I have accomplished in life to the background that I had at Central.

Central students found success in large part because of the quality teachers that Lawton and Stewart so affectionately described. “Central’s youngsters,” the *Time* article suggested, “are marching not only into junior colleges but also to Yale, Smith, Vassar, Oberlin and Chicago.”¹⁸

As a result of Central High School’s progressive reputation, it was selected as the American Field Service host school for foreign exchange students in 1963. This was a remarkable feat, considering that when Enzo Benedusi, Central’s first foreign exchange student, arrived at Central in the fall of 1963, the school was nearly all-black. Benedusi, an Italian, was white, and all of the foreign exchange students who attended Central between 1963 and 1969 were also white, which led one Central student, upon Benedusi’s departure in 1964, to remark:

¹⁷ Loretta Stewart, conversation with author, 2 November 2012.

¹⁸ “Everything’s Up to Date in Kansas City.”

Enzo Benedusi has set a milestone in America. He was the first American Field Service foreign student to be sent to a predominantly Negro school and live with a Negro family in a Negro community without incident. Alongside of him Centralites have proved that students recognize no racial barriers. Central has taken a great initial step not only for Central but for all schools in the United States.¹⁹

White foreign exchange students from Switzerland, Germany, Finland, and Denmark succeeded Benedusi, and by all accounts the foreign exchange students held Central in high esteem. Hans Jaeger, a foreign exchange student from Switzerland who arrived at Central the year after Benedusi, stated that Central was a “great school” and that “the students are so kind-hearted and friendly. They make you feel like you are one of them.”²⁰ In 1969, Central welcomed its first black foreign exchange student, Evans Awalime from Africa.²¹ It appears that 1969 was the last year of the program at Central, as there is no mention of another foreign exchange student after 1969. This, rather predictably, coincides with a period of time in which Central’s public perception began to fall out of favor and media reports characterizing Central as one of Kansas City’s dangerous and low-performing black schools became commonplace.

A Growing Discontentment, 1964-1965

All was seemingly good at Central in the first half of the 1960s. Central’s students were receiving more scholarships than ever before, including three who received National Merit Scholarships in 1965.²² The school itself was the subject of articles in two national magazines mentioned previously. Its principal, Mr. Boyd, was garnering national acclaim. Central’s basketball team finished third in the state in 1964, and the track team went

¹⁹ *Central Luminary*, 8 May 1964, 5.

²⁰ *Central Luminary*, 9 October 1964, 1.

²¹ *Central Luminary*, 26 September 1969, 1.

²² *Central Luminary*, 23 April 1965, 1.

undefeated and won state in 1965.²³ All of the success led one Central student, Paulette Jackson, to claim in 1964 that Central was a “boss” school and also enticed Mr. Boyd to proudly announce in 1965 that “the student body of Central High School has gained national recognition for its human relations, academic and athletic ability.”²⁴

Yet, in spite of the many accomplishments, there were struggles. According to the district’s report of faculty integration, in July of 1963, the same year that Central’s student enrollment was ninety-nine percent black, white teachers began “pleading” for transfers from both Central Junior High and Central High School, as well as Lincoln Junior High and Lincoln High School. Additionally, the report stated that eleven black teachers would be transferred from the junior high and high schools of Central and Lincoln, teachers who had expressed no desire to be transferred.²⁵ Among the teachers transferred, particularly the black teachers, were individuals who truly cared about Central High School and Central’s students.

Meanwhile, Central High School’s student population was growing. Central’s capacity in 1963 was 2,176; its enrollment was 2,273, and the district was estimating that enrollment numbers would swell to 2,952 by 1967 and by 1972, to 3,736.²⁶ The growing number of Central students were all black. Such projections led proponents of desegregation to begin to question the Kansas City, Missouri School District’s efforts toward integration.

²³ *Central Luminary*, 20 February 1964, 7; 21 May 1965, 8.

²⁴ *Central Luminary*, 20 February 1964, 7; 21 May 1965, 8.

²⁵ Current and Proposed Status of Faculty Integration, 25 July 1963, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 311.

²⁶ “Capacity Compared to Membership, Actual 1963, Estimated 1967 and 1972,” Office of the Superintendent, Kansas City, Missouri School District (1963), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 313.

Angry patrons of the district, a committee representing the Paseo, Southeast, Central and Manual areas, appeared before the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board of Education in June of 1963 to protest boundary changes, which the committee alleged “followed the unwritten law that Troost be the boundary separating the white population and Negro population.”²⁷ Such apprehension led to a 1965 article in the *Kansas City Star*, “A Danger of School Resegregation Grows,” which suggested that “school systems in many northern and border cities—the two Kansas Cities included—are in danger of becoming resegregated Negro school systems.”²⁸ Central was indeed resegregated by 1965, and so too were other Kansas City, Missouri School District schools. Central was no longer the city’s de jure all-white school. Rather, by 1965, Central had become one of the city’s all-black high schools, with black students comprising 99.4 percent of the student population.²⁹ The other majority black high schools in 1965 included Lincoln at 99.9 percent and Paseo at 62.4 percent.³⁰ The high schools’ feeder schools, too, were resegregated. The schools of the Kansas City, Missouri School District were beginning to follow a predictable pattern that became more pronounced over time: the vast majority of schools east of Troost were majority black, and schools west of Troost were primarily white. So despite the destruction of Kansas City, Missouri’s, dual school system, the Kansas City, Missouri School District, just ten years after *Brown*, had become firmly resegregated. As a result, many, especially in the black community, began to question the district’s efforts toward desegregation.

²⁷ Kansas City, Missouri School District Board Minutes (1963), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 313.

²⁸ “A Danger of School Resegregation Grows,” *Kansas City Star*, 27 October 1965, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public.

²⁹ Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-55—1983-1984.

³⁰ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 101.

It is important to remember that Missouri's history is rooted in separate but equal, especially in schooling. Though public accommodations were never mandated separate, they were customarily so. As late as 1960, the Missouri Commission on Human Rights stated:

The problems of human rights for minority groups in Missouri reside today in the area of rights not specifically delineated in constitutional, legislative or judicial provisions, i.e., the right of equality of opportunity in the obtaining of employment, upgrading and promotion on the job; specialized education apprenticeship training, public accommodations, housing, health and welfare facilities, recreation and entertainment³¹

Blacks were largely prohibited in the majority of Missouri hotels, motels, resorts, restaurants, dining rooms, cafes, soda fountains, and drug store and department store eating facilities: "In most cases a Negro may order food to take out but refused permission to eat on the premises. In a number of counties, a Negro can be served food in the kitchen, a back room, or in screened off area."³² Thus, it was not uncommon for a black family travelling from Kansas City to St. Louis to struggle to find a single café, restaurant, hotel, motel, or resort to accommodate them, a result of the fact that there were no state laws in Missouri prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations, at least not until the Public Accommodations Law of 1964. The Public Accommodations Law was part of the broadest and strongest civil rights legislation since Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Less than a year after the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, on July 2, 1964, the Civil Rights Act secured passage.³³ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited segregation and other forms of discrimination in public accommodations, barred segregation

³¹ Study of Human Rights in Missouri, Missouri Commission on Human Rights (1960), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 312, 1.

³² Ibid.

³³ Michael Levine, *African Americans and Civil Rights*.

in state and locally owned facilities, and gave the attorney general new powers to end school desegregation.³⁴ Perhaps most importantly, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided the attorney general the power to withhold federal funds from segregated school systems.³⁵

It was widely assumed in the South that the Civil Rights Act would cause the general destruction of education. Considering that as late as 1965 only two percent of black students were enrolled with white students in the public schools of the Deep South, the carrot-and-stick philosophy of the Civil Rights Act was most certainly designed to force the South to finally desegregate, and in parts of the South it worked quite well.³⁶ By 1966, the largest percentage of black pupils attending school with white pupils was occurring in Texas, Tennessee, and Virginia, Southern states.³⁷ But not all Southern states were models of compliance. South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana all initially used freedom of choice plans as a way of avoiding meaningful desegregation, though such a tactic was outlawed by the Supreme Court in 1968, thus paving the way for greater progress throughout the South. But in Border States, such as Missouri, desegregation proved elusive, as described in United States Commissioner of Education Harold Howe's letter in 1967:

In addition to the problem of dual school systems, other forms of discrimination may arise in the northern school situation. We are precluded by the language of the Civil Rights Act and by amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act from dealing with the massive problems of segregation resulting from housing patterns (so called 'racial imbalance'), but there are additional problems, such as gerrymandered school boundaries, racially determined teacher assignments, and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Forrest Carson to Superintendent of Public Schools (20 March 1968), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

³⁶ Revisions to Title VI, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (February 1966), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

³⁷ Enrollment of Negro Pupils in Southern and Border States, Office of Education (December 1966), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

many inequalities in the educational programs that may constitute violations of Title VI.³⁸

Kansas City, Missouri School District leaders, in fact, routinely suggested that resegregation was a result of residential segregation. While this is most certainly true, it is also clear that the Kansas City, Missouri School District engaged in practices, as referenced by Howe, such as gerrymandering of school boundaries, racially determined teacher assignments, and inequalities in educational program and course offerings, that contributed significantly to the separation of the races in schools. Eventually, the Kansas City, Missouri School District would fall under the watchful eye of the Office of Civil Rights, but they first would have to answer to the increasingly vocal and numerous local civil rights groups whose collective frustration with Superintendent Hazlett and the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board of Education was growing louder.

In August of 1964, the Citizens Coordinating Committee (CCC) was formulated with representation from all major civil rights groups, and it became one of the most influential and outspoken critics of Kansas City, Missouri School District efforts toward desegregation.³⁹ But it was the Kansas City chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) that initiated efforts to effect change in the Kansas City, Missouri School District with their march to protest resegregation on July 2, 1963.⁴⁰ It was at the March that Dr. Robert Farnsworth, Chairman of Kansas City's chapter of CORE, succinctly explained, not

³⁸ Harold Howe, U.S. Commissioner of Education, to Phil Landrum, House of Representatives (5 April 1967), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

³⁹ Thelma King, Council for United Action, to T. Johnson (23 June 1967), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

⁴⁰ Statement by the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board of Education (July 1963), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 313.

only what his organization stood for, but what many in the black community were feeling at the time:

We feel that the school Board of Kansas City, Missouri, has failed to comply with the Supreme Court decision of 1954. The School Board of Kansas City has not actively attempted to undo a history of wrong committed against the Negro citizens of this community. The School Board has not actively planned to provide integrated educational experiences wherever possible. On the contrary, the School Board has acted tardily and grudgingly to permit integration in some instances, but seldom to foster it. Since the Supreme Court decision we have frequently seen white students, in wholesale numbers, permitted to transfer out of integrated schools, thus creating resegregated schools. New school construction has not been planned with the Supreme Court's decision in mind. Boundaries have been shifted...and, in many cases, the boundary changes have clearly worked against the Supreme Court's ruling. There has been only token integration of the faculties. There are no Negroes in central administrative positions which affect the problem areas I have just mentioned...Classes of Negro children are bussed from the Ladd School to the Humboldt School but are not permitted to join in the integrated activities of the school. We have walked the parade route here to demonstrate publicly our concern for these problems.⁴¹

In particular, it was the busing of black students to white schools and their treatment and total segregation within those schools that seemed to elicit much emotion from both blacks and whites alike.

As early as 1960, parents of Ladd Elementary School were calling for a new building to alleviate crowded conditions. With the school well beyond capacity, even cloakrooms were being used as classrooms.⁴² A new building would have to wait, as the district's solution to the overcrowded nature of its majority black schools in the central city was to bus black pupils to white schools. Busing, however, did not equate to integration. By 1964, the Kansas City, Missouri School District was busing 1,300 black students from overcrowded black schools to under-utilized white schools and in nearly all cases, the black

⁴¹ Transcript of Procedures, March to Protest Resegregation (July 1963), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 313.

⁴² "Citizens Want a New School," *Kansas City Times*, 26 October 1960, 22.

students were kept separate from the receiving white students.⁴³ The CCC took issue with the district's busing plan, citing the numerous deprivations that were experienced by bussed black students.⁴⁴ When Superintendent Hazlett finally succumbed to the demands of the CCC and announced in October of 1964 that black students bussed to white schools would be integrated within the receiving school, he faced considerable push-back from white parents. It seems that white parents did not want their white children "mixed" with black children, claiming that in other cities "white children from the homes of a higher cultural level were retarded because of the slower learning of bussed-in pupils."⁴⁵ Ultimately, it was white opposition to the busing of black students that resulted in the passage of a \$17.5 million bond initiative to build three new elementary schools and a junior high school in the Central High School area.⁴⁶ It was the district's construction plan, however, that would erupt in controversy and widen a growing rift between the black community and the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

⁴³ "A School Wait on Race Issue," *Kansas City Times*, 10 October 1964, 1-2.

⁴⁴ Deprivations of bussed students cited by the CCC included the following: (1) required to be at their sending school at least twenty minutes earlier than other pupils, often in winter months leaving during darkness (2) loaded into buses and required to sit three to a seat and stand (3) denied opportunity to go home for a hot lunch (4) deprived of opportunity to attend many of the cultural activities which are a part of the enrichment program provided other pupils (5) subjected to total segregation from all activities of the school they attend and do not play, eat, or participate in normal regular activities with the school's other pupils (6) teacher of bussed pupil is required to utilize her time and energy to assume additional responsibilities for supervision during recess, lunch, and transportation (7) full responsibility of bussed pupils remains vested in the principal of the sending school (8) parent of bussed pupil who does not have transportation is severely handicapped in visiting child and classroom ("Report to the Kansas City, Missouri Board of Education," Citizens Coordinating Committee, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 313).

⁴⁵ "School Parents Disturbed by Integration Move," *The Wednesday Magazine* (September 1965), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314, 12.

⁴⁶ Patricia Doyle, "For Education 3 to 1," *Kansas City Times*, February 1965, 1-2.

Havighurst and the Middle School Controversy, 1965-1968

“My people are ready to die for the middle school,” said one black individual at a public meeting in 1967.⁴⁷ Indeed, the middle school controversy that unfolded between 1965 and 1967 aroused a certain passion that dichotomized supporters of the middle school from those in opposition to it, which largely fell along racial lines. Upon passage of the school bond issue in 1965, Superintendent Hazlett immediately began planning and selling the construction of three elementary schools in the congested area around Central High School. By 1965, the elementary schools in the Central High School area were “critically overcrowded” with approximately 1,700 elementary pupils being bussed out during the 1965-1966 school year.⁴⁸ The district estimated in 1965 that the elementary overload in the Central High School area would increase to over four thousand by 1967 and well over six thousand by 1969.⁴⁹ Not all schools were similarly overcrowded. In fact, the Central High School area was the only “severely overloaded” attendance area at the time, as it was estimated that there were roughly eight thousand available spaces in Kansas City elementary schools in other parts of the district.⁵⁰ As such, it was clear that something needed to be done to relieve the overcrowding; the issue was whether the construction of three new elementary schools in the Central High School area was the best approach.

⁴⁷ Rex Stout and John King, “Background Information on the Problems of Overcrowding and Integration in the Kansas City, Missouri District, League of Women Voters of Kansas City,” Missouri (September 1967), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

⁴⁸ Some Questions and Answers: Regarding Citizens Coordinating Committee Policy, Citizens Coordinating Committee (July 1965), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Despite Superintendent Hazlett's assurance in 1965 to a group of parents that the work to build three new elementary schools was "proceeding rapidly," Kansas City's local civil rights organizations were growing increasingly concerned about the district's construction plan. In July of 1965, the Citizen's Coordinating Committee told Hazlett that it could not endorse the three school sites where the district board of education had planned to construct the new schools.⁵¹ Thus, an already precarious relationship between Superintendent Hazlett and Kansas City's civil rights organizations grew even more strained. Hazlett stated that he was "taken aback" by the CCC's opposition to the school sites, claiming that they had reversed their position. The CCC, conversely, denied any reversal, suggesting that they never said they would support or oppose the sites.⁵² The CCC had come to the conclusion that the plan outlined by the district would offer no substantial relief and would only represent a continuation of existing patterns of segregation in Kansas City:

We are appalled that the public statements emitting from the superintendent's office persist in the claim that an end to bussing will come after the new schools are opened in 1967 when, in fact, the figures compiled by their office show an expectation of drastically increased over-crowding. This appears to be deliberate deception and distortion in fact.⁵³

The CCC subsequently began calling for consultants with expert knowledge in the area of urban schooling and planning to be hired to assess the situation in Kansas City, Missouri. In September of 1965, the CCC and the Kansas City, Missouri Board of Education reached a consensus in which the board agreed to suspend all building activities until after a study was

⁵¹ "Coordinating Committee Opposes School Sites," *Kansas City Call*, 9 June 1965, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Citizen's Coordinating Committee memo to James Hazlett (n.d.), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

conducted by three outside consultants led by Dr. Robert Havighurst, who was selected as lead consultant in Kansas City for his work with the Chicago Public School system, where he conducted a similar study in 1964.⁵⁴

Dr. Havighurst, along with Dr. William Cobb and Dr. Norman Drachler, released their report, *Problems of Integration in the Kansas City Public Schools*, in November of 1965, in which they listed a variety of recommendations. Havighurst's Kansas City study included several major recommendations that took into consideration the fact that the overcrowded nature of black neighborhoods was about to push into the upper grades and secondary schools. Consequently, the primary recommendations included the following: five or six sites for a junior high school as a way of achieving some "racial mixing"; a new senior high school in the Manual area; additional educational services given to the Paseo High School and its surrounding elementary schools to help preserve integration; the appointment of a director of community relations; greater faculty integration; attention to issues of student transfers and busing; and the abandonment of the school district's plan to build a de facto segregated elementary school at Fortieth and Park Avenue and instead construct an integrated middle school in the area of Brush Creek Boulevard and the Paseo.⁵⁵

Paseo became the critical area and school because the racial change in 1965 was not occurring as quickly in the Paseo area as it had in and around Central High School.⁵⁶ The proposed middle school became the foremost issue for local civil rights groups who were fighting for meaningful integration in the Kansas City, Missouri School District, while it

⁵⁴ "New Site Study for 3 Schools," *Kansas City Times*, 31 July 1965, 1-2.

⁵⁵ Robert Havighurst, William Cobb, and Norman Drachler, "Problems of Integration in the Kansas City Public Schools" (November 1965), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 514.

⁵⁶ "Rise in Negro Pupils," *Kansas City Times*, 27 October 1965, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

also came to symbolize the board of education and Superintendent Hazlett's indifference to it.

Superintendent Hazlett gave some indication of his thoughts on the integrated middle school in August of 1965, when he stated:

There is no evidence that quality education can only be achieved by classroom integration. There can be quality education in all-white or all-Negro schools and poor education in integrated schools. Quality education depends on smaller classes, good teaching, high motivation, adequate equipment and supplies. This does not deny the existence of positive values in integrated learning situations but to organize the educational system on the single criterion of integration is questionable⁵⁷

Civil rights groups and advocates of school integration, however, viewed the proposed middle school as a key element in the maintenance of a prosperous integrated neighborhood that resided in one of the most attractive residential neighborhoods of Kansas City. Part of the desirability was the concept of a middle school, which in 1965 was a new and innovative approach to education.

Although definitions vary, the middle school generally is defined as a school with any combination of grades between three and eight...Essentially, this nation-wide search for better ways to organize—or reorganize—education between the primary grades on the one hand and the senior high school on the other is part of a much larger ferment in American education.⁵⁸

Havighurst himself recognized the middle school as “one of the most attractive innovations in American education” and viewed its use as critical in supporting integration. The advantage of the middle school, Havighurst explained, was the size and scope of the neighborhood. Speaking of middle schools, he stated, “the natural neighborhood” was

⁵⁷ James Hazlett to the Board of Education (19 August 1965), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

⁵⁸ Robert Havighurst and Daniel Levine, “The Feasibility of Maintaining Integration in the Proposed Middle School” (April 1967), Missouri Valley Special Collections, James A Hazlett Papers,8.

“larger than the natural neighborhood of a primary school.”⁵⁹ It was reasoned, therefore, that a middle school at Brush Creek and Paseo, pulling from a larger pool of pupils residing in both black and white neighborhoods, would result in a stable integrated school and relieve overcrowding.

Upon release of the Havighurst Report, local civil rights groups immediately supported it. Superintendent Hazlett, however, was not convinced, stating that the recommended middle school “pays temporary homage to integration.”⁶⁰ Hazlett’s statements indicated that he assumed that the balanced enrollment that Havighurst projected was inaccurate. Moreover, Hazlett questioned the cost of the middle school project. In 1967, Hazlett made his recommendation to the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board of Education concerning the construction of a middle school in the vicinity of Brush Creek and Paseo; he said:

Charged with responsibility of as prudent management of funds as possible, I cannot recommend this school simply because we do not have the money to build it without materially affecting other sorely needed projects which were a part of the original building plan... The construction of a middle school from a practical standpoint, therefore, becomes academic. True, land could be acquired and construction delayed until money is available in another bond issue but I cannot propose doing this because of the pressing need to take care of overcrowding and to finish other projects subjected to increasing costs.⁶¹

Not surprisingly, civil rights groups scoffed at Hazlett’s statement and were further angered by his recommendation that the district pursue an “appraisal of the best use of funds allocated for the third elementary school, either to build the school or redeploy to build

⁵⁹ Havighurst, Cobb, and Drachler, “Problems of Integration in the Kansas City Public Schools.”

⁶⁰ James Hazlett to the Board of Education (14 June, 1967), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

⁶¹ Ibid.

space elsewhere.”⁶² Having positioned themselves firmly behind the integrated middle school recommended in the Havighurst Report, Kansas City’s civil rights groups, particularly the CCC and the Council for United Action (CUA), stood vehemently in opposition to another elementary school built in the inner-city that would only contribute to the segregated nature of the school district.

Ms. Thelma King of the CUA, in particular, became an outspoken critic of Superintendent Hazlett’s policies regarding desegregation. She was angered by his decision against the middle school. In July of 1967, King addressed the school board:

It should be clearly understood that the middle school is but a part of a much larger problem which reflects the failure of our present system of education to provide quality education for all children within the Kansas City School District. It should also be understood that the Council for United Action will not participate in any trading or “dealing” with this board or its superintendent based solely on the question of whether or not a middle school is to be built or not....The board should clearly understand that we will no longer “compromise” the future of our children. Specifically, we are asking this board, not only to meet its commitment to provide quality integrated education by building the middle school—but to provide a master plan for the integration of all schools in the Kansas City School District.⁶³

Charging a betrayal of trust, King and the CUA did not stop at the school board. Following Hazlett’s decision and the school board’s three-to-two vote in support of the superintendent, the CUA threatened a federal investigation of segregation practices in the public schools of Kansas City, Missouri.⁶⁴ In addition, Dr. Carleton Scofield, Chancellor Emeritus at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, resigned his position as Chairman of the Citizens

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Thelma King, “Statement to Board of Education” (6 July 1967), Missouri Valley Special Collections, James A Hazlett Papers.

⁶⁴ Stout and King, “Background Information on the Problems of Overcrowding and Integration.”

Advisory Committee to the Kansas City Public School administration in a sharp break with Superintendent Hazlett concerning integration:

I am afraid that I cannot conscientiously serve in an advisory capacity to a philosophy in the 20th century education that states with considerable degree of firmness that the notion that only integrated education can make for quality education is a myth that needs to be exploded.⁶⁵

On June 23, 1967, Thelma King, in a letter to the Office of Civil Rights, submitted a formal request for an investigation of the Kansas City, Missouri School District, and by June 30, 1967, a team of investigators were en route to Kansas City.⁶⁶

A federal team of eight Office of Civil Rights (OCR) educational specialists dissected the Kansas City, Missouri School District between July 17th and July 21st in order to determine if the school district was in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which required school systems receiving federal aid to operate without racial discrimination or segregation.⁶⁷ The investigators examined, in particular, teacher and administration recruitment, transfer, and promotion, course offerings, and student transfers. Their findings were troubling.

The investigation team discovered that twenty-four Kansas City, Missouri School District schools' faculties were all white, and ten were entirely black. Moreover, teachers in 1967 signed open contracts whereby the district would hire a teacher and then place them. Eighty-one percent of the black teachers for the 1967-1968 school year had been assigned to

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Thelma King to T. Johnson, Office of Civil Rights (23 June 1967), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314; Theron Johnson, Special Assistant to the Assistant Commissioner to Dr. Holloway, Acting Chief Title IV (30 June 1967), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

⁶⁷ Harold Williams memo to Theron Johnson, 12 July 1967, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 314.

majority black schools, while seventy-eight percent of the white teachers had been assigned to majority white schools. Similarly, ninety-one percent of white teacher transfers did so to majority white schools, and eighty-two percent of black teachers went to black schools. The district claimed that a policy of forced transfer would result in wholesale resignations. With regard to the administration, the federal investigators suggested “no area of the Kansas City, Missouri School District situation reflects more tellingly its tradition as a dual school system than its allocation of administration. Negro Administration, it appears, are assigned to exclusively Negro schools.” Indeed, in 1967, there were no black principals at schools where black students comprised less than ninety-seven percent of the student body, and there were no black head principals at any of the district high schools. Students, they found, were given a battery of tests at the conclusion of their eighth grade year to determine their ability group and subsequently classified as A, B, or C level. Determinations were made based largely on achievement and teacher recommendations, and it was concluded that the process and the tracking were not done in an equitable manner. Manual High School, for example, roughly all-black by 1967, had no A or B level students and did not offer a single advanced class. Considering student transfers, the investigators explained that if a pupil wanted to transfer, a parent called the board and asked for a list of open schools; no requested applications, they noted, were investigated by the school district.⁶⁸ In conclusion, the federal team of investigators stated: “It is undeniable that the graduates of Negro schools in the Kansas City, Missouri system are at an inferior educational level.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid; Parul Fairly and Gerald Sroufe, “Review of Kansas City, Missouri Schools” (1967), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

⁶⁹ Karen Krueger, “Preliminary Review of the Kansas City, Missouri Schools, July 17-21, 1967, Curriculum, Pupil Assignment and Transfer.” State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 315.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) sent a different team of investigators to Kansas City in early March of 1968 and found that little had changed since their previous visit roughly eight months before. It must have been clear to Superintendent Hazlett and the board of education that the Kansas City, Missouri School District had caught the eye of federal investigators. It most certainly came as no surprise, considering that Title VI enforcement had begun pushing north and west late in 1967. The Border States, therefore, would come under heavy scrutiny for years to follow, including Kansas City, Missouri. Hazlett surely anticipated as much, especially in light of the fact that federal investigators had made two trips to Kansas City in less than a year by spring of 1968. It is little wonder, then, that Hazlett released his own plan for desegregation “Concepts for Changing Times” in the aftermath of the middle school controversy.⁷⁰ The plan coincidentally was released to the public just days after the federal investigators had departed Kansas City for a second time. It dealt with pupil integration at the elementary and secondary levels, faculty integration, and curriculum. Hazlett suggested clustering and pairing of elementary schools; creation of magnet secondary schools in vocational-technical, performing and fine arts, and science; revision of teacher and principal assignment policy; and a broadening of the curriculum to include pluralistic viewpoints.⁷¹ Having laid out his vision, Hazlett set out to establish a so-called “council of thirty,” consisting of civil rights organizations, business and real estate groups, organized labor, teacher organizations, PTA representatives, and other citizen bodies. Superintendent Hazlett had already established a

⁷⁰ “Concepts for Changing Times: Proposals Offered for Public Examination, Dealing with Educational Equity in the Kansas City, Missouri, School District,” Office of the Superintendent, The School District of Kansas City, Missouri (March 1968), Missouri Valley Special Collections, James A Hazlett Papers.

⁷¹ Ibid.

reputation among civil rights groups as anti-integration, and it was unlikely that his vision for the future would be welcomed by those who had already lost trust in his leadership. His fate was all but sealed with the district's mishandling of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. funeral service on April 9, 1968, and the events that unfolded in its aftermath.

The Riot of 1968

The morning of Tuesday April 9, 1968, Al Brooks was at the Grace and Holy Temple Cathedral. Brooks, who was a longtime community activist, had worked in law enforcement for years, but in April of 1968 Brooks, ironically, was working for the Kansas City, Missouri School District coordinating efforts involving Title I programming with parents and schools. Sitting among the congregation on Tuesday morning, Brooks remembered how his day was interrupted by an emergency phone call: "They hand him [minister] a note, and he says 'Is Al Brooks in the congregation?' I said 'yes.' He said, 'You have an emergency call.' That was the call that three schools had walked out."⁷² The walkout included the majority of students at Manual High School, Lincoln High School, and Central High School, as well as many students at Paseo High School, Southeast High School, and Westport High School.⁷³ The students were angered by the manner in which the district had handled the events of April 9, 1968, the funeral service for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But it was clear that the student walkout ran deeper than what it seemed on the surface. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral service was the initial spark, yet the riots that subsequently enveloped the community were a result of longstanding inequalities, many of which involved the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

⁷² Alvin Brooks, conversation with author, 31 October 2012.

⁷³ Ibid.

The Mayor's Commission on Civil Disorder, completed in August of 1968, explained that the precipitating causes of the April riots were the "existence of conditions that produce and increase tensions, unrest and frustrations in the Negro community, and which result in the emotional climate which is necessary before a riot can occur."⁷⁴ As the commission suggested, the failure of the district to act on the Havighurst Report was a matter of which the black community was "acutely aware."⁷⁵ Moreover, there were several incidents that may have been a prelude to April 9, 1968. One incident, in particular, occurred at Central High School and involved both students and non-students. In November of 1967, a disturbance broke out that ended with the involvement of thirty-five policemen. Before it was over, bottles and rocks were hurled at police officers and their cars; police made twelve arrests. The *Kansas City Times* covered the incident, reporting that "[t]hree seventeen-year-old boys and nine juveniles were arrested yesterday afternoon following a second day of disturbances outside Central High School, 3221 Indiana."⁷⁶ There already existed a history of complaints within the black community against the police department for their treatment of black residents. Most generally, there was a feeling that Kansas City's white residents favored discrimination against blacks, and the nominal support that the white community gave to the 1964 Public Accommodations Law, specifically, was viewed as evidence of the feeling.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ "Final Report: Mayor's Commission on Civil Disorder" Mayor's Commission on Civil Disorder (August 1968), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 514, 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁶ "Arrest Twelve Youths in Disturbance," *Kansas City Times*, 11 November 1967, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

⁷⁷ "Final Report: Mayor's Commission on Civil Disorder," 5.

On Friday, April 5, the day after the assassination of Dr. King, the Kansas City, Missouri School District lowered the schools' flags to half-mast and reported that all was quiet; there appeared to be no indication of trouble. Meanwhile, on the Kansas side of state line, in the immediate aftermath of the assassination, the Kansas City, Kansas School District was busy assisting in a planned student march that would be accompanied by black police officers, as well as local clergy and the city's mayor.⁷⁸ No such march was planned by Kansas City, Missouri School District leadership. In fact, Superintendent Hazlett left for Washington D.C. on Sunday, April 7 to fulfill his duties as chairman of an advisory committee. Before he left, however, Hazlett announced that school was to be held on Tuesday but that a one-minute moment of silence was to take place in honor of Dr. King.⁷⁹ The same day that Hazlett announced Kansas City, Missouri, would hold classes on Tuesday, the Kansas City, Kansas School District announced that schools would be closed, a result of pressure from civil rights groups. At 7:30 a.m. on April 9, the Kansas City public radio station announced open and closed schools, and almost immediately upon hearing that school was open in Kansas City, Missouri, students planned a walkout from Lincoln High School, intending to walk to Central High School.⁸⁰

J. Anthony Snorgrass, a sophomore at Central High School in the spring of 1968, vividly recalled the evening of April 9, the day the riots began:

I do remember leaving school...and things were bubbling, and then getting off work coming back home it suddenly hit pretty hot and heavy. I remember that night, I remember...there was a post office, Gates, and my barber shop; it must have been

⁷⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 12-13.

Twenty-Seventh and Indiana back towards the school. I remember seeing all that in flames. I remember, you know, chaos, mass chaos.⁸¹

In the beginning, though a few cars were overturned and windows broken, the student walkout was mostly peaceful. Al Brooks joined the student protest and marched with them to the steps of City Hall, where he and others addressed the crowd. But as Brooks explained, things suddenly turned violent: “Somebody had thrown a Coca-Cola bottle at the feet of the police officer directing traffic at Twelfth and Oak, and that’s when the tear gas gets thrown. And the city manager and I hit the ground.”⁸² The scene was, as Brooks described, “mayhem.”⁸³ There was a report of a priest being struck by a patrolman and another priest, who was coming to the downed priest’s aid, being pushed off his feet and overcome by tear gas.⁸⁴ Later that day, many of the student protesters reconvened at Holy Name Catholic Church around Twenty-Third and Benton. The church was a gathering spot for teens, a safe place for them to hang out on Friday and Saturday nights.⁸⁵ As the students proceeded to the basement of the church for a dance on Tuesday evening, April 9, police used tear gas both outside and inside of the church. Eight canisters of tear gas were found in the Church.⁸⁶ The mood changed to anger. By Wednesday morning, April 10, ninety-four fires had been set

⁸¹ J. Anthony Snorgrass, conversation with author, 20 February 2013.

⁸² Alvin Brooks, conversation with author, 31 October 2012.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Final Report: Mayor’s Commission on Civil Disorder,” 20.

⁸⁵ Alvin Brooks, conversation with author, 31 October 2012.

⁸⁶ “Final Report: Mayor’s Commission on Civil Disorder,” 23.

and extensive looting had taken place—nine people were wounded and one person was killed.⁸⁷

By dawn on Thursday, April 11, 1968, the riots were over, but not before the death of six people, all of them black, and another thirty-six wounded. Ninety-eight arson fires were set in the predominately African-American eastside neighborhoods, and 312 buildings were damaged at an estimated cost of nearly one million dollars.⁸⁸ Those among the dead were Maynard Gough; Charles Martin; George McKinney and his son George McKinney, Jr.; Julius Preston Hamilton; and Albert Miller.⁸⁹ Four of the individuals had been killed by police officers, and two had been shot by unknown persons. Many in the black community were angered by the way the police handled the situation, which was covered in a *Kansas City Star* article, “Negroes Still Angry at Police”:

The Negro community, following the disturbances here, has never been more united in its opposition to the police. While the police are a constant point of friction in almost every lower income black community, police-community relations in the inner-city area have been suffered immeasurably.⁹⁰

Moreover, several black parents suggested that they could never forgive the police for their use of gas at Holy Name Catholic Church, as well as Central High School and Lincoln High School.⁹¹ There was certainly a sense of anger and betrayal that pervaded the black community following the riots. Harold Holiday, a Missouri state representative, claimed that the riot solidified the belief among blacks that there was “one standard of conduct

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁸ “Police, Fireman, and Guardsmen Praised for Riot Performance,” *Kansas City Star*, 5 May 1968, 1.

⁸⁹ “Final Report: Mayor’s Commission on Civil Disorder.”

⁹⁰ “Negroes Still Angry at Police,” *Kansas City Star*, 5 May 1968, 15A.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

permissible for whites and another one for blacks.”⁹² The riots had an enduring impact on both the eastside neighborhoods and the schools.

A report released in 1971 by the city’s Human Relations Task Force suggested that the civil disorder of 1968 was “undeniably the most spectacular display of frustration and anger on the part of black residents of Kansas City.”⁹³ The report also stated the following:

Today, most persons would concede that the disorder was a culmination of many hints and clues to which we failed—or refused—to respond, or to even see and hear. Yet, there are disturbing signs that already we are forgetting the lesson; a line of reasoning that goes something like, “It’s been three years...no more riots...we’ve made progress...” could readily lull us into a sense of false security...To the extent that change had not occurred, racism has been the primary impediment.⁹⁴

While reasons ascribed to the “volatile emotional state of tension and frustration” included lack of job opportunities, longstanding problems with the police, and frustrations in housing, at the center were problems of educational inequality that had become readily apparent by the late 1960s.

In 1969, a report by the Missouri School District Reorganization Commission suggested a radical new approach to public education: “While a sensible school district pattern alone will not cure all of the afflictions of the educational system, little progress can be expected without it.”⁹⁵ A “tempting solution,” it was suggested, to the problems of equality of education and racial integration was the creation of one school district in metropolitan Kansas City and St. Louis. Interestingly, Superintendent Hazlett had been

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ “Three Year Report: The Quality of Urban Life,” Human Relations Task Force on Civil Disorder (October 1971), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 514.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁵ “Equal Treatment to Equals: A New Structure for Public Schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis Metropolitan Areas,” Missouri School District Reorganization Commission (June 1969), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315, 1.

championing such an approach since the early 1960s and specifically highlighted a similar approach in “Concepts for Changing Times,” in which he wrote:

Any master plan for integration depends on geographic and population characteristics of the community to be served, and the plan must be adapted to those characteristics. The Kansas City School District is 80 square miles in area—only one-fourth the size of the city and a much smaller part of the metropolitan area. It is one of 17 public school districts that furnish educational services to the city. Yet it is the only district in the Missouri part of the metropolitan area that has important problems in integration.⁹⁶

Superintendent Hazlett was correct in his assertion that the problems of integration and geography were, in the Kansas City metropolitan area, unique to the Kansas City, Missouri School District. But it is also true that the district’s track record throughout the 1960s revealed a certain reluctance to embrace meaningful desegregation. Among the most obvious examples of the district’s lukewarm approach to desegregation included a lenient transfer policy, reluctance to hire black administrators and teachers, and a stringent reliance on a neighborhood concept in the face of hardening residential segregation. Superintendent Hazlett eventually succumbed to the pressures of civil rights groups who were calling for his resignation, announcing his departure on June 5, 1969.⁹⁷ The Kansas City, Missouri School District was not doing enough to integrate its schools, and the issue, which began to attract federal interest in the late 1960s after the middle school controversy, would become particularly acute in the 1970s.

⁹⁶ “Concepts for Changing Times,” The Office of the Superintendent (March 1968), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Hazlett Papers.

⁹⁷ James Hazlett to the Board of Directors (18 July 1969), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

CHAPTER 6

DESEGREGATION AVERTED: THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY, 1968-1977

Kansas City's Southeast Side, 1968-1970

A 1970 report, *Public Schools of the Southeast Side*, was released to allay fears that the southeast corridor schools were diminishing in quality. The report professes a certain cautious optimism that the district's reading clinics, vocational and technical education, and school facilities would maintain the high standards established in southeast schools in previous years:

With both increases and changes in population, parents often become concerned about a possible "watering-down" of their children's education. But parents are not alone in this concern. The new programs and technical equipment described earlier in this booklet are but a few of the attempts made by school personnel in the public schools of the Southeast side to maintain the high quality of education which has been characteristic of these schools.¹

Nonetheless, it was apparent by 1970 that little could be done to keep whites in the southeast area, regardless of the success of its schools. The trend was set. The southeast part of the city had already undergone a significant demographic shift, and the collective efforts of the real estate industry, the banking industry, and local, state, and federal housing policies were only contributing to greater flight.

Two high schools of the southeast side, in particular, Central High School and Southeast High School, serve as a lens through which neighborhood transformation in

¹ Center for the Study of Metropolitan Problems in Education, UMKC, *Public Schools of the Southeast Side: A Report to the Community* (Kansas City: University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1970).

Kansas City, Missouri, can be viewed. Central's student population, by the end of the 1960s, had been nearly all black for years, having gone from all white to all black between 1955 and 1962. Moreover, the neighborhoods around Central High School had undergone a rapid demographic shift in the second half of the 1950s. Southeast High School, conversely, was just shy of three percent black during the 1961-1962 school year, the same year that Central High School was over ninety-seven percent black.² By the 1968-1969 school year, Southeast High School was nearly forty-three percent black, and by 1972-1973, it was almost ninety-seven percent black.³ Clearly the trend of white flight was in a southeasterly pattern, which began in and around Twenty-Seventh Street and the Central High School attendance area, advancing southeast from there. When the aforementioned report on the southeast side schools was released in 1970, the area was at a critical juncture. Based on the demographic data, it is clear that Southeast High School continued to lose white students very quickly, going from fifty-nine percent black in 1969-70 to over ninety percent in 1971-1972.⁴ With the Kansas City, Missouri School District's continued reliance on a neighborhood attendance policy into the 1970s, the schools served as a microcosm of the neighborhood

Proponents of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, which extended protections of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed discrimination in employment and public education to the sale and rental of housing, hoped that it would create opportunities for people of color.⁵ Thus, the Fair Housing Act attempted to respond directly to the harms caused by racial and

² Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-1955—1983-1984.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Rajiv Sethi and Rohini Somanathan, "Inequality and Segregation," *Journal of Political Economy* 112, no. 6 (2004), 1296-1321.

social isolation upon individuals and communities.⁶ Oliver and Shapiro describe the process as the “racialization of state policy,” where federal policies had historically impaired the ability of African Americans to acquire land and generate wealth.⁷ Specifically, they argued that the policies and actions of the United States government, including housing subsidy and financing programs, had promoted home ownership, land acquisition, and wealth accumulation for whites but not for blacks.⁸ The significance of the 1968 Fair Housing Act was that it shifted the risk of financing inner-city housing to the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), but the vast majority of new construction, as a result of the Fair Housing Act, occurred in the suburbs and benefited whites, not blacks.⁹ Almost seventy-three percent of the new construction financed through section 235 of the Fair Housing Act occurred in the suburbs, and eighty percent of those participating were young white couples with children. On the contrary, over ninety percent of those who purchased existing homes as a result of the subsidy were black, and they were purchasing homes in all-black census tracts.¹⁰ As such, the risk-free environment, a result of relaxed mortgage lending standards, ushered in a second wave of realtors employing get-rich schemes. A Kansas City, Missouri, resident described the process in a *Kansas City Star* article in August of 1972:

Very poor families were directed into the area by unscrupulous real estate brokers who used the program to make money. They sold homes that were in bad repair.

⁶ Myron Orfield, “Segregation and Environmental Justice,” *Minnesota Journal of Law, Science and Technology* 7, no. 1 (2005), 147-160.

⁷ Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Kevin Gotham, “Separate and Unequal: The Housing Act of 1968 and the Section 235 Program,” *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 1 (November 2000), 13-37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

They dropped poor people in there without guidance...Some of the homes deteriorated, and the remaining Whites moved out.”¹¹

Consequently, census data for both urban and suburban neighborhoods of Kansas City, Missouri, reflected the changing residential patterns of the late 1960s and 1970s. Despite the efforts of eastside coalition groups like Forty Nine-Sixty Three Neighborhood Coalition and the Marlborough Heights Neighborhood Association, whites continued to make use of FHA loans to resettle in the suburbs, and blacks continued to secure housing in the urban core, thus reinforcing residential segregation.¹²

The growth of Kansas City’s metropolitan suburbs during the late 1960s and into the 1970s is evident on both sides of the state line and is reflected in 1970 census data. Raytown, Missouri, for example, a suburb located just south of the city on the Missouri side in Jackson County, almost doubled in size between 1960 and 1970: it grew from 17,083 to 33,306.¹³ Not surprisingly, of the 33,306 residents of Raytown in 1970, ninety-nine percent were white. In Kansas, a similar trend was established and can be seen in population and demographic data for Overland Park, Kansas, a suburb just southwest of Kansas City, Missouri, in Johnson County. With a population of 28,085 in 1960, Overland Park’s population grew tremendously and reached 77,934 by 1970, a population growth of almost fifty thousand. Like Raytown, roughly ninety-nine percent of Overland Park residents were white in 1970.¹⁴ The census tract around Central High School, by 1970, was 96.8 percent

¹¹ *Kansas City Star*, 28 August 1972, 1.

¹² *Kansas City Star*, 26 January 1971, 6A.

¹³ Raytown Planning and Zoning Commission, *Raytown Comprehensive Plan* (October 2002), www.raytown.mo.us; United States Census (1970), www.socialexplorer.com.

¹⁴ Overland Park Planning and Development Services Department, *Population Characteristics: 2011 Annual Development Report* (March 2012), www.opkans.org; United States Census (1970), www.socialexplorer.com.

black, which was an increase of nearly fifteen percent compared to census data from 1960. Additionally, the percentage of vacant houses jumped to over fourteen percent in 1970, up from four percent in 1960. Such data lends credence to the idea that the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and section 235 had a significant impact on neighborhoods like those surrounding Central High School, as the population was by 1970 almost entirely black and, based on the unemployment rate and number of vacant houses, less financially stable. As the Central High School attendance area's neighborhood dynamics changed, so too did the school's reputation. The dominant white view of the black inner-city schools was being advanced in local Kansas City newspapers, especially in the *Kansas City Star* and *Kansas City Times*.

Falling out of Favor: Central High School's Public Perception, 1970-1973

Central High School's reputation began to decline in the late 1960s, but it was not until 1970 that Central's image came under siege. The first mention of Central's declining image occurred in the November 27, 1967 issue of the *Luminary*, when two teachers addressed the Central student body and suggested that the image of Central was "slowly coming to a down fall."¹⁵ A student editorial by Joyce Eddy corroborated what her teachers were saying:

Dear old Central, far famed Central, two weeks ago, we, as students of Central went through one of the worst ordeals Central has ever been forced to tolerate. The great name of Central was brought down to a point that it was disgraceful.¹⁶

The concern for Central's image corresponds with a November 10 and November 11, 1967, incident that occurred outside of Central High School and resulted in the arrest of twelve.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Central Luminary*, 24 November 1967, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷ "Arrest 12 Youths in Disturbance," *Kansas City Star*, 11 November 1967.

Based on the report, three seventeen-year-olds were arrested and charged with creating a public disturbance and throwing bottles and stones at police officers and equipment.¹⁸

Following the November incident and in response to claims that Central High School's reputation was eroding, senior class president, Mae Thompson, suggested that the media was exaggerating the issue: "I truly believe that Central has become a victim of news sensationalism. The news media is so anxious to get a story that they'll blow up anything and Central just provided the happenings."¹⁹ Few at the time, in 1967, could have predicted the accuracy of such a statement, but Thompson's comments can be viewed in hindsight as a strangely precise premonition.

After the November 1967 incident, Centralites seemed to situate themselves on the defensive, which is understandable considering that nearly all of the media reports coming out of Central thereafter were negative. There was a fight between two female students in 1968, which was followed by an altercation at a basketball game between Central and Southeast High Schools, where one of Central's star players, W. D. Roby, was arrested for felonious assault of two referees.²⁰ Following the two incidents, Deffanie Harris wrote a student editorial claiming, "Central has a harder time upholding a good image than any other school in the city....Many schools are jealous, jealous of our achievements....Let's stand tall and show them that Central is as great as we think it is."²¹ The negative news continued, however, as the *Kansas City Star* covered an incident that occurred in the spring of 1969.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Central Luminary*, 24 November 1967, 1.

²⁰ "Hold Youth in Tourney Fight," *Kansas City Star*, 14 March 1969, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

²¹ *Central Luminary*, 1 March 1968, 1.

Two Central students broke through a window and caused an estimated ten thousand dollars in damage as they “tore through offices and classrooms on three floors, scattering and destroying records and materials.”²² Subsequently, in May of 1969, the *Kansas City Times* ran an article, “New Breed of Student at Central Aims to Change School’s Image” and reported, “[T]here is a new breed of student at Central High School whose aim is to improve the school’s image and create better student-teacher relationships.”²³ Yet, Central High School mathematics teacher, Charles Williams, claimed, “[T]his isn’t a bad school, although Central has apparently picked up a bad reputation.”²⁴ Indeed, local newspapers were littered with negative articles about Central, and the damaging media reports seemed to be taking a toll, as is evidenced by one student’s comments in the *Central Luminary*:

Central has a bad name in the surrounding community. Through the aid of the news media, sporadic incidents that occur at Central or involve Centralites are blown out of proportion and give our school a bad reputation. Those who do not attend Central or are not associated with it in any way readily accept these news items as fact and believe that the majority of those who attend Central are not assets to the community. Is this true? Well of course not!²⁵

The bad press did not relent; rather, it intensified and grew even more widespread throughout the 1970s.

A February, 1970 article in the *Kansas City Star* stated that violence was the “most immediate problem facing the Central High School and community.”²⁶ The article was

²² “Vandals Rake Central High,” *Kansas City Times*, 24 February 1969, 1, 3.

²³ “New Breed of Student at Central Aims to Change School’s Image,” *Kansas City Times*, 24 May 1969, 3E.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Central Luminary*, 26 September 1969, 2.

²⁶ “CHS Area Seeks Solutions to Violence,” *Kansas City Star*, 19 February 1970, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

preceded by an article in February 1970 detailing two separate “disturbances” at Central High School, which ultimately led to the decision by the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board of Education, just one day after the disturbance, to place armed guards within Central High School:

Authorization by the Board of Education for security guards at Central High School to carry guns is a festering symptom of deep trouble in the schools and the society in which the schools—and all of us—exist...when the Board of Education believes firearms are a necessary adjunct to routine discipline, then something is terribly wrong.²⁷

Students were troubled by the increased security, and security guards carrying revolvers particularly disturbed them: “I don’t think they need guns. All they are going to do is start more trouble.”²⁸ One week later, guns were removed from Central guards, a result of widespread protest from district parents and students.²⁹

In response to the pattern of intense media scrutiny directed toward Central High School, Janell Walden wrote an insightful editorial in the *Central Luminary*:

Prejudiced people who are seeking to justify their beliefs and those who are ignorant to the happenings and students in a black high school—Central High School—would believe that most, if not all, of the students are hall-birds and frustrated English students. Such people would believe that Central high school is a hopeless blackboard jungle where learning and productivity run a poor second to discipline....Were it such, I would not charge the illustrious *Kansas City Star* with manifesting itself as definitely bigoted toward Central high school—a black school....It is my estimation that the *Star*’s article has dealt Central a severe blow, but I am hoping that my out-cry, and all others like it, can help encourage publication

²⁷ “Outbreaks at Schools Here,” *Kansas City Star*, 13 February 1970; “Resorting to Guards with Guns in the Public Schools,” *Kansas City Star*, 14 February 1970, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

²⁸ “Armed Guards Concern Students,” *Kansas City Star*, 17 February 1970, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

²⁹ “Goal of Relevance for Central High School,” *Kansas City Times*, 22 February 1970, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

of more truthful and consequently inclusive views of the interior of the building at 3221 Indiana Avenue.³⁰

Students such as Walden were fed up with the portrayal of Central as the city's roughest school, and the racial overtones were becoming more and more obvious.

Marion Halim and Arthur Jackson, both students at Central in the early 1970s, like Walden, did not remember Central to be a bad place at all, though they were cognizant of Central's slipping reputation in and around Kansas City. Halim, in reference to Central's characterization as a violent school, explained her remembrances:

Well you know what, we had that reputation, but I can't say that I remember that being a reality. I mean, of course there were fights. There were fights at every school, you know...In the neighborhood, there was, you know, violence around there, but I just can't remember that there was a threatening or harmful environment inside of the school.³¹

Jackson affirmed Halim's recollection. When asked about the perception of Central as violent or dangerous, Jackson quickly responded: "Not true. Not true. Violent? No. Central was not violent."³² Yet the barrage of public negativity and portrayal of Central as the most dangerous and violent school in Kansas City was taking its toll.

Morale at Central High School by 1971 was low. After just a year at the helm, Central's principal, David W. Porter, the first black principal from outside of the city, was removed from the principalship and subsequently reassigned in a temporary administrative capacity in November of 1971. Porter, who had previously served as a principal in Dallas, Texas, was seemingly pressured out of his leadership position at Central as a result of demands from a group of parents who alleged that Porter was "weak" and allowed students

³⁰ *Central Luminary*, 6 March 1970, 1.

³¹ Marion Halim, conversation with author, 2 October 2012.

³² Arthur Jackson, conversation with author, 2 October 2012.

to roam the halls and gamble on school grounds.³³ Porter's reassignment followed quite a lot of controversy, as many students and parents were displeased with the district's decision and felt the grounds for his dismissal were questionable. Daniel Britton, a white assistant principal who stepped into the head spot following Porter's departure, succeeded Porter.³⁴ In a parting shot to district administration, Porter, when asked about his removal said, "I couldn't care less"; he immediately followed the comment with a very different tone and one perhaps that speaks to the district decision to hire a white replacement. He stated: "I'm black, and I've spent half of a century working with black people. Those kids have been real nice to me."³⁵

In addition to Porter's removal, Centralites had been contending with negative publicity for years. The district administration and members of the school board, consequently, devised a plan, a rather curious one at that—they purchased two chicken fryers for Central High School. "Will fried chicken in the cafeteria prevent student uprisings at Central High School?" questioned Patricia Doyle, a *Kansas City Star* journalist. Doyle followed up the question with the following explanation:

Kansas City school board members and administrators hope it will, and consequently have approved the purchase of two chicken fryers for \$1,439 for the school. In discussing the pros and cons of the purchase by the financially strapped school district the following came to light: . . . Central High School is the only Kansas City high school without fried chicken.³⁶

³³ "Week of Uncertainty at Central," *Kansas City Star*, 21 November 1972, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

³⁴ "Central Principal Receives New Job," *Kansas City Star*, 17 February 1972, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

³⁵ "Week of Uncertainty at Central," *Kansas City Star*, 21 November 1972, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

³⁶ "Chicken as Moral Builder," *Kansas City Star*, 12 January 1971, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

Superintendent for Urban Education for the Kansas City, Missouri School District, Robert Wheeler, noted in 1972 that the chicken fryers would “help build morale,” stating that there was a “dire need for impressive steps to head off difficulties at Central.”³⁷ In addition to Central, a chicken fryer was also purchased for all-black Lincoln High School, and the measure was only opposed by a single vote, a board member representing two of the whitest high schools in the district, Northeast High School and East High School.³⁸ The Council of 100 on Human Relations picketed the *Kansas City Star* following the chicken fryer article, which Paul Smith, chairman of the Council, said was done to convey that the Central community had “registered their resentment of the implication made by the *Star* that purchase of chicken fryers at Central will pacify students...”³⁹ Indeed, Central supporters were growing increasingly resentful and indignant of the lack of regard for Central. Such frustration revealed itself in the most unlikely of places—a basketball game held in 1972 in Maryville, Missouri.

Maryville was the location of the March 1972 district quarterfinal basketball game between suburban and all-white Raytown South High School and Central High School. The fact that the game was being played in Maryville and not Kansas City was in large part due to Central’s reputation and the fear among white schools that playing in the inner-city would result in conflict. Thus, state officials decided that Maryville, a city with a deeply racist history, was a better location for the basketball game than Kansas City, a decision that Dr.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Article Protested,” *Kansas City Star*, 31 January 1971, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

Edward Fields, head of the Division of Urban Education in the Kansas City, Missouri School District, said in hindsight was “foolhardy.”⁴⁰ The decision proved disastrous, as a riot broke out between Central spectators and Raytown South spectators following the overtime thriller. Jackson, a team manager for Central’s basketball team, recalled the game and the chaos that unfolded in its aftermath:

The game was close; matter fact Raytown was leading by one. There might have been about 15 or 20 seconds left in the game. Raytown had the ball. Raytown came down, guy drives to the bucket for a shot. He shoots the shot up, Lyonell Harden... goes up, blocks his shot, wipes the shot off. Central gets the rebound, the ball’s passed out... We were getting ready to run our fast break and this referee that was past half court, blonde haired referee, blows his whistle. [He] comes running down the court and calls goaltending. They already had an official already down there that didn’t even call the play and he’s right there. Raytown goes to the line and hits two free throws, and now they lead by one. Jack Bush calls a timeout. The scorekeeper didn’t stop the clock....we called a timeout with maybe 8 or 10 seconds....they didn’t stop the clock....[it] ran down to three seconds....Now the only thing you could really do is do the hail Mary....We throw it in. Tim Abney catches it—almost makes a spectacular shot...it hits the rim...the clock hit zero and it was a stampede. The fight was on.⁴¹

According to Jackson, the fight lasted every bit of twenty minutes. “You could hear bottles breaking....I remember seeing the ref that made that call. He had just blood...he was full of blood. You just see chairs flying, people hollering.”⁴² In the end, fourteen persons were injured, none seriously. But indeed the damage was far more emotional than physical. Jackson explained: “They cheated us. And they [were] always cheating us.”⁴³

Almost immediately following the riot, Central was blamed for the incident and placed on probation, despite the fact that the players on both teams had little if any

⁴⁰ “Basketball Fight Studied,” *Kansas City Times*, 10 March 1972, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

⁴¹ Arthur Jackson, conversation with author, 2 October 2012.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

involvement in the melee. In fact, Bud Lathrop, Raytown South's coach, commented that many of the Central players came to the aid of Raytown South players. Eyewitnesses suggested that, if anything, Raytown South fans provoked the Central crowd with racial epithets and taunts. The most injurious aspect of the riot, however, was the media storm that followed the incident. Central was assailed in the local media with more than twenty articles written in the *Kansas City Star* and *Kansas City Times*, and nearly all of them assumed Central's responsibility and guilt in the conflict. Just two days after the game, the nineteen members of the Northwest Missouri School Administrators Association recommended that Central High School be suspended from the Missouri State High School Activities Association, a blow that would not only affect athletics, but music, speech, drama, and debate.⁴⁴ The decision was officially handed down on March 23, 1972, that Central would be placed on probation for the 1973-1974 school year and banned the team from the 1973 regional basketball tournament, a ban that was eventually lifted in January 1973 with assistance from the NAACP.⁴⁵

Despite the fact that Central's punishment was forgiven, the damage had been done. The very public and widely circulated Maryville incident served as a culminating event. It reaffirmed an image of Central that had been created in previous years, one that suggested that all-black Central High School was a dangerous place; and it was widely believed to be true, especially among Kansas City's whites. "Central, the school located on Linwood and Indiana, is not as bad as the news media proclaims it to be," wrote Nancy Heydon, a student

⁴⁴ "Action Against Central," *Kansas City Star*, 10 March 1972, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

⁴⁵ "Central is Barred," *Kansas City Star*, 27, March 1972, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central High.

at all-white Southwest High School who spent the day at Central in March of 1973 as part of a school exchange; she continued:

I have read many times of the prejudice that seemingly existed at Central and, truthfully, was apprehensive of attending the exchange. But, going to Central was a rewarding experience, and I found that the school life at Central is much like my own. But importantly, the people were friendly and congenial...I believe that we need many more school exchanges for we all need to be opened to the lives of each other.⁴⁶

By 1973, white and black students were largely attending separate schools and thus relegated to being in each other's company only during "school exchanges." As such, those on the outside had largely formed Central's reputation, but perception had become reality, and Central High School's troubled image served as a longstanding obstacle. Whites were not interested in attending "dangerous" all-black Central High School, nor were they keen on attending any of the central city schools that had a large proportion of black students. With nearly sixty percent of its student population black by 1973, the Kansas City, Missouri School District was resegregated, and there was little evidence to suggest that the trend would reverse itself.

Federal Oversight and the ESAA, 1973

While Central High School found itself under almost constant scrutiny, a result of the racial makeup of the student population, Central was not the city's only black high school. In fact, by 1973, nearly all of Kansas City, Missouri School District's high schools were racially segregated. Blacks and whites lived in different neighborhoods and therefore attended different neighborhood schools, as can be seen in the 1973 high school enrollment data. In that year, Central High School was one hundred percent black, as was Lincoln High School; Manual High School was 99.7 percent black; Paseo High School was 99.8 percent

⁴⁶ *Central Luminary*, 8 February 1973, 3.

black; and Southeast High School was 97.9 percent black.⁴⁷ Conversely, Van Horn High School was 99.9 percent white, Northeast High School was 96.9 percent white; Southwest High School was 93.4 percent white; and East High School was seventy-seven percent white.⁴⁸ Only at Westport High School and West High School was the student enrollment somewhat balanced. Westport was 54.3 percent white and West High School, 66.3 percent white.⁴⁹ So nearly twenty years after the Kansas City, Missouri School District had initiated its desegregation plan, its schools were firmly divided by race. This did not go unnoticed by federal investigators, who had been concerned with Kansas City's segregated schools since their first site visit in 1967.

The Kansas City, Missouri School District received its first note of noncompliance from the Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in 1971, but HEW granted the district a one-year grace period to address deficiencies. The primary areas of concern were not new, and were the same issues that had long caught the ire of Kansas City's civil rights groups; they included a lack of staff integration, problematic and inequitable administrative assignments, a student transfer policy that too liberally granted white transfers, and an academically talented program that favored whites.⁵⁰ The year 1971 was also the year that the Kansas City, Missouri Human Relations Commission released its report, "Quality of Urban Life," urging integration of Kansas City, Missouri, students and faculty:

⁴⁷ Arthur A. Benson Papers, unpublished demographic data.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Henry Givens, "A Report to the State Board of Education Concerning the Desegregation of the Kansas City Public School District" (August 1975), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 514.

No progress has been made in integration of the student bodies; on the contrary, the pattern is very distinctly one of re-segregation. Progress on integration of faculties is not uniform throughout the school district. Emphasis should be placed on developing techniques for accomplishing integration—both to assure quality education for all students and to avoid federal intervention.⁵¹

The report criticized the neighborhood school concept, but offered a conciliatory tone in stating that “Laying sole blame on the real estate industry for this condition constitutes an easy excuse.”⁵² The Kansas City, Missouri School Board, the report explicitly determined, “has permitted the student body and faculty of many of its schools to remain predominantly white or to become predominantly black.”⁵³ As such, the report outlined certain recommendations, which included the following: a continuation of efforts to integrate faculties and student bodies of all schools to the “fullest extent”; availability of inner-city school buildings and teachers for educational and recreational use during the summer months; an expansion of school boundaries to include all of Jackson County; and serious consideration of implementation of both the 1967 Havighurst Plan and 1968 cluster plan, both of which were controversially never utilized.⁵⁴

Kansas City, Missouri, was not the only Midwestern city confronting issues of educational inequality and segregation; many of America’s northern and western states faced similar situations, especially Border States. The percentage of black students in the north and west attending eighty-to-one hundred percent “minority” schools in 1970 was 57.4 percent, over thirteen percent higher than in the South; and in Border States, the percentage

⁵¹ “Three Year Report: The Quality of Urban Life.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

was over sixty, nearly twenty percent higher than in the South.⁵⁵ Comparatively, the percentage of black students in white schools in the South rose from 18.4 percent in 1968 to 38.1 percent in 1970.⁵⁶ Democratic Senator Abraham Ribicoff (who had been Secretary of HEW from 1949 to 1953) explained the discrepancy between desegregation in the North and South in a 1972 congressional address:

For years we have fought the battle of integration primarily in the South where the problem was severe. It was a long, arduous fight that deserved to be fought and needed to be won. Unfortunately, as the problem of racial isolation has moved north of the Mason-Dixon Line, many northerners have bid an evasive farewell to the 100-year struggle for racial equality. Our motto seems to have been “Do to southerners what you do not want to do to yourself.” Good reasons have always been offered, of course, for not moving vigorously ahead in the North as well as the South.⁵⁷

HEW’s focus, therefore, had shifted by the early 1970s from the South to the North, and in 1972, HEW subsequently listed Kansas City as one of twelve major Northern cities of concern.⁵⁸

Congress enacted the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) in June of 1972 to give school districts like the Kansas City, Missouri School District the opportunity to compete for federal financial assistance in order to “reduce minority group isolation and to upgrade the quality of education for all students.”⁵⁹ The ESAA was effectively designed to accomplish

⁵⁵ Department of Health, Education, and Welfare News Release (January 1971), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 315.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ 118 Cong. Rec. S 2524-S 2543, 24 February 1972, in David Henderson, *Integration in Missouri Public Schools: Faculty and Students Twenty Years after Brown* (Jefferson City, MO: Commission on Human Rights, 1974).

⁵⁸ United States Commission on Human Rights, *Statement of the United States Commission on Civil Rights Concerning the Statement by the President on Elementary and Secondary School Desegregation* (Washington, DC: Center for Human Relations, National Education Association, 1970).

⁵⁹ Michael Brogan, “Ineligibility under the Emergency School Aid Act: A Disparate Impact Standard,” *Nebraska Law Review* 59, no. 4 (1980), 1127-1142.

three purposes. It was to meet the special needs arising from school desegregation in elementary and secondary schools; to encourage the voluntary reduction of group isolation in schools with substantial proportions of “minority group students”; and to aid school children in overcoming the educational disadvantages of their group isolation.⁶⁰ The Office of Education defined racial isolation as a condition in which the enrollment at a school was greater than fifty percent minority.⁶¹ In Kansas City, district officials began preparing an application for ESAA grant money in January of 1973. On January 22, 1973, in fact, the Commission on Human Relations commended the Kansas City School Board for taking steps to qualify for the ESAA and urged it to develop and submit an application to the United States Office of Education for funds pursuant to isolation.⁶² Despite the public note of encouragement from the Commission on Human Relations and the formation of a Citizens’ Advisory Committee consisting of eighty-four members comprised of an equal number of whites, blacks, and Hispanics to assist in the ESAA grant application, the district adopted only narrow measures of relieving racial isolation.⁶³ Busing, in particular, proved to be a hot-button issue eliciting deep emotions, especially among those in opposition to it.

Clustering or pairing of schools was a tactic that HEW and the federal government supported as a way of integrating segregated neighborhood schools, but it often involved large-scale busing, and “forced busing” had long been widely opposed by the Kansas City, Missouri School District’s white parents. Many white parents did not want their children

⁶⁰ Emergency School Aid Act: Final Report to Task Force, National Advisory Council on Equality of Educational Opportunity (June 1977), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 316.

⁶¹ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of the Public Schools*.

⁶² Resolution Regarding the Current State of Education in Kansas City, Missouri, Commission on Human Relations (March 1973), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 322.

⁶³ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of the Public Schools*.

bussed to schools with black children, nor did they want black children bussed to their white schools. The Van Horn attendance area, which was 99.9 percent white in 1973, was particularly vocal about preserving their all-white schools. Robert Lund of the Van Horn High School's Patrons Association provided insight into the parents' opposition to busing when he stated the following at a public meeting:

I suppose we white people might consider it flattery that some black people think that just mixing children will give black children a better education. This is ridiculous. It is inconceivable that a child with home motivation and desire is not getting a good education in the inner city.⁶⁴

At the same meeting, an unidentified man in the audience stood up and professed, "We don't want colored out here and they don't want to come."⁶⁵ Ultimately the Van Horn High School Patrons Association voted unanimously to oppose all desegregation options that were proposed by the school district. The community hostility toward a plan that included busing options led Bob MacNeven, assistant superintendent, to conclude that the board would not accept a far-reaching desegregation plan. MacNeven went so far as to ask the Chief Education Branch Officer for OCR to advise him on the minimum amount of student desegregation the district could undertake that would render them eligible for ESAA funds.⁶⁶ Consequently, HEW, not satisfied with the district's grant proposal, initiated a lengthy probe of the Kansas City, Missouri School District in 1973. Thus, 1973 marked the beginning of a contentious and difficult period for Kansas City, Missouri School District officials.

⁶⁴ "Parents Oppose Integration Options," *Kansas City Times*, 27 March 1973, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 462.

⁶⁵ "Van Horn School Group Oppose Bussing Options," *Kansas City Times*, 28 March 1973, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 462.

⁶⁶ Memo from Chief Education Branch Office for Civil Rights to Kansas City School District (2 April 1973), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 317.

District Judge John A. Pratt's decision in the 1972 case, *Adams v. Richardson*, established that HEW had failed to enforce compliance with Title VI in numerous states and schools where noncompliance had been determined in 1969 and 1970.⁶⁷ The NAACP had taken on the case and the Secretary of HEW, Elliot Richardson, was the listed defendant. Judge Pratt, in finding that HEW had neglected its responsibilities to enforce desegregation under Title VI, also ruled that HEW had failed to enforce the *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* ruling that described as its objective the elimination from public schools "all vestiges of state-imposed segregation."⁶⁸ If school districts maintained segregated schools—schools that departed by more than twenty percent from the racial composition of the district as a whole—they were required to provide adequate documentation and justification for doing so.⁶⁹

The *Swann* case, then, established that it was HEW's responsibility to evaluate districts that were out of compliance and withhold funding, and it was the *Adams* case that determined HEW was failing to effectively do its job.⁷⁰ The Kansas City, Missouri School District was one of the districts that was out of compliance with the parameters established in *Swann*. During the 1971-1972 academic year, twenty of Kansas City's twenty-nine elementary schools that were over eighty percent black were in reality over ninety-eight percent black; twenty-three of forty-one elementary schools that were less than twenty percent black were actually less than two percent black. The same was true of high schools,

⁶⁷ *Adams v. Richardson*, 356 F. Supp. 92 (1973).

⁶⁸ *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 402 U.S. 1 (1971).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ John Egerton, "Adams v. Richardson: Can Separate Be Equal?" *Change* 6, no. 10 (Winter 1974/1975), 29-36.

as well: three of four high schools over eighty percent black were over ninety-eight percent black, and all three high schools less than twenty percent black were less than two percent black.⁷¹ Such bleak statistics regarding desegregation in Kansas City resulted in a lawsuit filed by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Federal District Court in 1973 alleging unlawful racial segregation.⁷² The case was eventually dropped in 1974, in large part as a result of SCLC's inability to fund a legal defense team. But the Kansas City, Missouri School District's legal troubles were far from over, as HEW was empowered by the *Adams* ruling to pursue districts out of compliance with a newfound vigor.

HEW began its court-ordered enforcement proceedings against eighty-five school districts around the country with schools "substantially disproportionate" in racial composition in 1973, and Kansas City, Missouri, found itself among the listed districts and was notified of the situation on April 17, 1973:

On February 16, 1973, the United States District Court, in the case of *Adams v. Richardson*, entered an order which requires the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, within 60 days from the date of the order, to communicate with a number of local school districts, including yours, "putting them on notice to rebut or explain the substantial racial disproportion in one or more of the district's schools"⁷³

Upon receiving Holmes's letter, acting superintendent Glenn Travis responded in a letter of his own dated April 30, 1973, in which he sent the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) statistical data that documented the racial makeup of the Kansas City, Missouri School District and basically defended the district's neighborhood school approach and suggested that residential segregation was to blame for the racial makeup of the Kansas City, Missouri

⁷¹ "Three Year Report: The Quality of Urban Life."

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Peter Holmes, Director of the Office of Civil Rights, to Superintendent Adams, 17 April 1973, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 316.

School District and not the district.⁷⁴ Beginning with Superintendent James Hazlett, who served from 1955 to 1969, district officials had been bemoaning the effects of residential segregation on efforts of desegregation, claiming that, in effect, the district was powerless to effect meaningful change in segregated schooling as a result of segregation in housing and residential neighborhoods. A 1973 article in the *Kansas City Star* addressed the dilemma, defending the Kansas City, Missouri School District:

There can be no question that the Kansas City Schools indeed are disproportionate in racial balance. As examples, consider Central and Lincoln High Schools are all black and that Paseo has one white student...An urban district such as Kansas City is helpless with its fixed boundaries and pattern of de facto real estate segregation that has existed for many years...It is not fair, and it is wrong but the fact remains that strenuous efforts to desegregate schools within a district quite often will only speed the white migration to the suburbs and other districts.⁷⁵

The district had long advanced the notion that any attempt to integrate its schools would result in greater white flight, but HEW was not satisfied with such a rationale and decided to search deeper. Their investigation was lengthy and thorough.

Flat Broke and Federal Scrutiny, 1973-1976

By 1973, the Kansas City, Missouri School District voters had not passed a bond issue or tax levy in four years. In fact, between 1969 and 1987, district voters rejected nineteen consecutive bond issue and tax levy initiatives, a distinct reversal from previous decades in which the Kansas City, Missouri School District enjoyed widespread support. Of the seventeen bond issues offered to voters between the district's inception in 1867 and

⁷⁴ Glenn Travis, Acting Superintendent to Peter Holmes, Director of the Office of Civil Rights, 30 April 1973, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 316.

⁷⁵ "City Schools: A Racial Dilemma," *Kansas City Star*, 28 February 1973, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 462.

1956, only one had failed.⁷⁶ But the district had changed considerably between 1956 and 1973. In 1956, the district consisted of 63,834 students, and seventy-eight percent were white; 62,685 students attended Kansas City, Missouri School District schools in 1973, and 55.7 percent of them were black. Between 1973 and 1975, the total number of students fell to 53,725, and the percentage of black students rose to 60.4 percent.⁷⁷ The last year that the district secured a tax levy, 1969, was also the last year the district was majority white, pointing to the racial hostility at play in Kansas City, Missouri.⁷⁸ Many middle-class whites had, by 1969, left for the suburbs, but those who remained were starting to send their white children to parochial schools; they seemingly saw little reason or value in supporting a majority black school district, a district that their children were no longer attending. The district's inability to find money through conventional means meant a growing reliance on federal grants. As early as 1966, the district had applied for and received over two million dollars in Title I funding.⁷⁹ But as financial constraints grew tighter throughout the 1970s and federal grants more difficult to secure, especially for school districts like Kansas City, Missouri, that were out of compliance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the financial hardship fell heavily on the district's teachers.

The teacher strike of 1974, an indication of the growing frustration of Kansas City, Missouri School District teachers, displaced students for six weeks. Arthur Jackson, a senior at Central High School in 1974, recounted how he and some of his classmates attempted to picket to end the strike: "We were trying to picket for the first two to three weeks until they

⁷⁶ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of the Public Schools*.

⁷⁷ Arthur A. Benson Papers, unpublished demographic data.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "Schools Here May Hire 100," *Kansas City Times*, 28 April 1966, Schools-Public.

stopped us. Then once they stopped us...we would still meet.”⁸⁰ Jackson also described the effect that the strike had on students:

We graduated on time but what they were going to do was everybody else had to go through July 3. We still graduated on graduation day, which was May 29, 1974. They were going to try and make us go all the way through July, which we were kind of like “okay”...but what they did, they lowered the credits. Because they knew you couldn’t make up that time to get the credits to graduate if you need two to three credits because you missed for a month....So they lowered the credits.⁸¹

The strike was obviously a disruption for students like Jackson, who essentially missed six weeks of his senior year. Certainly, the strike was more incentive to act for parents teetering on the edge of pulling their students from the district. Between the 1974-1975 school year and the 1975-1976 school year, the district lost just shy of six thousand students, and the percentage of black students increased by roughly three percent.⁸² In only one other two-year time frame, between 1976 and 1978, did the district lose close to as many students as it did between 1974 and 1976.⁸³ Many of the district’s white parents viewed the teacher strike as the final straw, but the teacher strike was an indication of deeper issues.

In light of the district’s financial situation, federal grant acquisition through the Office for Civil Rights and ESAA funding became critical. The Kansas City, Missouri School District, as of 1968, received ten percent of its budget from the federal government. The increase in federal funding was accompanied by greater federal oversight, which proved problematic for the Kansas City, Missouri School District. The regional representative to the director of OCR, in a memo to a colleague, noted five “problems” with Kansas City,

⁸⁰ Arthur Jackson, conversation with author, 2 October 2012.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-1955—1983-1984.

⁸³ Ibid.

Missouri School District's application for eligibility under ESAA. The five areas included the following: faculty assignment supporting racially identifiable schools; basic organizational structure of the district, which included an urban education division that oversaw most of the district's black, inner-city schools; racial composition of classes for "mentally retarded" that consisted of seventy-eight percent minority students; lack of a bilingual education program; and ability grouping and tracking methods that produced racial segregation of students in "desegregated schools."⁸⁴ Indeed, the district did employ a reassignment initiative in 1973, a reshuffling of teachers so as to "eliminate racial and ethnic identifiability of any one school."⁸⁵ The faculty desegregation plan, in fact, was initially applauded by OCR, but by 1974 their tune had changed. They criticized the depth of the plan while also calling into question the district's Academically Talented Program: "Our review of the tenth component, the Academically Talented Program raises serious questions as to the nondiscriminatory nature of the assignment procedures used to place students in the program."⁸⁶ But the issue that seemingly was the final straw was that of "inter-attendance zone transfer of students" that allowed for students to transfer from schools where their race was below fifty percent to a school where their race was above fifty percent.⁸⁷ OCR was "specifically concerned" with such a practice, and as it so happened, they were troubled enough with it that they notified the Kansas City, Missouri School District on April 3, 1974

⁸⁴ John Scheldrup, Regional Representative to the Director, OCR memo to W.P. Hefley, Regional Commissioner, Office of Education, regarding "Eligibility of the School District of Kansas City, Missouri, ESAA Application," 29 May 1973, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 317.

⁸⁵ Robert Macnevan to Robert Medcalf, Superintendent of Schools, 9 July 1973, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 317.

⁸⁶ Taylor August, Director for Civil Rights Region VII to Superintendent Medcalf, 22 March 1974, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 317.

⁸⁷ Phillip Hersley, Regional Commissioner, Office of Education to Superintendent Medcalf, 3 April 1974, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 317.

that the processing of their ESAA application for 1974 funds had been temporarily suspended.⁸⁸

When learning of the temporary suspension of their ESAA funds, the Kansas City, Missouri School District scrambled to appease OCR, but they continued to advance the argument that they had long relied upon: a change in the transfer policy would result in white resentment and thus greater flight.⁸⁹ By January of 1975, the district had decided to take a stand against OCR and their claims of noncompliance. Superintendent Medcalf publicly declared that he believed the district had complied with federal demands to carry out civil rights assurances in the areas of integration of administrators, discrimination in the Academically Talented Program, and student transfers.⁹⁰ HEW, however, did not relent, and in February of 1975 suspended payments to the Kansas City, Missouri School District, a suspension that was lifted in March and then reinstated again in April.⁹¹ HEW's approach to the Kansas City situation was growing bolder. In May, HEW asked a federal judge to force the Kansas City, Missouri School District to repay all of their ESAA funds already spent for the 1974-1975 school year. The prospect of having to repay federal funds was a frightening one, especially for a financially-strapped district such as Kansas City, Missouri.⁹²

Meanwhile, the district hurried to come up with a plan to satisfy OCR, though the superintendent and school board remained fearful of losing white students. Thus, the school

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Edward Fields internal memo to Robert Medcalf, 20 August 1974, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 317.

⁹⁰ "Medcalf Denies Noncompliance," *Kansas City Star*, 26 January 1975, 3A.

⁹¹ "U.S. Again Halts School Grant," *Kansas City Times*, 18 April 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 402.

⁹² "Suit Asks Schools to Repay U.S. Aid," *Kansas City Times*, 29 May 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 402.

board conceived a plan that would integrate some of its schools through the busing of 2,600 black students.⁹³ The plan was almost immediately criticized by parents of black students, who began an organized effort in opposition to a busing scheme that bused black students but not white students. Part of the concern lay in the fact that black parents worried about sending their children to Independence, an area of town that had exhibited racist tendencies toward black students. One parent suggested that Independence was “George Wallace country.”⁹⁴ The Kansas City Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was particularly vocal about their displeasure with the district’s plan. “The board’s desegregation plan is unfair and inequitable...black parents are just not going to send their kids to Independence.”⁹⁵ Emmanuel Cleaver, SCLC Executive Director, was especially determined in his disapproval of busing black children out of the central city and into nineteen district schools in the northeast part of the district’s attendance area: “Only at gunpoint would I put my twins on a bus out to Independence.”⁹⁶ The SCLC admonished the district for its desegregation efforts and explicitly told the board of education that they could not accept the desegregation plan as proposed and instead offered a plan of their own that called for a merger of the Kansas City, Missouri School District and Center School District, as well as clusters of elementary schools and a consolidated high school.⁹⁷ Consistent with

⁹³ “Education Board Orders Staff to Implement Integration Plan,” *Kansas City Times*, 17 July 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 402.

⁹⁴ “Leaders Seek Acceptance of Bussing Plan,” *Kansas City Times*, 14 July 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 462.

⁹⁵ “SCLC Drafting School Plan,” *Kansas City Times*, 13 June 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 402.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ “Board Members Say HEW Can’t Stop Plan,” *Kansas City Times*, 11 July 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 462.

its pattern of neglecting the demands of its black constituents, the district did not give credence to the SCLC's demands, suggesting that their desegregation plan that would bus black students to white schools was "the only way to achieve some measure of desegregation while preventing a massive flight of white parents to the suburbs and private schools."⁹⁸ Thus, the district submitted its controversial plan, which became known as Plan E, to OCR and awaited a decision on funding.

It took OCR only four weeks to conclude that Plan E was unacceptable on the grounds that it preserved segregation at a level of ninety percent or greater in as many as twenty district schools and additionally placed the burden of busing almost solely on black students.⁹⁹ The district responded by scrapping Plan E only a little over a week after receiving OCR's decision; instead of working to revise the plan as suggested by OCR, the district simply abandoned it.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Kansas City, Missouri School District opened the 1975-1976 school year without a comprehensive desegregation plan and a continued reliance on the neighborhood system.¹⁰¹ After a summer of planning to establish twelve alternative elementary schools and make boundary line adjustments across the district, the board voted down the proposal in a six-to-three vote and informed OCR of the development:

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Taylor August, Director of OCR, to Superintendent Medcalf, 14 July 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 317.

¹⁰⁰ "Board Scraps Plan E, Going to Courts," *Kansas City Times*, 24 July 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 402.

¹⁰¹ "HEW Blocks School Grant," *Kansas City Times*, 19 September 1975, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 402.

“In deference to your position, we have withdrawn Plan E and begun work on another plan.”¹⁰²

In the wake of the Plan E fiasco, the district formed a community task force, and two separate plans were developed: Plan A and Plan 6. Plan A was a bold plan described as “total desegregation,” a plan so thorough that students of color would comprise two-thirds of every school within the Kansas City, Missouri School District through busing, clustering, pairing, and student exchanges.¹⁰³ Plan 6 consisted of three options, the most popular of which was Plan 6C, which planned for an enrollment of fifty percent black and white in most schools, though it established thirty percent “minority” enrollment as a minimum. Additionally, the plan provided for a shifting of attendance zones, and, like Plan E before it, the busing of over two thousand black students to white schools on the urban fringe.¹⁰⁴ In a rather predictable fashion, the board voted in favor of Plan 6C, despite the opposition of many in the black community, including the NAACP.

Plan 6C, 1976-1977

Following the board’s approval of Plan 6C in December of 1976, serious concerns surfaced. Chairman of the community task force, Isaac Gardner, Jr. suggested that the proposal would disrupt the black community and impose one-way busing, stating that it was “abundantly clear that while this plan conveniently stabilizes several white communities, it totally disrupts the black community.”¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Dr. Cameron, President of the NAACP,

¹⁰² “School Board Vote Upholds ‘No-Change’ Policy,” *Kansas City Times*, 6 August 1975, 3A.

¹⁰³ “Desegregation Now Up to Board,” *Kansas City Star*, 3 October 1976, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 462.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ “School Plan Termed Racist,” *Kansas City Times*, 18 March 1977, B36.

expressed his concerns regarding the fact that Plan 6C left Central, Lincoln, Paseo, and Southeast High Schools and their feeders all black. He also expressed alarm that black students would bear the brunt of busing:

There are still things in it that give me a great deal of concern—like how many black children are going to be bussed....The black community will not tolerate the wholesale bussing of black children and negligible bussing of white children.¹⁰⁶

Busing was not just controversial in Kansas City; by 1976, forced busing had garnered national criticism. In the aftermath of Boston's violent opposition to busing, Congress, in 1975, approved the Byrd Amendment, which prohibited HEW from using funds to require transportation of any student to a school other than the one nearest his or her home.¹⁰⁷ This proved a problem in Kansas City due to the fact that Plan 6C relied heavily on a busing component. How would HEW respond to Kansas City's plan in light of the new, more stringent anti-busing restrictions that had been enacted?¹⁰⁸ The uncertainty was settled in July of 1977 when David Tatel, Director of OCR, informed newly appointed superintendent Robert Wheeler that Plan 6C did not "achieve the level of desegregation required by prevailing constitutional and statutory standards," alleging that the plan perpetuated discriminatory attendance zone lines, transported "minority" students away from their neighborhood schools, and limited desegregation at the secondary level, reducing the number of all black secondary schools from nine to eight.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ "Mixed Reactions to Plan," *Kansas City Star*, 18 March 1977, B36.

¹⁰⁷ Kathleen Nutter, "'Militant Mothers': Boston, Busing, and the Bicentennial, 1976," *Historic Journal of Massachusetts* (Fall 2010), 52-74.

¹⁰⁸ The anti-busing legislation did not apply to magnet schools, nor did it affect federal court rulings.

¹⁰⁹ David Tatel, Director OCR, to Superintendent Wheeler, 7 July 1977, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 316.

OCR and the Kansas City, Missouri School District eventually settled their differences with regard to Plan 6C, as the district agreed to the modifications and subsequently voted them into policy in February of 1978. The district agreed to the following six-part resolution: Effective September, 1978, white students enrolled at Lincoln High School would consist of no less than fifteen percent and no more than thirty percent by the implementation of a magnet school; beginning with the 1978-1979 school year, all site selections for new educational programs offered at the elementary level would be made to promote desegregation of the entirely black schools; effective in 1978, the policy of permitting senior high school students to transfer on the basis of their senior status was to be discontinued; policies governing faculty assignments was to meet 1973 ESAA guidelines; the district would implement and maintain procedures that assured the health and childcare transfer not be used as a device in inhibiting desegregation; and the district would continue non-discriminatory optional zoning and ensure that all students within the optional zone remained in the optional zone school assignment unless approved for transfer through the district's intradistrict transfer policy.¹¹⁰ But despite the district's willingness to appease OCR and secure federal funding through the aforementioned modifications to Plan 6C, their focus had shifted from efforts of intradistrict desegregation to interdistrict.

The shift to an interdistrict approach was not new. Superintendent Hazlett publicly recognized the importance of considering metropolitan residential patterns in district policy with his 1968 release of "Concepts for Changing Times," in which he stated:

"Master plans" must recognize social, political, and economic realities and the attitudes of people. New patterns of school reorganization and pupil assignment to

¹¹⁰ Samuel Carpenter, President of the Board, to David Tatel, Director of OCR, 22 February 1978, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 316.

make schools integrated must be studied in their relationships to the enlargement of de facto residential patterns, the out-migration of white residents¹¹¹

By 1975, the district appeared ready to seriously consider a desegregation plan that was metropolitan in scope, and the district's legal team began investigating the possibility of the school district filing a metropolitan desegregation lawsuit. A metropolitan plan, however, was not going to be easily achieved. The district, at the time that they began really entertaining the idea of a metropolitan plan in 1975, was already embroiled in a struggle with HEW for federal funding, and the *Milliken v. Bradley* case had set a legal precedent that made city-suburban desegregation less likely.

In 1970, the NAACP filed a suit against Michigan state officials, including William Milliken, the state's governor, alleging a relationship between housing and education. After a little over a month-long trial, a district court judge ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, and provided for the creation of a massive metropolitan district in Detroit, Michigan whereby the Detroit public schools would be involved in a cross-busing plan with fifty-three surrounding suburban school districts.¹¹² The case eventually made it before the Supreme Court, and in 1974, the federal court's decision was overturned. The Court ruled that any city-suburban desegregation plan had to demonstrate that the suburbs or the state took actions that contributed to segregation in the city.¹¹³ The decision represented a blow to cities such as Kansas City, where the city schools were majority black and suburban schools majority white. *Milliken* protected the suburbs, affirming the notion that the suburbs were off-limits

¹¹¹ "Concepts for Changing Times: Proposals Offered for Public Examination, Dealing with Educational Equity in the Kansas City, Missouri, School District."

¹¹² Gary Orfield and Susan Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: The New Press, 1996).

¹¹³ *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

with regard to efforts of desegregation within the city. So when the Kansas City, Missouri School District announced its decision to seek city-suburban desegregation, an announcement coincidentally that was made on March 20, 1977, the same day in which the school board approved Plan 6C, it was obvious that the road to metropolitan desegregation would be anything but easy.

CHAPTER 7

A NEW DIRECTION: FROM METROPOLITAN PLAN TO MAGNET REMEDY, 1977-1988

The Suburban Dilemma, 1977-1980

The Kansas City, Missouri School District's leadership had long desired to include the suburban school districts in a desegregation remedy, and it began to take shape in 1977. By 1977, the district's student population was 63.9 percent black, and the trend was suggesting that the percentages would only grow in the subsequent years, which it did; in 1983 black students comprised 67.7 percent of the district's total population.¹ Moreover, while the overall percentage of black students was increasing, the district's total student population was decreasing at an alarming rate. With a total population of 45,726 students in 1977, the number dropped to 36,650 in 1983.² In striking contrast, the total student population in 1967, when the number of district students was at its highest point, had been 74,997. Thus the ten-year period between 1967 and 1977 is a time when the Kansas City, Missouri School District's overall student population fell by nearly thirty thousand students, and the majority went from white to black.

Many of the departing students and their families were leaving the Kansas City, Missouri School District for the surrounding metropolitan suburbs. Johnson County, Kansas, and Clay County, Missouri, experienced quite impressive growth between 1960 and 1980.

¹ Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-1955—1983-1984.

² Ibid.

Johnson County, home to Overland Park, Olathe, Shawnee, and Prairie Village, grew from 217,662 residents in 1960 to 270,269 residents in 1980, and the population remained overwhelmingly white; it was 99.2 percent white in 1960 and 97.2 percent white in 1980.³ Likewise, Clay County, Missouri, underwent a similarly noteworthy population growth. Consisting of such northern suburban towns as Liberty, Parkville, Gladstone, and North Kansas City, Clay County grew from 87,474 in 1960 to 136,488 in 1980 and from 99.1 percent white in 1960 to 97.5 percent white in 1980.⁴ The suburban school districts residing within each respective suburban town on both sides of state line were also large and mostly all white. Thus, it was not altogether surprising when the Bi-State Committee suggested, in 1977, a metropolitan desegregation plan as the only way to meaningfully integrate the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

The Missouri Advisory Committee, also known as the Bi-State Committee on Education, conducted an independent assessment of over twenty school districts in metropolitan Kansas City.⁵ The report, released in January of 1977, was designed to advise the Commission on Civil Rights regarding the “current status of educational activities and problems” in the Metropolitan Kansas City area, as well as the significance of segregated housing patterns and activities of civic and political leadership.⁶ The committee called for school districts in Missouri and Kansas to work cooperatively with each other to develop a program of voluntary student transfers and regional magnet schools:

³ United States Census (1960, 1980), www.socialexplorer.com.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Crisis and Opportunity: Education in Greater Kansas City,” Bi-State Committee on Education, Missouri Advisory Committee (January 1977), Missouri Valley Special Collections, 1.

⁶ Ibid., vi.

A well designed voluntary program, with strong community support, could improve significantly the quality of public education throughout the area. At the same time, it would have an important impact in reducing the racial and economic isolation that pervades the school districts in the area.⁷

The committee provided a disclaimer, as well, and stated, “If suburban districts manifested no cooperative interest within two months after the report was released, a suit should be brought seeking a compulsory remedy.”⁸ Roughly two months after the report was released in January of 1977, the Kansas City, Missouri School District’s school board decided to seek a mandatory desegregation plan that would involve the surrounding suburban school districts.

It was the work of Daniel Levine and Robert Freilich, both University of Missouri-Kansas City professors, which provided the impetus for the lawsuit.⁹ Levine and Freilich’s study concluded that Kansas City had promising prospects for a metropolitan desegregation plan, based in large part on two prior Supreme Court rulings, *Green v. New Kent County School Board* and *Keyes v. Denver School District*.¹⁰ *Green* established that school districts had to dismantle segregated systems, but it was the *Keyes* case that, according to Levine and Freilich, represented reason for optimism in Kansas City. *Keyes* was the first ruling on school segregation in the North and West, in which the school district was considered responsible for policies that resulted in racial segregation in the school system, which included constructing schools in segregated neighborhoods and gerrymandering attendance

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ “Chronology,” *Kansas City Times*, 1 September 1977, B4.

¹⁰ *Green v. New Kent County School Board*, 391 U.S. 430 (1968); *Keyes v. Denver School District*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973).

zones.¹¹ Moreover, *Keyes* affirmed that if there was segregation in one part of the district, the entire district was presumed to be illegally segregated, as well.¹² Such line of reasoning led Freilich to conclude that “if area school districts fostered segregation in the 1950s [,] there could be a ‘presumption’ that they continued to do so in later years.”¹³ The challenge was in finding a way to include the suburban districts in the remedy, considering the Court’s ruling in *Milliken v. Bradley*. A lawsuit in Kansas City would have to overcome *Milliken* and show that the suburban school district and the state had fostered segregation.

Signifying the first time a school district had filed a desegregation lawsuit, the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board looked to a desegregation remedial order that incorporated eighteen suburban school districts in both Kansas and Missouri. The initial lawsuit was huge. Several plaintiff groups were listed, including the Kansas City, Missouri School District and the children of school board members Joyce Stark and Edward Skaggs, and the complaint listed sixty-seven defendants; among them were school districts in both Missouri and Kansas, as well as the federal agencies of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Transportation (DOT).¹⁴ At the core of the complaint was the reasoning that governmental action, even if it did not have a segregative intent but did have a segregative effect, resulted in a Constitutional violation.¹⁵ As such, the actions of the defendants, it was argued, had resulted in a demographic shift that left the Kansas, City Missouri public schools racially isolated

¹¹ Orfield and Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation*.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Stephen Winn, “Effect on Suit Here Unclear to Lawyers,” *Kansas City Star*, 3 July 1979, A4.

¹⁴ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*.

¹⁵ Dunn, *Complex Justice*.

and obligated the state to stop the transformation. By such reasoning, therefore, the state contributed to the segregated nature of metropolitan Kansas City. By positioning the argument in such a way, the district believed that the limitations of *Milliken* could be avoided, but obviously it ultimately hinged on the judicial interpretation.

Judge Russell Clark, who took the place of Judge John Oliver upon his recusal, was a conservative Democrat and a native Missourian. Clark, one of ten children, grew up in Oregon County, a small rural area of southern Missouri and was a strong proponent of education. He had an older brother, in fact, who was a teacher, principal, and eventually superintendent.¹⁶ While Clark, appointed by Jimmy Carter to the District Court for the Western District of Missouri, believed strongly in public education, he also supported local school district control and the importance of school boards and school districts having autonomy. This was in stark contrast to Judge Oliver, who was appointed by President Kennedy and was known as one of the most activist judges in the country.¹⁷ One of Judge Clark's first rulings was to realign the school district as defendants, which left the attorney-less school children as the plaintiffs.¹⁸ As such, Arthur A. Benson, II, a local civil rights lawyer came on the scene.

Arthur Benson, only thirty-five years old in 1979 when he was approached to represent the school children of the Kansas City, Missouri School District, obliged to take on the case, not knowing that it would ultimately consume his professional life for nearly twenty-five years and define his career. Benson, despite his young age, was a known civil

¹⁶ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

¹⁷ Dunn, *Complex Justice*.

¹⁸ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

rights attorney in Kansas City who began his career with the Legal Aid Society before embarking on a legal career in private practice. It did not take Benson long to establish a reputation as a guardian of the poor. He became known for taking on corrupt car dealers and landlords, as well as anyone who targeted and exploited the impoverished.¹⁹ With Benson's knowledge of Kansas City, his liberal agenda, and his strong reputation as a civil rights lawyer, he seemed well-suited for the role of representing the children of the Kansas City, Missouri School District. Benson recalled meeting with Jim Borthwick of Blackwell-Sanders, an attorney who represented the school district, in 1979:

I can remember Jim Borthwick sitting right across from me and saying, "Here's the deal. The school children have no plaintiff so they need a lawyer. We, Blackwell-Sanders and the school board, really...would like you...We support you if that's your decision." And they said, "To allay your concerns; the way I see it," and this is Borthwick speaking. He said, "You'll be sitting in the front of the boat with the plaintiffs, and we'll be in the center, or we'll be doing the rowing for the school board."²⁰

With such support, Benson took the opportunity to represent the school children, though soon after he did, the school district, as he explained, was no longer willing to "sit in the middle and pull the oars."²¹ The district had decided that they could not afford to support Benson and his case, so Benson looked elsewhere, sending letters to elicit support, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) agreed to send two lawyers, Jim Liebman and Teddy Shaw, as well as "a ton of resources."²² The NAACP, in the aftermath of the *Milliken* case,

¹⁹ Phillip O'Connor and Lynn Horsley, "Guardian or Glory Hound? Arthur A. Benson II Has Been Called Many Things During KC Schools Case," *Kansas City Star*, 14 July 1996, A1.

²⁰ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

was eager to find a place to seek a viable interdistrict metropolitan plan: Kansas City, they decided, was the place to do it.

Benson knew that the fight for a metropolitan desegregation remedy was fraught with obstacles, most specifically a conservative democrat as a judge and a precedent that had been established in *Milliken* that made interdistrict desegregation most challenging. Benson was consumed with trial preparation materials, conducting nearly three hundred depositions and hiring twenty-five law students, paid by the LDF, to conduct extensive research about housing and education.²³ Benson's intuition, however, proved to be correct; a metropolitan remedy was going to be a struggle. Judge Clark was a hard sell. What Judge Clark was seeking was hard evidence, specific acts of discrimination against blacks by the suburban school districts or public officials in the suburbs, and he seemed dissatisfied with the plaintiff's ability to deliver direct evidence.²⁴ Thus, Judge Clark's ruling that there was no justification for holding the suburbs accountable all but shut the door on a metropolitan remedial order.

Benson, though, remained hopeful that Clark's willingness to continue to consider the state's role in segregation meant an interdistrict plan was still viable. Benson continued to hold onto his vision that the eleven area suburban school districts, along with the Kansas City, Missouri School District, could be consolidated into one large district in which students would be mandated to participate in a low-cost metropolitan plan. Such a plan would have mitigated white flight, Benson reasoned, because all of the schools in the greater metropolitan area would have been involved. Whites would have no option but to

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*.

participate, unless they were willing to move beyond Kansas City's suburbs.²⁵ Additionally, while Benson's efforts were being poured into proving an interdistrict case against the state, a back-up plan was in the works. The back-up plan was a remedy that would shift focus from a mandatory desegregation plan to a voluntary one through the use of magnet schools.

The Growing Popularity of Magnet Schools and Voluntary Desegregation, 1980-1984

The idea of incorporating magnet schools into the Kansas City, Missouri School District had been suggested by both the Bi-State Committee and OCR. In their 1977 report, the Bi-State Committee suggested the following with regard to magnet schools:

A stable, quality educational system is the goal of the Bi-State Committee. To achieve this it will be necessary to upgrade education in the entire area.... This will require cooperative efforts by all school districts in the area as well as substantial State and Federal financial assistance. Assistance for a magnet school program is needed from local colleges and universities and from the business and civic communities. These magnet schools should be designed in cooperation with the suburban districts to minimize duplication of services and offer the widest possible range of educational opportunities for students in the region.²⁶

In 1978, after the district's submission of Plan 6C, OCR Director David Tatel reasoned that turning Lincoln High School into a magnet school might accomplish an increase in white enrollment of the desired fifteen to thirty percent.²⁷ Indeed, the district did work to convert Lincoln High School into a magnet school, effective September of 1978, and renamed it the Lincoln Academy for Accelerated Study.²⁸ The conversion of Lincoln from traditional to

²⁵ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

²⁶ "Crisis and Opportunity: Education in Greater Kansas City," 5.

²⁷ David Tatel, Director, Office of Civil Rights to Samuel Carpenter, President of the Board, 22 February 1978, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 316.

²⁸ Note: The name was changed back to Lincoln High School in May of 1978 as a result of protests among Lincoln High School alumni.

magnet school came with \$4.2 million in federal funding, and Thomas Eagleton, Democratic senator from Missouri, proclaimed the district would need “every penny” to convert Lincoln into a magnet school.²⁹ Lincoln, Eagleton explained, had crumbling plaster, peeling paint, and broken light fixtures, not to mention science labs that had been burned in a fire just several weeks before Eagleton’s visit. “Why,” Eagleton asked, “would a student from Van Horn High School decide to go to Lincoln Academy?”³⁰ Eagleton’s question was indeed a valid one. Kansas City, Missouri School District’s white students had historically shown little interest in attending school with black students, and given the state of Lincoln’s facilities, it seemed unlikely that a new magnet theme was going to attract large numbers of white students. The district did, however, secure funding for updates to Lincoln High School in May of 1978, though the budget was tight. Yet Lincoln’s transition to a magnet school left district officials hopeful and resulted in the identification of four elementary schools as potential sites for all-day magnet kindergarten programs and a business management philosophy magnet for West High School.³¹

Magnet schools were created in the late 1970s when urban districts, such as the Kansas City Public Schools, began seeking alternatives to court-ordered desegregation mandates.³² Following the United States Court of Appeals ruling in *Morgan v. Kerrigan*, magnet schools became a viable option for desegregation, a way to make schools attractive

²⁹ “‘Lincoln Plan OK’: Eagleton School Tour,” *Kansas City Times*, 29 March 1978, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 462.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ “Four All-Day Kindergartens Part of Magnet School Plan,” *Kansas City Times*, 4 May 1978, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 316.

³² Ronald Szczypkowski and Marilyn Musumeci, “New York State Evaluation Study,” in *Magnet School Policy Studies and Evaluations*, eds. Donald R. Waldrip, Walter L. Marks, and Nolan Estes (Austin: Morgan Printing and Publishing, 1993), 103-256.

to parents, students, and educators.³³ The concept of a magnet school was to offer specialized, unique programs in order to attract a diverse student body.³⁴ Magnets became an extremely popular strategy during the early 1980s, implemented as attempts toward school improvement and desegregation. Magnet schools' growing attractiveness can be seen in their widespread implementation nationwide from 1980 onward. Part of the appeal of the magnet philosophy in Kansas City was the promising outcomes of magnet implementation in places like Dallas, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and San Diego, as well as Missouri's own St. Louis. Dallas and Chicago, in particular, Thomas Eagleton noted in a letter to Hale Champion of HEW, attracted students with their "brand-spanking new facilities" and "truly challenging and innovative curricula."³⁵

Los Angeles, by the 1983-1984 school year, had magnet programs at the elementary, junior high, and senior high level, and evaluations showed students in nearly all of the magnet programs scoring at or above both district and national levels.³⁶ Results in New York were equally impressive. A 1985 study of forty-one of the one hundred magnet schools across eight New York districts provided extensive evidence of magnet school accomplishment in improving educational quality, suggesting that choice was a powerful

³³ *Morgan v. Kerrigan*, 530 F.2d 431(1976).

³⁴ Susan E. Eaton and Elizabeth Crutcher, "Magnets, Media, and Mirages: Prince George's County's Miracle Cure," in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, eds. Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton (New York: The New Press, 1996), 265-289.

³⁵ Thomas Eagleton, U.S. Senate, to Hale Champion, HEW, 23 May 1978, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 319.

³⁶ Mary A Raywid, "The Accomplishments of Schools of Choice," in *Magnet Schools: Recent Developments and Perspectives*, eds. Nolan Estes, Daniel U. Levine, and Donald R. Waldrip (Austin: Morgan Printing and Publishing, 1990), 31-47.

incentive in the improvement of the New York schools.³⁷ By 1984, the magnet schools of Milwaukee had grown to include twenty elementary and middle schools as well as five senior high schools. Black students were attending suburban schools, and white students were attending city schools.³⁸ Moreover, the San Diego Public Schools had implemented a voluntary desegregation plan and utilized magnet schools, which proved popular and successful.³⁹ In Kansas City's own backyard, in St. Louis, Missouri, a magnet plan had been initiated in 1981 and resulted in an interdistrict desegregation plan that brought whites to the city's magnet schools.⁴⁰ Despite the great optimism that surrounded magnet schools in the early 1980s, they were not panaceas; magnet schools were not trouble-free.

Magnet schools, Smrekar and Goldring explained, were intended to entice parents to remove their children from their home schools and place them in specialty schools possibly outside of their neighborhood school.⁴¹ While magnet schools provided an alternative to forced busing and mandatory desegregation, there was a certain danger in the magnet theme that stemmed from their selectivity and elitism. Thus, there was a risk of the establishment of a two-tiered system within urban school districts whereby low achieving students would attend poorly functioning traditional schools and academically-oriented magnet schools

³⁷ Marilyn Musumeci and Ronald Szczyrkowski, *New York Magnet School Evaluation Study: Final Report* (New York: Magi Educational Services, 1991).

³⁸ Daniel U. Levine and Eugene E. Eubanks, "Desegregation and Regional Magnetization," in *Magnet Schools: Recent Developments and Perspectives*, eds. Nolan Estes, Daniel U. Levine, and Donald R. Waldrup (Austin: Morgan Printing and Publishing, 1990), 49-57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Ellen B. Goldring and Claire Smrekar, "Magnet Schools and the Pursuit of Racial Balance," *Education and Urban Society* 33, no. 17 (2000), 17-35.

⁴¹ Claire Smrekar and Ellen B. Goldring, *School Choice in Urban America: Magnet Schools and the Pursuit of Equity* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).

would house the highest performing students. Often times this two-tiered system had racial implications:

Lots of places were doing magnet schools. So what they do is they take an all-black school and the first thing they do is throw out half of the Blacks. Well, that's not good. And then they spend more money on that school to attract Whites in. So it's doubly discriminatory. Half the blacks become victims of the remedy and then you have the perception that a school's only worth spending more money on if you're going to try to get Whites to come.⁴²

In order to avoid a two-tiered system, Daniel Levine and Eugene Eubanks, both of whom were professors in the Department of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and had significant involvement in desegregation efforts in Kansas City, suggested three key guidelines. They recommended school districts do the following: “Magnetize” as many schools as possible in order to provide maximum opportunity; take steps to improve the effectiveness of education in schools that are left as traditional; and minimize the use of academic criteria in magnet admissions.⁴³

Employing a comprehensive magnet concept, as explained by Levine and Eubanks, would, it was thought, avoid detracting from the quality of instruction in inner-city schools that resulted from the draining off of the best students and teachers and thereby leaving them even more devoid of positive academic leadership than they were in the first place.⁴⁴ Thus, the vision that was being championed by Levine and Eubanks, in particular, was both systematic and transformative, one that would transform traditional, low-performing urban schools and the neighborhoods that surrounded them; and Houston, Cincinnati, and Chicago

⁴² Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

⁴³ Levine and Eubanks, “Desegregation and Regional Magnetization,” 55-56.

⁴⁴ Daniel U. Levine and Connie C. Moore, “Considerations in Developing and Implementing Big City Magnet Programs,” State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 514.

were looked to as examples of how magnet schools could attract young middle-class families back into the city. By the early 1980s, big urban school districts, Kansas City, Missouri School District included, were at a critical juncture. While most white families had already left the cities for the suburbs by 1980, many middle-class black families remained; yet this began to change in the 1980s. As housing opportunities opened for blacks in the fringe suburbs, middle-class, black families began to leave the urban core as well. Thus, the early 1980s signify a time when inner-city schools, already strapped for cash, were faced with a declining tax base, old and decrepit buildings, and an increasingly impoverished population of students. Central High School provides a particularly cogent example of this phenomenon.

All But Forgotten: Central High School in the Early 1980s

The early 1980s signify a time when Central High School and the neighborhoods around the school were undergoing further transition. By 1980, Central had already been labeled one of Kansas City's worst and most dangerous inner-city, black schools, a reputation that had taken shape over the course of the 1970s.⁴⁵ The 1980s only strengthened such a notion, which was in large part a result of the fact that the area around Central High School had gotten poorer. While the issues causing a socioeconomic decline in the Central High School attendance area were many and varied, several stand out: a disinvestment in the urban core, greater housing opportunities for middle-class black families, and the financial struggles and declining reputation of the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 5 for further discussion

The percentage of poor people living in poor neighborhoods nationwide grew from forty percent to fifty-seven percent between 1980 and 1989.⁴⁶ With the enactment of fair housing laws and subsequent Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975, the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, and changes in the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act in the 1980s, housing opportunities did improve for black middle-class families who could afford to move out of the inner-city.⁴⁷ Black, middle-class outmigration affected the spatial element of the urban neighborhood that prior to 1970 was vertically integrated. Thus, the presence of middle-class, black families in inner-city neighborhoods maintained a viable community in which middle-class families and their resources were community assets.⁴⁸ The white middle-class had long before abandoned black urban neighborhoods. As opportunities improved for the black middle-class, many took advantage of the chance for bigger and newer houses in the fringe suburbs, and fled the inner-city as well. However, by the early 1980s, such movement left urban neighborhoods with higher percentages of people living in poverty than ever before.

Kansas City's urban neighborhoods certainly followed the aforementioned trend, and the area around Central High School provides insight into this phenomenon. The historic census data between 1940 and 1980 shows how significantly the area around Central High School changed between the identified years. Not only did the area transform from almost entirely white to nearly all black, it also became less socioeconomically diverse, with the percentage of poor residents growing in number and the middle-class declining. The Central

⁴⁶ Douglas S. Massey, Andrew B. Gross, and Kumiko Shibayu, "Migration, Segregation, and Geographic Concentration of Poverty," *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 3 (1994), 425-445.

⁴⁷ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*.

⁴⁸ William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

High School census tract enjoyed a consistently low unemployment rate through 1970: four percent in 1940; one percent in 1950; four percent again in 1960; and five percent in 1970.⁴⁹ The unemployment rate provides a picture of the socioeconomic viability of a neighborhood, and between 1940 and 1970, the unemployment rate in the Central High School attendance area was relatively low. However, the unemployment rate shot up dramatically between 1970 and 1990. By 1980, the unemployment rate had risen to 11.6 percent and then dramatically increased to 24.1 percent in 1990, suggesting that the area changed significantly between 1980 and 1990.⁵⁰ Certainly, the socioeconomic makeup of the neighborhood affected Central High School and the other inner-city Kansas City, Missouri School District schools that were forced to serve a student population, which, by the late 1980s, had become much poorer, and the schools had to meet the needs of their students with fewer and fewer resources.

Lee Barnes, Jr. and Connie Wright both graduated from Central High School in 1982, and their unique life experiences at Central and perceptions of the school upon their graduation and departure provide great insight. Barnes, Jr. still a resident of Kansas City, grew up attending Kansas City, Missouri School District schools, as did his classmate, Wright, who is also a resident of the metropolitan Kansas City area. Both individuals graduated from Midwestern, four-year universities: Wright graduated from the University of Kansas, where she earned her bachelor's degree before going on to get her master's degree; and Barnes, Jr. received his engineering degree from Kansas State University in four years.

⁴⁹ United States Census (1940-1970), www.socialexplorer.com.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1970-1990.

Barnes, Jr. and Wright attributed their success in college to their preparation at Central High School in the early 1980s. Wright explained:

I was really surprised when I got to KU. All these Johnson County kids, they don't know anything. I was totally prepared. It was very frustrating when I would get into the large, survey classes and they'd be like "Oh, inner-city black girl, she can't handle it." Little did they know...my study skills...I was ready. Not to mention all of the extracurricular activities they would pump in to help you. You had people who were committed...they prepared us.⁵¹

Wright, Central's valedictorian in 1982, and Barnes, Jr. were among the highest performing students at Central and thus benefited from the most challenging course of study. As Wright explained, the top ten percent of students, she estimated, received certain advantages: "You had the same teachers for the advanced classes. They didn't track, but it was natural elimination....Our top ten went into engineering or computer science and went to major D-1 schools and earned a 3.0 or above." Barnes, Jr. corroborated Wright's remembrances of her educational experiences and added, "We had African American teachers who kind of knew what we needed to do to be successful and compete."⁵² Wright, too, mentioned her African American teachers: "To me, the level of commitment was even more so important still for us. The teachers were still teaching us like they were teaching in a segregated school and to prepare us to compete with the white man. Because that was their constant call."⁵³

Both Wright and Barnes, Jr. spent their childhood in the neighborhoods around Central High School. Wright grew up in a house at Thirty-Sixth and Olive, and Barnes, Jr. was just around the corner at Thirty-Sixth and Agnes. Barnes, Jr. explained that his experience growing up in the same house throughout his elementary, junior high, and senior

⁵¹ Connie Wright, conversation with author, 12 November 2012.

⁵² Lee Barnes, Jr., conversation with author, 12 November 2012.

⁵³ Connie Wright, conversation with author, 12 November 2012.

high school years was most beneficial and stabilizing: “That was one of the key elements of the neighborhood. There was some stability. Most of the people I went to school with, I went to school with them from second grade—or first grade—to high school.” Moreover, he stated that his commitment to Central High School started at a young age:

One of the things I remember early on, even before I went to Central, was during homecoming there would be a homecoming parade down Benton Boulevard. Several of my friends and I, even as middle schoolers or elementary students, we would go to the games. I knew of the players. It was a community thing.⁵⁴

Wright, too, one of ten Central High School graduates in her family, recalled the sense of belonging and kinship she felt in the neighborhood schools around Central:

Growing up in those neighborhood schools there was a sense of community. The families were really grounded. My mom was there; my dad was there. They were married for sixty years. The people on the same blocks went to school together, and there was that community, that longevity. My closest friends are friends from high school, because they either went to Ladd, Richardson, or C. A. Franklin....⁵⁵

Wright, however, explained that she noticed a change in the neighborhood and the school in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a change that she attributed to the busing of Central students, her peers, out of Central and into area white schools such as Van Horn High School and East High School:

I think busing was the downfall of the school system. In '82 we still had the community and the infrastructure; we just didn't have all of the students because of the bussing...we were the last of it. They say we were the last of it, because we were the last of it. Nobody wants to go where there are no winners. Now you can't attract students.⁵⁶

Busing did indeed lower the overall number of students attending Central, as black students were pulled from their neighborhood school and bused out into white schools. “We

⁵⁴ Lee Barnes, Jr., conversation with author, 12 November 2012.

⁵⁵ Connie Wright, conversation with author, 12 November 2012.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

still tease people who went to Van Horn and East,” Barnes, Jr. stated, whose wife was among the students who lived in the Central attendance area but spent the majority of her high school years at East High School.⁵⁷ Between the 1975-1976 academic year and the 1983-1984 academic year, Central’s total annual enrollment decreased from 2,025 to 682.⁵⁸ In 1982, Barnes, Jr.’s and Wright’s senior class had dwindled to 167 students, a far cry from the classes of five hundred or more that walked Central’s halls less than a decade before. While busing lowered the number of students in neighborhood black schools such as Central, so too did a noticeable population flee from urban neighborhoods. Neighborhood census data show that the census tract around Central High School greatly decreased in both population and population density between 1970 and 1990, though the size of the tract remained constant at one-half square mile. In 1970, the total population of the tract was 8,260, and the population density per square mile was 16,918.⁵⁹ By 1980, the total population of the same area had dropped to 6,112, and the population density had fallen to 12,523.9; by 1990, the population had decreased to 4,768 and the population density to 9,565.5.⁶⁰ Barnes, Jr.’s family was among those who left the Central attendance area during the 1980s. In 1987, they moved to Ninety-Seventh and Harris in the southern portion of Kansas City, Missouri, still in Kansas City but on the southern edge near the suburbs of Raytown, Lee’s Summit, and Grandview, Missouri: “My parents left,” Barnes, Jr. explained, “for a nicer, bigger house...that’s where a good number of people live.”⁶¹ An uncertain

⁵⁷ Lee Barnes, Jr., conversation with author, 12 November 2012.

⁵⁸ Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-1955—1983-1984.

⁵⁹ United States Census (1970), www.socialexplorer.com.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1980-1990.

⁶¹ Lee Barnes, Jr., conversation with author, 12 November 2012.

future drove Barnes, Jr.'s parents away from their longtime home near Central High School, uncertainty that, as Barnes, Jr. described, had much to do with the school system and neighborhood, which by 1987 when the Barnes family moved out, looked vastly different than just a decade before.

Money and Magnets in Kansas City, Missouri, 1984-1987

“Grown men would cry,” explained Arthur Benson, in reference to the physical deterioration of the Kansas City, Missouri School District, which by the mid-1980s was in bad shape.⁶² He continued:

I mean, the school district had no financing. The buildings were just so dilapidated...I mean they were foul and stinky and oppressively hot in the winter and people would come out almost gagging. And the president of the Kansas City Southern Railroad was crying when he came out of one of these schools. He said, “I cannot believe that there are children in our community that I am responsible for that we are educating in conditions like this. Fire code violations, I mean, just horrible.”⁶³

A Board-commissioned study in 1980 found that the rehab requirements and costs to provide a more adequate environment for effective instruction required more than thirty-six million dollars just to bring the district buildings into compliance with code and safety regulations and meet minimal standards of education.⁶⁴ Most certainly, the district's financial situation was dire. By 1984, it had been fifteen years since voters had passed a tax levy.⁶⁵ In 1969, when the last tax levy had been passed, the Kansas City, Missouri School District consisted of 72,674 students; that number dwindled to 36,650 in 1984 when Judge

⁶² Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ *Jenkins v. Missouri*, 639 F. Supp. 19 (W.D. Mo. 1985).

⁶⁵ Alison Morantz, “Money and Choice in Kansas City: Major Investments with Modest Returns,” in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, eds. Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton (New York: The New Press, 1996), 241-263.

Clark finally handed down his first ruling in the *Jenkins* case.⁶⁶ For district supporters, Judge Clark's ruling could not come too soon. Considering the steady, yet alarming decline in enrollment and exodus of both affluent businesses and middle-class and upper-class residents from the Kansas City, Missouri School District's attendance area, in addition to the district's difficulty in acquiring consistent federal assistance, it was clear that something needed to be done. The question revolved around what that "something" would entail. It ultimately hinged on Judge Clark's interpretation.

Plaintiff's counsel, Arthur Benson, remained hopeful that Judge Clark would rule in their favor and against the state, thereby ordering an interdistrict remedy at the state's expense. His optimism stemmed from the September 1984 ruling in which Judge Clark ruled in favor of the district children, the plaintiffs, and against the school district and the state. Thus, Clark found that the Kansas City, Missouri School District had suffered continuous effects of pre-1954 segregation and that the State of Missouri had failed in correcting the problem:

Since the State under its Constitution has the duty to establish and maintain free public schools, it has the primary responsibility for insuring that the public education systems in the State comport with the United States Constitution. The State Board of Education and the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board of Education have much more expertise than this Court in the operation and management of public schools within this State...the State board of Education and the Kansas City, Missouri School District Board of Education are hereby directed to prepare a plan which would establish a unitary school system within the Kansas City, Missouri School District.⁶⁷

Working alongside the district, Arthur Benson and his team of litigators continued to focus their efforts on convincing Clark to accept a two-way busing plan that involved sending

⁶⁶ Kansas City, Missouri School District Enrollment by School, 1954-1955—1983-1984.

⁶⁷ *Jenkins v. Missouri*, 593 F. Supp. 1485 (W.D. Mo. 1984), 36.

urban students to suburban schools and suburban students to urban schools. The metropolitan-wide plan that Benson so desired, however, was never realized. While the metropolitan plan was a laborious undertaking that required years of forethought, it took Clark no more than a week to dismiss it.⁶⁸

With the possibility of an interdistrict desegregation policy officially off the table, Benson and his team of litigators and educational experts rather reluctantly turned to magnet schools as a remedy:

We recognized there were a lot of problems with magnet schools as a remedy, and we didn't want to do it. Because they would not be fully effective the way that they had traditionally been done. Plus, they were expensive and we thought they were discriminatory.⁶⁹

To be sure, many magnet schools had been designed as selective schools and had certain admission requirements, such as an exam, portfolio, or audition that determined one's acceptance. As such, magnet schools seemed to privilege certain students over others, resulting in inequitable access to resources and opportunities.⁷⁰ Benson recognized the discriminatory process by which magnets had historically functioned and pledged to avoid replicating such a system in Kansas City. The new magnet plan, as imagined by Benson's team, was one that required massive educational improvements available to all students. The vision, therefore, for the voluntary interdistrict remedy included, as Benson explained, a plan to "magnetize the entire district."⁷¹ Transforming the majority of the district's schools,

⁶⁸ Dunn, *Complex Justice*.

⁶⁹ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

⁷⁰ Mark C. Vopat, "Magnet Schools, Innate Talent, and Social Justice," *Theory and Research in Education* 9, no. 1 (2011), 59-72.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

if not all, into magnet schools solved the problem of access, but the critical issue that remained uncertain was how such a plan would be subsidized.

The financing of a remedial plan proved to be a divisive issue from the beginning, and when a magnet remedy was adopted by Judge Clark in June of 1986, it was clear that costs were sure to be high. Conservative Missouri Attorney General William Webster and conservative Governor John Ashcroft were determined to ensure a limited fiscal responsibility on behalf of the state. Already involved in a costly desegregation settlement in St. Louis, the State of Missouri was particularly motivated to battle another expensive desegregation plan in Kansas City. Thus, nearly every recommendation advanced by Dr. Eugene Eubanks and the Desegregation Monitoring Committee, a committee established by Clark to oversee the implementation and effectiveness of Kansas City, Missouri School District's desegregation efforts, was opposed by the state. Consequently, *Jenkins v. Missouri* developed into a collection of appeals, whereby the Desegregation Monitoring Committee would make a suggestion to the court and the State of Missouri would appeal the measure.⁷² But by July of 1986, the district had a clear vision, and Clark appeared fully on board, despite the state's resistance.

The Long Range Magnet Plan, which was principally devised by two educational consultants, Daniel Levine and Phale Hale, but also involved the expertise and support of school district officials and plaintiff's attorneys, was comprehensive in nature and detailed the conversion of all of the district high schools and middle schools and approximately half of the elementary schools to magnet schools.⁷³ Only eighteen elementary schools were not

⁷² *Chronology of Jenkins*, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Kansas City, Vertical File.

⁷³ Phale D. Hale and Daniel U. Levine, "Long Range Magnet School Plan" (Kansas City, MO: Kansas City, Missouri School District, 1986), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D503.

part of the magnet plan and instead were involved in the district's Effective Schools program, which left the school in its traditional format but emphasized a uniform Effective Schools framework. These schools, dubbed the "black corridor schools," were referred to as such because they consisted of a student body that was all black and resided deep within neighborhoods that were also all black.⁷⁴ As such, district administrators did not foresee a magnet theme attracting white students to these eighteen elementary schools and thus decided on an Effective Schools program instead.⁷⁵ The state, however, argued that the proposed magnet plan, despite leaving eighteen elementary schools in a traditional format, converted too many of the district's schools into magnet schools and was hastily drafted.⁷⁶ The court acknowledged the state's position but affirmed the plan with convincing language:

The Court finds that the proposed plan would serve the objectives of its overall desegregation program. First, the carefully chosen magnet themes would provide a greater educational opportunity to all Kansas City, Missouri School District students. The plan magnetizes such a large number of schools that every high school and middle school student will attend a magnet school. At the elementary level, there would be a sufficient number of magnets to permit every student desiring to attend a magnet school to do so.⁷⁷

The design of the magnet plan in Kansas City was unique in its all-inclusive nature, which was designed to avoid issues of inequity and formation of a two-tier educational system. The Long Range Plan identified the 1991-1992 academic year as the target date for completion. Considering the scope of the project, the five- to six-year window seemed reasonable, as the district faced a considerable amount of building renovation and new construction in order to

⁷⁴ "Black corridor schools" appears to have been the prevailing term for these eighteen schools, though such a term was not identified in school documents.

⁷⁵ Loyce Caruthers, conversation with author, 12 April 2014.

⁷⁶ Court Order, 12 November 1986.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

implement the far-ranging magnet themes, which included foreign languages, computers, performing arts, agribusiness, environmental science, engineering and technology, health professions, and classical Greek.⁷⁸ Indeed, the plan was costly, with a projected six-year implementation phase of \$143 million and an additional \$53 million in capital improvements.⁷⁹

The capital improvements were slotted for eleven district schools that required work to ready them for the new magnet theme. Additionally, some of the \$53 million was to account for four new schools. Despite the state's insistence that the condition of the district's schools were a result of lack of maintenance on the part of the Kansas City, Missouri School District, the court did not buy it:

The Court finds that even if the State by its constitutional violations and subsequent failure to affirmatively act to remove the vestiges of the dual school system did not directly cause the deterioration of the school facilities it certainly contributed to, if not precipitated, an atmosphere which prevented the Kansas City, Missouri School District from raising the necessary funds to maintain its schools. Furthermore, the capital facilities program requested by the Kansas City, Missouri School District is a proper remedy through which to remove the vestiges of racial segregation, and is needed to attract non-minority students back to Kansas City, Missouri School District.⁸⁰

The district, it appears, was benefiting from a court that had bought into the notion that the substantial resources requested were reasonable considering that the “constitutional violations committed were also substantial.”⁸¹ Although the State of Missouri did not approve, their appeals fell on deaf ears; neither the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals nor the Supreme Court were willing to oppose Clark's support of The Long Range Magnet Plan. So

⁷⁸ Hale and Levine, “Long Range Magnet School Plan.”

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Court Order, 12 November 1986.

⁸¹ Ibid.

with the district's magnet plan firmly in place, the district began working toward implementation of their ambitious magnet-themed remedy.

Having affirmation by the courts that a comprehensive magnet plan was an acceptable remedial order, the court addressed the condition of the district's schools. Richard C. Hunter, a consultant, was commissioned by the district to evaluate the extent of capital improvement needs, which involved a school-by-school assessment of all of the district's schools as well as some of the surrounding suburban schools. A professor from the University of North Carolina and former superintendent of the Richmond, Virginia, and Dayton, Ohio, public schools, Dr. Hunter's 1987 report was thorough and troubling:

The school buildings are generally very old and in poor condition. The Kansas City, Missouri School District has failed to obtain necessary financial resources from the community and the state for proper maintenance, substantial renovation, or replacement of the school buildings. Thus, some have become unserviceable. Over the years, several unsuccessful attempts have been made to pass capital improvements bond issues.⁸²

At the time of the report, in January of 1987, the Kansas City, Missouri School District consisted of eighty-one buildings, and the breakdown was as follows: fifty elementary schools, eight junior high schools, nine high schools, and fourteen special or closed schools. The average age of the buildings was 53.8 years, with eleven of the buildings having been built seventy-five or more years before.⁸³ Moreover, Hunter came to the conclusion that the schools of the district adversely affected education and discouraged parents from enrolling their children in the district, not to mention the fact that the buildings represented safety and

⁸² Richard C. Hunter Deposition, 11 November 1988, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D162.

⁸³ Richard C. Hunter, "Kansas City, Missouri School District Long-Range Capital Improvement Plan" (January 1987), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box 618.

health hazards.⁸⁴ The report concluded that seventeen schools should be demolished, twenty-one be constructed anew, and all of the buildings renovated for a projected cost of \$265 million.⁸⁵ Hunter's assessment of Central High School represented both how decrepit the schools of the Kansas City, Missouri School District had become and how massive Kansas City, Missouri's, magnet-themed project would be.

Hunter described Central High School as being in the worst condition of any of the district secondary schools, suggesting that it was "deplorable."⁸⁶ In his deposition, Hunter explained that Central required work on both the inside and outside. He suggested the outside of the building needed "a lot of work," but it was the inside that was most distressing. Hunter suggested that Central was "just a depressing facility to walk in." In several parts of the building, paint was peeling from the walls and the ceiling was falling in, a result of severe water damage. In the auditorium, Hunter claimed that the daylight peered through a hole in the roof.⁸⁷ Arthur Rainwater, principal at Central High School from 1987 to 1989 and later an assistant to the superintendent, remembered Central to be in terrible condition when he assumed his position as principal: "My office was on the top floor of the building and we had buckets out on the floor when it would rain. I mean it was really in bad shape."⁸⁸

Central, however, represented merely one of many buildings that Hunter determined needed to be rebuilt or renovated. Upon receipt of Hunter's report, the school board

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Richard C. Hunter Deposition.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Arthur Rainwater, conversation with author, 29 July 2013.

immediately approved it and subsequently sent it to the Desegregation Monitoring Committee that did the same, as did Judge Clark. In a show of support for upgrading the facilities of the Kansas City, Missouri School District, Clark, in a September 1987 ruling, exercised the court's "broad equitable power to remedy the evils of segregation" by ordering a tax increase on the residents of Kansas City, Missouri.⁸⁹ Clark's reasoning was based on the notion that the majority had no right to deny others their constitutional rights:

This Court, having found that vestiges of unconstitutional discrimination still exist in the Kansas City, Missouri School District, is not so callous as to accept the proposition that it is helpless to enforce a remedy to correct past violations. Failure of the Kansas City, Missouri School District to come forward with its share of funds to implement the remedial plan would certainly operate to hinder vindication of federal constitutional guarantees to which the school children in the Kansas City, Missouri School District are entitled. This Court cannot shrink its sworn duty to uphold the Constitution of the United States....The Court is of the firm conclusion that it has no alternative but to impose tax measures which will enable the Kansas City, Missouri School District to meet its share of the cost.⁹⁰

Thus, Clark imposed a 1.5 percent increase on the Missouri State Income Tax, which raised the tax to 7.5 percent on residents and nonresidents of the Kansas City, Missouri School District alike, as well as business associations, partnerships, and corporations who earned salaries, wages, commissions and all other compensation subject to the Missouri State Income Tax. Additionally, Clark raised the property tax of Kansas City, Missouri School District residents by \$1.95 per one hundred dollar assessed valuation, which amounted to over twenty-seven million dollars annually.⁹¹

Clark's decision resulted in an almost immediate backlash and cries of an imperial judiciary. Just a year after the decision, the income tax surcharge was appealed and

⁸⁹ Court Order, 17 September 1987.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

overturned, but the increase in property tax withstood an appeal to the Supreme Court. By 1987, it appeared the district's magnet plan was unfolding as well as could have been hoped by its supporters. Judge Clark was fully supportive of the district's Long Range Magnet Plan, and the State of Missouri was being held responsible for much of the financial burden. But 1987 was just the beginning, and perhaps no Kansas City, Missouri School District school represents the magnet years better than Central High School.

Planning Kansas City's Computers Unlimited/

Classical Greek Magnet High School, 1987-1988

Central High School was re-envisioned as a computers and classical Greek magnet, and a task force was established in 1987 to iron out the details. Arthur Rainwater, Central's principal, who before assuming the principalship at Central had spent much of his career in Catholic education, was hired by the Kansas City, Missouri School District for his expertise in athletics and proficiency in technology:

My background was certainly in athletics, and I also had spent a lot of time working with technology in schools. I was, at that time, very technology proficient, and so that particular job appealed to me because of the dual magnet themes.⁹²

Rainwater, who led the planning task force, remembered Central's planning phase as "fun," though the job was a big one considering the scope of the project.⁹³ Central was designed with two academic tracks; one was constructed around computers and technology and the other in classical Greek and athletics. Therefore, the new Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School was intended to meet the program-specific needs of the new curricula.

⁹² Arthur Rainwater, conversation with author, 29 July 2013.

⁹³ Ibid.

The computer side was planned with computers and technology at the core of instruction, and as it was suggested in the Long Range Magnet Plan, “Computers unlimited magnet schools will provide students with educational opportunities specifically in computer technology and information technology to a greater extent than they are presently offered in the Kansas City metropolitan area.”⁹⁴ As such, the computers unlimited magnet schools were planned to emphasize computer technology in all academic subjects, as computers would be the “vehicle for communication, computation, and management.”⁹⁵ The district planned computers unlimited magnet programs at Richardson Elementary, Central Middle School, and Central High School. Of critical importance for the computer magnet schools was access. The availability of appropriate computer hardware and software was considered essential to the implementation of the computer program.

At Central, all classrooms were designed to be equipped with twenty-five computers, and the computers would, it was reasoned, be used in three ways: through academic core classes, computer-themed classes, and direct instruction.⁹⁶ Computers would serve as an instructional tool in all traditional academic classes so that students would use computers as everyday learning tools. In computer-themed classes, computers would provide a broad base of computer knowledge, thus qualifying students for college, training programs, and job entry, and the classes would be taught in “specially equipped laboratories.”⁹⁷ The management of instruction, it was suggested, would be one that revolved around computers

⁹⁴ Hale and Levine, “Long Range Magnet School Plan.”

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “Central High School Academic Program,” Central High School Task Force (January 1988), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D153.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

and technology, in which classrooms, teacher preparation spaces, laboratories, administrative offices, and secretarial stations would all employ computers and promote a paperless environment.⁹⁸ It was also hoped that Central Computers Unlimited High School would work in cooperation with the city's leading businesses and universities to prepare graduates for entry into college or directly into the workforce.⁹⁹

The classical Greek side of the curriculum was based on the ideal of “a sound mind in a sound body” and was designed to provide students with a strong liberal arts education that featured philosophy, debate, forensics, and pursuit of Greek culture, in addition to a unique and comprehensive athletic program that would be based on the Olympiad.¹⁰⁰ It was hoped that the classical Greek program would attract students, particularly suburban students, interested in Olympic sport, such as aquatics, fencing, or martial arts. While it was thought that Central would attract serious athletes, the school was open to students of all athletic ability levels. The state-of-the-art facilities and top-notch coaches would allow all students to reach their fullest potential and provide an opportunity for many to develop to a nationally competitive level.¹⁰¹

The athletic program was designed to be demanding. As explained in the Long Range Magnet Plan, students would be required to participate in one individual sport and one team sport, which would be part of the student's personal development plan utilized to

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Hale and Levine, “Long Range Magnet School Plan.”

¹⁰⁰ “Central High School Classical Greek Preliminary Program Narrative,” Central High School Task Force (n.d.), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D153.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

maximize physical development throughout the student's four years in high school.¹⁰² By providing unique, Olympic athletic programs, it was reasoned that Central would offer "tremendous opportunities for inner-city kids" while also attracting suburban students and parents seeking to replace expensive and inconvenient out-of-school athletic programs, such as swimming or gymnastics.¹⁰³ The athletics program was split between two different paths, one consisting of "interscholastic athletics" and the other, Olympic development.¹⁰⁴ The interscholastic pathway was designed for students wanting to compete in traditional high school sports, such as basketball, baseball, or football. Students participating in interscholastic sports, however, would be required to take part in two different sports, one of which would be individual and the other team. The Olympic program was to include a rigorous twelve-month training program in one sport, with the training designed to assist students in reaching a high skill level in their sport of choice.¹⁰⁵ But the classical Greek magnet would not focus on only athletics, as the academic programming was claimed to be attractive as well.

Central was the only school in the Kansas City, Missouri School District that would offer a classical education. Rainwater suggested that the academics on the Greek side would be particularly challenging: "I think you will find that the Greek program has probably the most rigorous academic programs in the whole city.... The academic program, on the Greek

¹⁰² Hale and Levine, "Long Range Magnet School Plan."

¹⁰³ Arthur Rainwater Deposition, 2 November 1988, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D174.

¹⁰⁴ "Central High School Classical Greek Preliminary Program Narrative."

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

side particularly, is so demanding and so structured that it is every bit a co-equal part.”¹⁰⁶ The emphasis on a strong academic curriculum was in part motivated out of fear that if a solid academic program was not advanced at a magnet school that promoted athletics, it would turn into a place to “dump” athletes.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the site task force designed the classical Greek curriculum to include a required classical studies component. As part of the classical studies, Central students would have to complete a sports biology class, as well as classical Greek, philosophy, Greek art and archeology, Greek literature, and Greek drama.¹⁰⁸ The task force seemed careful to ensure that the public perception of Central’s dual tracks—computers and classical Greek—not be one of computers versus athletics but a dual curriculum school designed for kids interested in computers and athletics with a common purpose in academic excellence.

With the school’s computer and classical Greek programs taking shape, the task force began seriously considering the building itself and concluded that “the specialized nature of the curriculum at Central High School requires a unique building.”¹⁰⁹ The Long Range Magnet Plan had established overall standards for magnet program development, including guidelines for a new Central High School, which was to provide exceptional features that would attract white parents and students from surrounding private schools and suburban schools to voluntarily choose to attend Central. To obtain the court-ordered forty

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Rainwater Deposition.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Levine Deposition, 16 February, 1989, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D174.

¹⁰⁸ “Central High School Classical Greek Preliminary Program Narrative.”

¹⁰⁹ “Central High School Academic Program.”

percent white enrollment, the scope of the programs were considered essential, as Central, it was thought, would be a challenge to desegregate:

Central High School promises to be the most difficult school to desegregate, both because of its location in the highly segregated central corridor of the city and because its reputation as a problem school with a history of academic failure....In order to attract white students, Central must offer an exceptional program in an exceptional facility.¹¹⁰

Accordingly, the new Central High School was to be spacious and robustly equipped with the latest in computer technology and sport and physical education equipment and facilities.

The new building's design was certainly impressive, especially the natatorium, which was planned to house all of the aquatic sports. The natatorium included a six foot-by-six foot underwater window with observation space, underwater speakers for synchronized swimming, two one-meter diving boards, two three-meter diving boards, and platform diving tower, a gutter system for overflow and circulation, hydrostatic relief system for stabilization, and an automatic timing system with scoreboard.¹¹¹ The aquatic facility was intended for both school and community use in recreational and competitive swimming and diving, as well as water polo and synchronized swimming.

In addition to the natatorium, the new Central would have a state-of-the-art field house to accommodate gymnastics, basketball, and indoor track and field, among other sports. The overall concept of the athletic facilities was to create an environment conducive to attracting and developing young people for world-class competition levels.¹¹² On the

¹¹⁰ *Jenkins v. Missouri*, "Plaintiff's Post-Hearing Brief and Suggested Findings of Fact," March 31, 1989, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D237.

¹¹¹ "Design Program Analysis for the New Kansas City Central High School, Kansas City, Missouri," Councilman/Hunsaker & Associates (March 1988), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D503.

¹¹² Thomas Eaton Meeting Notes (2 March 1988), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, BoxD503.

computer side, the new building was to have roughly one thousand computers in total, with fifteen computer-equipped classrooms, each having twenty-five computers in a perimeter arrangement, as well as six computer-equipped science labs; several specialized computer labs, including a graphic arts lab, robotics lab, electronics lab, drafting design lab, and two business labs; four computer programming classrooms; and a computer mainframe or resource room for Central students to use during extended-day opportunities.¹¹³

With the new building being planned to open during the 1991-1992 academic year, Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School was going to be, its supporters proclaimed, one of the best and most unique secondary schools in the nation. Certainly, the new building's design was impressive, but it was also expensive. The site location had been decided in 1987, which was the least disruptive of the three sites considered, as it required little in the way of additional land acquisition.¹¹⁴ The new building essentially wrapped around the old building and was literally built within a few feet of it. Originally, in 1986, the district estimated the new Central would cost \$15,243,050, and the court obliged. By 1988, however, the district began considering an increase in the construction budget, which was approved by the court's Desegregation Monitoring Committee and eventually by Judge Clark. Thus, construction costs were raised by \$7,010,166, increasing the overall cost of Central from just over fifteen million dollars to \$23,474,615.¹¹⁵ The State of Missouri vehemently opposed the measure:

One is left with the conclusion that the Kansas City, Missouri School District's motion to modify the construction budget regarding Central is the result of educators

¹¹³ Arthur Rainwater Deposition.

¹¹⁴ Final Site Report, Kansas City, Missouri School District (August, 1988), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, D503.

¹¹⁵ Court Order, 26 April 1989.

creating a wish list. One can imagine the district educators reviewing the Court's approved programs and insisting on the inclusion of frill after frill, like sharks in a feeding frenzy....It is an outrage that the district has chosen to make a sham of the desegregation process, converting it into something resembling a money grab.¹¹⁶

Despite the state's opposition, the Kansas City, Missouri School District continued its insistence that the new Central High School was within the parameters outlined by the Long Range Magnet Plan, and Judge Clark routinely supported the assertion. As such, the construction of the new Central High School moved forward as planned with a completion date of fall 1991. Meanwhile, in the fall of 1988, the old Central High School opened its doors as a computer magnet high school. A new era had begun.

¹¹⁶ *Jenkins v. Missouri*, "State's Opposition to the Motion of the Kansas City, Missouri School District for Approval of a Site for Central High School and for Increases and Modifications in the Budgets for Building Construction and Equipment for the Magnet; Alternative Request for a Hearing" (December 1988), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II, Box D503.

CHAPTER 8

A NEW ERA: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT EXPERIENCE

AT CENTRAL COMPUTERS UNLIMITED/CLASSICAL

GREEK MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL, 1988-1999

The Computer Magnet, 1988-1991

Daryl Norton, a student at Central from 1986 to 1990, had long dreamed of attending Central High School, a school that seemed almost bigger than life when he was a young boy. Norton remembered how he desired to enter the old Central High School building that was built in 1915:

It was this big, magnificent building. We used to go in the building, and I remember from my cousin, we used to go in there with them, back in the seventies, you know, late seventies. I was like, “Look at that,” and I was like “Man, this school is big.” And even when I got here, I was like, “Well, it’s not as big as I thought it was,” but then I thought, “It’s bigger than what I thought it was.” With the track, the indoor track that was right above the basketball court. We used to think, “Man, that’s cool!” You know, all this stuff...we were like, “Man, we are really about to be in here.”¹

Norton grew up in Kansas City, Missouri and lived just blocks away from Central High School. Though Norton’s parents were present in his childhood, he grew up living with his grandparents, who, he explained, were actively involved in his life and schooling and acted as his mother and father: “That was momma and daddy to me...that’s exactly what I called them.”² Norton explained, too, that the support he felt growing up from his grandparents extended beyond the walls of his home and into the neighborhood, which he described as

¹ Daryl Norton, conversation with author, 27 September 2013.

² Ibid.

“close” and “watchful.”³ Perhaps Norton benefited from a connected family, as Norton’s grandfather, a former bodyguard for Booker T. Washington, began his career in Kansas City as one of the first printers at the black newspaper, the *Kansas City Call*, before embarking on a longtime career in education in the Kansas City, Missouri School District: “he was so well connected and a lot of people, especially in the school district, the Kansas City School District, knew my grandfather.”⁴ So Norton most definitely felt a certain loyalty to the Kansas City, Missouri School District considering his grandfather’s history, but he had a particular affection for Central, which had been instilled in him from the time he was in elementary school:

I remember in elementary and they came and told us like, “Hey, you’re going to be going to Central; we’re recruiting you now....But we were already eager to go there anyway because that was our neighborhood school, you know, and my cousins went there so I used to hear all this fun stuff they had...so many teachers lived in the neighborhood. You know, the community, I mean like the school kind of funded a lot of stuff that was around here.”⁵

So when Norton finally walked into Central High School on his first day as a freshman in 1986, he had realized a longtime dream—he had made it to Central High School, a school that Norton had long held in high esteem.

Crystal Shakur, a graduate of Central’s class of 1989, was just a year ahead of Norton in school and, like Norton, had grown up, for the most part, in the neighborhoods around Central. Shakur was one of eleven children raised by a single mother who struggled with alcoholism. Shakur’s father was never in her life, and her mother was merely somewhat involved. Shakur explained that her mother did “as best she could,” but that her alcoholism

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

had taken a physical toll by the time she had entered Central High School and rendered her mostly disengaged. Thus, the neighborhood community played an essential part in her life and contributed to her feelings of connectedness to Central: “I remember feeling like everybody kind of knew everybody, you know....Families kind of knew each other....”⁶ The close-knit feel of the neighborhood carried over into the school, as Shakur described how she and her friends would walk to one another’s houses and then proceed to Central High School; she recalled it fondly:

I loved it because all my friends were there! I was very connected with Central. I was one of the students that was kind of the leaders I guess, involved heavily with things going on as far as student council—I was a cheerleader, you know, ran track—so I was very connected with the school.⁷

Shakur remembered the teachers, the majority of them still black in the mid and late 1980s, as “supportive” and “encouraging” and suggested that the teachers at the time knew how to “pull your strings.”⁸ Shakur did feel emotionally supported by teachers, whom she said would “get with you” in times of need, she did not always feel academically challenged:

There were some [teachers] that, to me, it felt like they would just give you busy work. And maybe it was just me because I was in some of the other classes, I guess you would say advanced courses or whatever. So those teachers really challenged me, but in some of the others, not really.

Indeed, standardized testing data reveal that in 1985-1986, Shakur’s freshman year, Central had fallen well below national norms in reading and math.⁹ The computer magnet program, then, was designed to bring technology into the “vital role of enabling all students to be

⁶ Crystal Shakur, conversation with author, 5 December 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Evaluation of Reading and Math Objectives for the School Year, 1985-1986, Kansas City, Missouri School District, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 182D.

challenged and at the same time experience success by allowing teachers to truly handle individual differences.”¹⁰ So when Shakur entered Central High School for her senior year in 1988, Central was no longer Central High School; it was the Central Computers Unlimited Magnet. The school still occupied the old 1915 building, but it had received a facelift and had been rewired to accommodate computer technology. The comprehensive magnet plan was underway, but would it work—would it lead to greater integration and improved academic performance?

Shakur recalled a thrust to incorporate computers into the curriculum her senior year, 1988-1999, the first year of the magnet program at Central:

It was pushed [computers] as part of the curriculum. I remember also, as a senior, a half-day where we would go and work with, like, DST and different companies. Back then, for those of us who had the credits to leave for a partial day or so, it was pushed. I remember learning different programs. I remember COBOL, but I don't really remember how to do it right now, but you know. I just remember that they did try to implement those things and try to direct us more toward using computers.¹¹

It was understood by district administrators that the implementation of a new computer-themed magnet would take time. Arthur Rainwater explained the district's cautious optimism: “people expect an immediate turnaround, and that just isn't going to happen. It is going to take a long time to remedy the vestiges of desegregation that were here.”¹² Thus, students like Shakur, who were seniors during the first year of implementation, would not benefit as greatly as students who entered Central Computers Unlimited as freshmen in 1988 and spent four full years in the program. The implementation phase, monitored by annual

¹⁰ Computers Unlimited Computers Magnet Outline: 1988-1989, Central High School Task Force, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, D153.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Elizabeth L. Spaid, “Magnets’ Attract in Kansas City,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 June 1992, 12.

formative evaluations, was viewed as a three-year process, and success was to be reported in a summative evaluation relying on achievement test results, interviews, and observations.¹³ The 1988-1989 formative report revealed how slowly the process of change might unfold. While enrollment increased from 809 to 967, and the number of “non-minority” students increased from one to thirty-seven or under one percent to four percent, student achievement continued to lag well behind both district and state averages.¹⁴ The Long Range Magnet School Plan emphasized the need for “major” improvements in the mathematics curriculum and instruction.¹⁵ Central’s tenth grade students’ scores, for example, in the math portion of the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests (MMAT) jumped from 249 to 282 between 1987 and 1989, but it was still ten points behind the district-wide average and nearly fifty points behind the statewide average.¹⁶ Moreover, mean math and science scores across all grade levels on the Tests of Academic Proficiency (TAP) were lower at Central than the district-wide mean scores.¹⁷

Shakur, though recognizing the push to incorporate computers in the classroom and acknowledging the availability of computer technology, did not notice a major difference in her education nor in the facility after the magnet program had been initiated in 1988, despite the roughly \$37 million in capital improvements pursuant to the court’s 1985 order and over

¹³ Formative Evaluation of the Central Senior Magnet School Computers Unlimited, 1989-1990, Evaluation Office, School District of Kansas City, Missouri, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 511.

¹⁴ Formative Evaluation of the Central Senior Magnet School Computers Unlimited, 1988-1989, Evaluation Office, School District of Kansas City, Missouri, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 511.

¹⁵ Hale and Levine, “Long Range Magnet School Plan.”

¹⁶ Formative Evaluation of the Central Senior Magnet School Computers Unlimited, 1988-1989.

¹⁷ Ibid.

eight million dollar annual budget increase for magnet implementation:¹⁸ “The only thing was that the programs just were different. That’s the only thing I noticed...I didn’t really notice how the money may have come in.”¹⁹ Shakur was not particularly interested in computers. A self-described “people-person,” Shakur claimed to have had some knowledge of the magnet plan from her service on student council and even participated in a 1988 marketing campaign for the school. She and another student were featured on a poster promoting the magnet theme at Central. Yet, Shakur never felt a passion for computers, but the allegiance she felt to Central was too great to entice her to go elsewhere during her senior year.

Unlike Shakur, Norton was very much interested in computers and welcomed the new emphasis on computer technology, though Norton said that he really was not much aware of the magnet plan or the impending court case until his senior year, the 1989-1990 school year.²⁰ Norton recalled, specifically, a meeting with then principal of Central Computers Unlimited, Arthur Rainwater:

He [Rainwater] talked to us first and let us know what was going on. And then he said, “You guys are the stepping stone to the future”.... We had no idea that the court thing was going on. When he came along and talked to us, he really emphasized, he let us know, that, you know, you guys are going to be the ones graduating out of the computer unlimited magnet school. You’re going to be the first and then we started hearing a little bit of stuff here and there...that there was a court case...and we were like, “Hey man, we love you [Rainwater] for this.” Because, I mean, it really did, it improved our stuff so much. I mean, we still didn’t really know the full of it, but we just, we were thankful for that...we started getting new stuff.²¹

¹⁸ *Jenkins v. Missouri*, “Motion for Approval of the Kansas City, Missouri School District Long-Range Capital Improvement Plan” (1987), State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 511.

¹⁹ Crystal Shakur, conversation with author, 5 December 2013.

²⁰ Daryl Norton, conversation with author, 27 September 2013.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Before the magnet money began coming into Central, Norton suggested that expectations were unreasonable. “How can we [raise scores],” he asked, “if we don’t have the updated material?”²² He noted that he recognized when the money began filtering in:

So each year it was like, you know, something new. We either got something new or we got an improvement on something....It helped a lot for a lot of us....We wouldn’t have had the programs that we had. We had the explorer’s club, all the various clubs. We were able to go do stuff. I mean go check out IBM, go check out AT&T, go to these places that wouldn’t have been accessible for us if we didn’t have the money....Ah man, it made a lot of stuff easier.²³

There was a commitment under the Long Range Magnet School Plan to provide Central Computers Unlimited students and all district students an opportunity for practical application and field experiences.²⁴ Norton was involved in a group at Central known as the Lanterns, which consisted of high-performing students who were interested in computer-related careers. The Lanterns, as Norton described, served as technical support within the school building: “if there was a computer problem, we had to go in. We had access to the server. If something was going wrong with a program, we fixed it...basically, we were doing what a network administrator does.”²⁵

While Norton was feeling fulfilled outside of the classroom through the Lantern program and outreach programs with local businesses in the community, he also felt challenged in the classroom, something he attributed to teachers such as his English teacher, Mrs. Lewis, a black woman, who, he stated, “did not play.”²⁶ Norton described her style as

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hale and Levine, “Longterm Magnet School Plan.”

²⁵ Daryl Norton, conversation with author, 27 September 2013.

²⁶ Ibid.

“college preparatory,” in which she explicitly told students that she would have them ready for college.²⁷ Many teachers, Norton remembered, exemplified similar qualities: “A lot of teachers had that power. They didn’t care who you were or how bad you were, but you were in their class; you were their responsibility, and they would not play.” Despite Norton’s fondness for his teachers, there was little change in the achievement test data between the 1988-1989 and 1989-1990 school years. In year two of the magnet program, tenth grade students had tested below both district and state mean scores on the MMAT, and in fact, had performed slightly worse in math and science in 1990 when compared to 1989. TAP scores, however, revealed progress, especially in reading, in which Central students across all grade levels showed improvement, and ninth graders, in particular, experienced substantial gains. Thus, based on TAP scores, Central students’ achievement and proficiency in reading, math, written expression, science, and social studies were catching up with district-wide mean scores, but they were still performing well below national norms.²⁸

Like student achievement data, integration data was revealing little in the way of meaningful progress. The total number of students actually fell from 967 in 1988-1989 to 885 in 1989-1990, but the number of “non-minority” students increased, though only modestly, from four percent to six percent.²⁹ The magnet plan was only in its second year of implementation, the data were less than impressive. But the program was still in its infancy, and it was too early to determine success or failure. Meanwhile, students such as Shakur and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Formative Evaluation of the Central Senior Magnet School Computers Unlimited, 1989-1990.

²⁹ Ibid.

Norton were graduating from Central after having experienced one and two years, respectively, of magnet programming.

Shakur graduated as valedictorian of her 1989 class and had consistently taken advanced classes at Central both before and after the magnet implementation. Upon graduation, Shakur joined the Marine Corps as a reservist and subsequently headed off to the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. But Shakur would only spend a semester in Columbia: “I was only there for a semester, and that’s when I found out that even though I was taking all those challenging courses [at Central], they weren’t challenging.”³⁰ Shakur explained how she felt ill-prepared for college coursework and college life:

Got there [University of Missouri] and was making Cs. So I mean for me that was devastating. I had never made Cs or a D. What is this? I realized even some of the things like with literature and things like that we had not gotten....So I really didn’t feel like I got enough exposure to things to prepare me. In math and sciences, I did okay.³¹

Shakur returned to Kansas City after the fall semester of her freshman year and attended the University of Missouri-Kansas City on a part-time basis, but family issues got in the way of her schooling, and she found work in customer service and childcare. It was her work with children that ultimately informed her career path.

Shakur explained how at Central her counselors always encouraged computers and engineering as a result of her academic performance. She described it as, “You’re making the grades for this, so you should go into that.”³² The “that” for Shakur was computers and engineering, which she claimed to have little interest in pursuing. It was not until Shakur

³⁰ Crystal Shakur, conversation with author, 5 December 2013.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

began working in childcare that she realized her passion. Shakur would eventually find her way back to college earning her associate's degree by attending two area community colleges, Penn Valley and Longview, before completing her bachelor's degree at UMKC in liberal arts in 2000. In 2010, Shakur earned her master's degree in education from the University of Phoenix and currently teaches kindergarten in the Kansas City Public Schools, the very district she graduated from nearly twenty-five years ago. Although Shakur associates her lack of college preparation with inadequate academic preparation at Central, she still holds Central near and dear and claims that she was "very connected" with the school, her teachers, and her peers.³³ Shakur experienced only one full year of the magnet program, but she seemed skeptical that more time under the magnet theme would have left her better off academically. When questioned about whether more time in the magnet plan might have yielded more rigor, she stated, "Well, I'm really not sure."³⁴

Norton, like Shakur, entered the military immediately following his graduation from Central, despite having several scholarship offers to play collegiate football. The scholarship offers, he explained, "fell through."³⁵ Thus, Norton entered the Navy as a communication technician, where he utilized the knowledge and skills in computer technology that he gained at Central Computers Unlimited Magnet:

I mean, it [knowledge of computers] helped when I was in the military...just the simple fact of being able to look at a system and being a little bit familiar with it. Knowing what a cable or fiber optic that you have to hook up...And for us to just learn about it and know how to put it in, how to install it, you know, what to do if the computer acts up. I mean, it really made it a lot easier. I wasn't nervous to get into a

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Daryl Norton, conversation with author, 27 September 2013.

computer or scared to try to figure it out. I mean, it really made it a lot easier for a lot of us.³⁶

Norton served in the military for over three years and found his preparation at Central Computers Unlimited Magnet most helpful in readying him for life as a “radio man.” Norton completed a tour of duty in Kuwait during Desert Shield/Desert Storm; he is now working toward obtaining a bachelor’s degree in elementary education.

Whereas Shakur did not notice any major improvements in academics in her one year at Central under the school’s newly initiated magnet plan, Norton found that the computer magnet theme and the money that accompanied it improved the quality of education at Central:

It [magnet money] gave the teachers a wider range to teach us...it made school a lot more, I guess, it made it a lot more adventurous for us because it was always an adventure because we didn’t know what was going to happen next. So each year it was something new. We either got something new or we got an improvement on something. I mean, it helped a lot for a lot of us, especially the upper advanced kids. We wouldn’t have had the field trips...It really got to the point where it made me even more want to know what’s out there. It made me really want to learn more about what we had. When robotics hit...I’m like wow! They would do drafting...I mean, it made it a lot easier for a lot of us.³⁷

Norton’s experiences at Central Computers Unlimited Magnet were overwhelmingly positive, though he did suggest that in 1990 during his second and final year at Central he noticed a difference in the faculty, stating, “You could see the change coming when the teachers started retiring. You started seeing the quality changing. You start getting these young teachers, young white teachers.”³⁸ Indeed, more white teachers were arriving at

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Central in the early 1990s, who, by 1992, had reached nearly seventy percent.³⁹ Yet, Norton claimed that there was little he would change about his high school experience, other than the fact that he graduated just before the new Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek building was opened:

I was really upset because we weren't going to be the ones coming out of the building, but I was really happy too that it was coming. And we said, "Man, for all our hard work, you know, it's about time they did something." And I was just thankful enough that the building was going to be there for my cousins...I loved it, everything they had...I wish we would have had it. It probably would have elevated us one hundred times even more.⁴⁰

The highly anticipated and routinely criticized new Central opened its doors in the fall of 1991. While Norton missed the opening of the new building by a few months, Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway, Christopher Slaughter, Melanie Evans, and Quincy Williams were among the first students to graduate from the new Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet School.

New Beginnings, 1991-1992

Just prior to the opening of the new Central building, the superintendent, George Garcia, the eighth Kansas City, Missouri School District Superintendent in eighteen years, resigned. His resignation was allegedly a result of a divided school board, which reflected a citizenry skeptical of district capital improvements, financed in part through an increase in property tax.⁴¹ The most extravagant of the capital improvements was the new Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet, a school that was said to have rivaled many

³⁹ *Centralian*, 1992.

⁴⁰ Daryl Norton, conversation with author, 27 September 2013.

⁴¹ Bruce Rodgers, "A Good Guy Leaving a Tough Job," *Kansas City View*, 2 November 1990, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri Superintendents, Vertical File.

colleges.⁴² Arthur Benson called it the “most phenomenal high school facility in the nation,” speculating that it would be the “most” sought after high school in the district.⁴³ The roughly \$33 million facility was welcomed by many but certainly not by everyone.⁴⁴ A 1992 *Kansas City Star* article labeled the new Central the school that Missouri taxpayers “love to hate,” suggesting that it epitomized excess and was a “prime example of everything frivolous and wasteful in a desegregation plan.”⁴⁵ Yet, the new Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet represented a new beginning for many students, including Karriem-Hardaway, Slaughter, Evans, and Williams, individuals from the graduating classes of 1992 and 1993.

Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway was one of nine children, and she, like all but one of her siblings, graduated from Central High School. Growing up down the street from Central at Thirty-Third Street and Benton Boulevard, Karriem-Hardaway long knew she would eventually walk the halls of Central, stating: “Central was known for breeding family members.”⁴⁶ She recalled fondly the neighborhood in which she was raised, noting that she knew every neighbor on her block and spent much of her time outside playing; she stated: “I wish kids had what I had growing up, and that’s the ability to build relationships with one another, exercise, you know, just feel the burn of being outside.”⁴⁷ But Karriem-Hardaway

⁴² Spaid, “‘Magnets’ Attract in Kansas City.”

⁴³ Tim O’Connor, “New Central High to Cost \$32 Million,” *Kansas City Star*, n.d., A9, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central.

⁴⁴ Jim Mosley, “Stunning: Kansas City’s New Central High Has It,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 9 February 1992, 4a.

⁴⁵ Lynn Horsley, “KC’s Central High: The School Some Love and Some Love to Hate,” *Kansas City Star*, 10 May 1992, A1, A14.

⁴⁶ Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway, conversation with author, 9 December 2013.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

also recalled that the neighborhood had issues as well, most specifically the popularity of crack cocaine in the early 1990s. She described how crack cocaine affected the neighborhood and those close to her:

I witnessed that [beginning of crack cocaine]. I witnessed that, and I witnessed a lot of my friends' parents just sort of give away on them because of the drugs. And so, that, that part of it, I wish I didn't have to see, but we did.⁴⁸

Karriem-Hardaway's family eventually moved out of the Central High School attendance area, but not by choice. An electrical fire during her junior year in high school burned her family home to the ground, and while everyone escaped without injury, the family was forced to move to another home, a home on Thirty-Fourth and Virginia nearer Paseo High School. But as a result of the magnet theme, Karriem-Hardaway continued to attend Central Computers Unlimited Magnet during her junior year before eventually entering the new building, the Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet. The so-called "vintage bunch," Karriem-Hardaway noted, "we carried the history over into the new building."⁴⁹

Christopher Slaughter, too, eventually enrolled at the new Central building in 1991-1992, but for Slaughter, unlike Karriem-Hardaway, attending Central was not a forgone conclusion. Although he and his twin brother attended Kansas City, Missouri School District schools for part of their elementary and middle-school years, their mother home-schooled them for a while, and they attended private Christian schools, as well. "We moved schools a lot," Slaughter explained, which he attributed to the fact that his parents made education a "huge" part of their lives and were always concerned about finding the best possible

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

education for him and his twin brother, as well as for his younger sister and brother.⁵⁰ By the time Slaughter entered high school, his mother and father had divorced, and his mom had moved to Kansas and resided within the high-performing Shawnee Mission Public School District:

When we moved out to Forty-Seventh, we had to go to a Kansas school, and my mother always wanted us to go to a good school. So we went to Shawnee Mission North my freshman year. I loved it; I loved Shawnee Mission North.... We get into this huge house, a five bedroom home. I mean I'm a kid in the inner-city and the house we used to live in was only two bedrooms...we get to Forty-Seventh Terrace, and there's five bedrooms. We each have our own room. And, you know, we were like, "Oh, wow, this is awesome!"⁵¹

Slaughter's time at Shawnee Mission North was short-lived, however, as his mother accepted a job in St. Louis in 1989 during Slaughter's first year at North. Initially Slaughter's mother moved to St. Louis without the family, and his father moved into his mother's house in Kansas to take care of the children. But by the middle of Slaughter's freshman year, his mother requested that he and his siblings join her in St. Louis. Slaughter was not happy about the move: "I fought it tooth and nail....I was in ROTC. I was on the drill team. I was doing wrestling. I was doing very well in wrestling. I was just coming into my own." Despite Slaughter's resistance, he did move to St. Louis during his freshman year, to Olivet County just outside of Ladue, an inner-ring suburb of St. Louis.

Strangely, it was Slaughter's move to Ladue High School in St. Louis that ultimately landed him back in Kansas City and at Central High School. Ladue was a well-respected, high performing high school and part of the St. Louis interdistrict student transfer plan, St. Louis's controversial voluntary desegregation program resulted in some African-

⁵⁰ Christopher Slaughter, conversation with author, 30 September 2013.

⁵¹ Ibid.

American students attending suburban schools and some white students attending city magnet schools.⁵² Slaughter never felt comfortable socially at Ladue, though he did appreciate the academic rigor:

Well, they knew me as Clarence's [Slaughter's twin] brother because, well, Clarence was popular because he would do crazy stuff, stupid stuff. I was trying to, you know, keep my head above water, and Ladue was very challenging, and I loved it. It was very challenging.⁵³

Slaughter also continued with wrestling at Ladue, which he had started at Shawnee Mission North High School. As fate would have it, wrestling—and a certain love interest—introduced Slaughter to fencing:

While I was at wrestling—this is quite a funny story—there was a young lady who was fencing at the time, and I saw her across the way. I thought, “Oh, wow, she's pretty cute.” So I wanted to go over and, you know, talk to her and the fencing coach, who was Hungarian, a sabre coach, was like, “You know, if you want to be over here you got to fence.” So I was like, “Okay.” So I tried it....It was fun. I got pretty good at it.”⁵⁴

As Slaughter's passion for fencing grew, he joined the fencing club team at Ladue High School. By the end of his sophomore year, Slaughter had gotten “pretty good” and competed at the Midwest High School Championships in Phoenix, Arizona, where he learned of the new fencing program at Kansas City's Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet led by Vladimir Nazlymov.

Central's state-of-the-art facilities and innovative classical Greek program, it was hoped, would attract Olympic caliber athletes, as well as elite coaches. The classical Greek program goals explicitly addressed the need for “highly qualified personnel” to enhance

⁵² The St. Louis interdistrict student transfer plan is the subject of Amy S. Wells's and Robert L. Crain's book, *Stepping over the Color Line: African American Students in White Suburban Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁵³ Christopher Slaughter, conversation with author, 30 September 2013.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

“physical and mental development to the highest level.”⁵⁵ One such individual was Willie Mahone, who began his teaching career in the Kansas City, Missouri School District as one of only a few black teachers at Southwest High School in the early 1970s. He was transferred to Central High School in 1982, where he would serve in administration until 1994. Before he assumed his position at Central, Mahone was aware of its negative reputation and was reluctant to make the change, but once he arrived, he described how he “fell in love” with Central and its students:

I heard a lot of the stuff...But then after I got there after a while, I just got immersed in stuff. I took a class over and started coaching, and I just got involved with the kids. And after that, it was all over. You know, I loved Central after that.⁵⁶

In 1991, Mahone became the program administrator for the Greek programs; he remembered his initial excitement about the program and how Central was attracting some of the nation’s best coaches:

The swimming coach was Bill Shalley. He used to have all of those championships teams out at Blue Springs, and he came...Tom Garabedian came...and he was the diving coach. Mary Phyl Dwight came as the team handball coach, and she was an Olympian...She’s a Kansas City girl, and she came. The weightlifting coaches we got from the University of Kansas. They were trainers there at Kansas. We got two of them, and they came over to our weightlifting program. Tennis coaches we brought a guy in that was very prominent, Skip, he’d been to the U.S. Open and all that kind of stuff...and Fred Johnson who [is] now the director of tennis for the Missouri Valley.⁵⁷

The coaching staff at Central was impressive, but perhaps no coach garnered as much attention and respect as the fencing coach, Russian native, Vladimir Nazlymov.

⁵⁵ Program Goals, Central High School Task Force, 1990, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box D153.

⁵⁶ Willie Mahone, conversation with author, 24 October 2012.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Currently the head fencing coach at Ohio State University, Nazlymov, a three-time Olympic gold-medalist and ten-time world champion fencer, joined Central in December of 1991 after having served as the Soviet national team coach for years.⁵⁸ Following the district's December 1991 press release announcing Nazlymov's employment, Central's fencing coach at the time, Steve Butler, called the hiring "the most significant event in American fencing history."⁵⁹ And in an editorial in the *Kansas City Star*, one Kansas City resident, upon hearing of Nazlymov's hiring, claimed, "[M]y faith in educational and political leadership and use of tax money was restored."⁶⁰ Nazlymov moved from Moscow to New York in 1990 to be closer to his son, who had received a fencing scholarship at Penn State. Nazlymov had been offered a job with the prestigious New York Athletic Club, but he decided to join Kansas City's Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet. This curious decision may have been motivated by his displeasure with how the New York program was being run and the desire for a new challenge.⁶¹ Indeed, Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet, a school in Kansas City's urban core, qualified as quite a challenge for an individual who spoke almost no English and had never stepped foot in Kansas City, let alone Kansas City's urban core.

So everything seemed to be going according to plan for the 1991-1992 school year, Central's first year implementing its dual computer and Greek program. An impressive list of coaches headlined by Vladimir Nazlymov had been assembled, and the new high school

⁵⁸ Vladimir Nazlymov, conversation with author, 22 July 2013.

⁵⁹ Clarence Hill, Jr., "Soviet Fencing Coach Joins Central Faculty," *The Kansas City Star*, 19 December 1991, D5.

⁶⁰ Diane Stephenson, "Fencing is Much More Than a Sport," *Kansas City Star*, n.d., Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Central.

⁶¹ Vladimir Nazlymov, conversation with author, 22 July 2013.

building was fully operational with all of the amenities necessary to train future Olympians, as well as abundant computer technology. Karriem-Hardaway described the new building, finished in 1991, as “highly sophisticated” and suggested that once the new building was completed, the improvements were evident:

You could see the benefit of the money. You saw it right away because of course we were the first class; we did see it. I don’t know about the generations behind us, but we saw new uniforms, we saw new balls, new everything. Everything about the school was new, brand new.⁶²

Slaughter, too, upon his transfer to Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet from St. Louis’s affluent Ladue High School, noticed almost immediately that Central was well resourced: “Central High School had everything you needed. Everything. I had to buy all of my stuff at Ladue. Ladue [fencing] was a student-sponsored club. At Central High School it was a team. Totally different.”⁶³ Students like Slaughter and Karriem-Hardaway were relishing their new surroundings and enjoying participating in athletics that were robustly supported with the latest uniforms and equipment, but they recognized that the improvements masked some underlying deficiencies.

Even before Slaughter arrived at Central, he was exposed to the harsh reality of magnet quotas. The Long Range Magnet Plan had established a lofty goal of reaching a student enrollment of forty percent white and sixty percent students of color. Considering that Central was over ninety-nine percent black in 1988, achieving such a ratio was obviously going to pose quite a challenge.⁶⁴ Despite efforts to avoid a two-tiered system of elite magnet schools by transforming all of Kansas City, Missouri School District secondary

⁶² Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway, conversation with author, 9 December 2013.

⁶³ Christopher Slaughter, conversation with author, 30 September 2013.

⁶⁴ “Formative Evaluation of the Central Senior Magnet School Computers Unlimited, 1988-1989.”

schools into magnets, a certain reality existed at schools like Central; more white students were needed to meet the forty-sixty goal to be met by 1998.⁶⁵ Slaughter reflected on his difficulty as an African-American getting into Central, despite his strong desire to participate in fencing:

They would only take so many black kids. If you were a white kid, go ahead. Go to Central. If you're an Asian kid, go to Central. Hispanic kid, go to Central. If you're a black kid, I'm sorry, we're full. That's how they did with schools at the time... I remember myself and my father and the fencing coach walking into the Kansas City School District headquarters and my Dad saying to them and the coach saying to them, "He was guaranteed a spot; we want him in this school." They're like, "No, he can go to Lincoln. He can go to Paseo." "I don't want to go to Lincoln; I don't want to go to Paseo. I want to go to Central."

Although the district refused to admit Slaughter, Steve Butler, the fencing coach at the time, found a way to get him admitted; he was forced to enter the computer side but was still allowed to participate in fencing.

Certainly, one of the major criticisms of Kansas City's magnet plan, especially among many in the black community, was the favoritism shown to white suburban students. As early as 1989, in fact, parents of black students sued the Kansas City, Missouri School District, alleging that the desegregation plan was denying black students access to the best public schools.⁶⁶ Yet, supporters of the magnet plan, including Arthur Benson, continued to champion the magnet approach, reasoning that magnetizing the entire district afforded all students, both black and white, the greatest opportunity. But even Benson acknowledged that in order for desegregation to occur at the level hoped, the magnet schools would have to attract white students from area schools: "We didn't want to call it that, but in effect, it was

⁶⁵ Spaid, "'Magnets' Attract in Kansas City."

⁶⁶ "Suit Says Magnet Schools Bar Black Children," *New York Times*, 3 August 1989, A14

whites only [who] could transfer into the school district for the purposes of integration”⁶⁷ By the 1991-1992 school year, Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet housed 862 students in computers and 240 in classical Greek. Thirteen percent of those enrolled in the Computers Unlimited Magnet were “non-minority,” whereas thirty-one percent in classical Greek were “non-minority.”⁶⁸ Thus, if considering the entire building of 1,102 students, Central was roughly seventeen percent “non-minority” during the 1991-1992 school year, an impressive statistic considering that Central had been nearly one hundred percent black just several years prior.

Karriem-Hardaway, who describes herself as an activist, was skeptical of the magnet plan when she was a senior at Central, and she remains skeptical today. While she did not recall many white students during her time at Central, she viewed the magnet plan as a scheme to encourage whites to move back to the urban core, thus displacing African Americans: “To me, it was designed to separate people...so that white natives or people of this city could move back into the inner-city and take it over.”⁶⁹ As part of the high school exchange program, Karriem-Hardaway was able to witness first-hand education in the suburban schools, and she noticed a marked difference from the education she was receiving at Central:

Lee’s Summit only had one high school and we exchanged, we had our exchange program with them...And just to see the difference in everything, just everything. I mean, from the way they were taught to the classroom sizes. From the way they were arranged amongst each other was just different...and the fact that when you went to

⁶⁷ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

⁶⁸ “Summative Evaluation of the Central Computers Unlimited Magnet High School, 1988-1992,” Evaluation Office, School District of Kansas City, Missouri; “Formative Evaluation of the Central Classical Greek Magnet High School, 1991-1992,” Evaluation Office, School District of Kansas City, Missouri, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 511.

⁶⁹ Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway, conversation with author, 9 December 2013.

lunch the difference in the nutritional value of the food you got versus what you got in our school”⁷⁰

Karriem-Hardaway was less than impressed with the education she received at Central, even after the magnet plan was implemented. She explained that her parents were not particularly interested in her schooling and that she was not pushed to excel; she claimed that she “skated” by and was a victim of false support, in which she was allowed to be a mediocre student because she was a gifted athlete and was winning track championships at a school that was built to promote athletics.

Slaughter, too, found the academic program at the new Central Computers

Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet to be desperately wanting:

At Ladue [St. Louis] there was an expectation to be educated, at Central there wasn't. I mean, to give you an idea, in my senior year at Central High School my English book was the same as my sophomore English book at Ladue...they were doing, you know, how to conjugate verbs into sentences and break sentences down, basic grammar stuff. I was expecting to do advanced papers and stuff like that....My educational life at Central High School really wasn't much. It really wasn't much at all. I got more education from Vladimir Nazlymov than I did from all of those classes [I took].”

Yet despite receiving what he described as a “weak” academic education, Slaughter suggested that Nazlymov’s fencing program made Central well worth the gamble. “He took care of us,” Slaughter proclaimed, in reference to Nazlymov, “like we were his own kids.”⁷¹ So while Slaughter was not aware of the details of the ongoing *Jenkins* case when he arrived at Central, he knew that Central had a well-financed fencing program with an internationally recognized coach, and that combination was enough to convince him that Central had what he needed. It was a decision that Slaughter described as “life-changing” and ultimately one

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Christopher Slaughter, conversation with author, 30 September 2013.

that significantly impacted his career path.⁷² Slaughter, after graduating from Central, still had his eye on the Olympics and tried to make it in fencing. Though he was at one point ranked as high as sixteenth in the nation, he simply ran out of money; he could not fund his fencing, and he no longer had the Kansas City, Missouri School District to pay for expensive national and international travel. He took a job with Costco, got married, and had kids. But fencing and Vladimir Nazlymov had a profound influence on Slaughter's life, and he felt the desire and need to get back into the sport he loved. After starting Black Star Fencing in St. Louis for junior fencers years ago, Slaughter is back in Kansas City and looking to begin a youth fencing program in the city where he honed his own craft.

Karriem-Hardaway's athletic ability and performance at Central landed her a track scholarship at Park University in Kansas City, but college was never really on her radar. Karriem-Hardaway wanted to be a cosmetologist, but she gave in to her parents' demands and attended Park. Her time at Park University, however, was brief. "I was just a resident," she explained.⁷³ Instead of attending class, Karriem-Hardaway spent her days doing hair, and today she owns her own hair salon. Karriem-Hardaway still maintains an activist spirit, exhibiting today the same passion that caused her to question the magnet remedy when she was a student at Central. Karriem-Hardaway takes great pride in being a Central alumna; she stated: "I am proud to have graduated from Central High School, and I wouldn't change it," though she quickly followed up with, "I would have liked to change the educational experience a little bit."⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Khadijah Karriem-Hardaway, conversation with author, 9 December 2013.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

In Full Swing, 1992-1995

Melanie Evans is a business analyst for a large bank where she daily relies on her computer technical skill—knowledge she attributes, in part, to her experiences at Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet. It came as no surprise to those close to Evans that she ended up in an occupation involving computer technology, as she had been interested in computers from the time she was an elementary student:

I think I started being interested in computers in elementary because I kind of almost remember—I went to D.A. Holmes, and we had a little quasi-computer lab. We had the first Apple, little bitty Apple computers. And I believe I got interested there...I think where I really was wanting to do computers was when I got to Central, and we were able to actually write programs in BASIC.⁷⁵

Evans grew up on Kansas City's eastside, and her entire family graduated from Central High School. While Evans was interested in computers, it was her neighborhood ties to Central and not its computer program that was the deciding factor in her attending Central over one of the other district magnet programs. She explained, "I grew up in a time where everybody in the neighborhood went to your school, so you kind of want to stay with your friends...it was just a natural progression."⁷⁶ Evans really felt the support of the community:

We all came from the community where the community watched you...Even down there. Growing up down there, we knew each other. We knew the families. Everybody knew one another, so we knew the importance of at least graduating.⁷⁷

Graduating in 1993, Evans was among the first students to experience a full complement of Central middle and Central high school computer curriculum, and she recalled writing computer programs at Central Middle Magnet School Computers Unlimited, which she

⁷⁵ Melanie Evans, conversation with author, 30 July 2013.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

claimed got her “very interested” in computers and excited about Central’s newly implemented high school computers unlimited magnet.

Beginning at Central High in 1989, Evans experienced two years in the old building and two years in the new building, and although she described the old Central High School as in “pretty good shape,” she did recall hot summer and fall days in school without air conditioning. Evans, however, would have air conditioning and more when she returned from summer vacation and entered her junior year: “I just remember my sophomore year ending and just showing up the next year at the new building...it was very nice.”⁷⁸ Evans especially appreciated the new computers and computer wing, though she was not impressed with the district’s magnet approach, a plan that she, like Karriem-Hardaway, thought of as a way to “get people back into the inner-city” but not necessarily strengthen the education.⁷⁹

She elaborated:

It was just like, oh we’re going to build all these schools and, you know, if you like to dance, go here; if you like to do this, go here. And I don’t know that was really a good idea. So did it make sense to spend the money on that? Or, does it make sense to spend money on really beefing up the education?⁸⁰

Evans felt the magnet schools should have been implemented as a college preparation program, and the core curriculum should have been modified to incorporate more rigor. Yet, in spite of her criticisms of the curriculum, Evans was appreciative of the efforts of Central’s teachers, who, she explained, “tried for every kid...and made sure they had access to everything.”⁸¹ Evans particularly benefited from some of the veteran teachers, most of them

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

black. However, more and more young white teachers would be hired in subsequent years.⁸²

Mahone, classical Greek program administrator, remembered some of the young teachers who were brought in during the magnet years:

They [Kansas City Missouri, School District] brought all of these people in from these different places that didn't stay long... because they were from Princeton, you know, at these private schools and stuff like that. And they just weren't used to inner-city kids.⁸³

Along with young white teachers who were arriving in the early 1990s to teach in the new magnet schools like Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet, were more and more white students.

Quincy Williams, a classmate and friend of Evans's on the classical Greek side, recalled more diversity in athletics his senior year, 1993, than years previous:

I mean, I knew there was integration because I remember especially like our soccer team and our wrestling team was very diverse. So you know, definitely, there was only four, maybe five black people that played soccer, and so the rest were definitely white.... So you definitely saw the integration on that behalf. As you reflect back years now, it was actually very diverse. A lot more diverse than I remember back in the day.⁸⁴

Williams was most certainly correct. In 1993, Central was as diverse as it had been since 1959; it was roughly twenty percent white.⁸⁵ The numbers were even more impressive when considering the classical Greek program alone. Twenty-eight percent of the 279 students in September of 1992 were classified "non-minority."⁸⁶ As such, Central appeared to be

⁸² *Centralian*, 1993-1997.

⁸³ Willie Mahone, conversation with author, 24 October 2012.

⁸⁴ Quincy Williams, conversation with author, 2 August 2013.

⁸⁵ Arthur Benson, unpublished demographic data.

⁸⁶ "Process/Product Evaluation (Formative): Central Classical Greek Magnet High School, 1992-1993," Evaluation Office, School District of Kansas City, Missouri, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 511.

making real progress toward the district goal of forty percent “non-minority.” The district-wide statistics, however, were far less encouraging. In 1993, high school enrollment showed no significant gain in white enrollment, and elementary magnet white enrollment grew by less than one percent; across all grade levels, the “minority” enrollment increased by less than one-half percent.⁸⁷ Central’s progress toward desegregation goals was indeed notable, but it was only half of the equation; the other half was academic achievement.

Williams, one of five children and a self-described “military brat,” moved around quite a lot when he was growing up. He and his family lived in the Philippines, South Korea, and Italy, as well as in Nebraska, Mississippi, and Missouri, before eventually settling in Kansas City. Williams was a fifth-grader when his family moved to a house on Forty-Fifth and Montgall which was closer to Paseo High School than it was Central High School, but with the magnet philosophy firmly in place when he went to middle-school, Williams chose to attend Central. So like his classmate, Evans, Williams received a full complement of magnet schooling from middle school onward; he first attended Central Middle Magnet School Computers Unlimited before moving on to Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School. Starting off in the old building and part of the computer magnet program, Williams switched to the Greek side his junior and senior years in the new building. An athlete, Williams was interested in the Greek magnet theme and ultimately participated in several sports, including cross-country, soccer, wrestling, and baseball. He was particularly impressed with Central’s sporting facilities, explaining that as he continued wrestling in college, the facilities at Central were far superior to what he experienced at Missouri Valley College: “Our weight room, having an indoor track, having ropes, having

⁸⁷ Mary Esselman memo to Pauline Moley, 1993, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 185D.

all that stuff available and accessible to you at any time [at Central]. We didn't get that stuff [at Missouri Valley College] until my senior year.”⁸⁸ Williams was also involved in student government and student council, as well as serving as class treasurer, and as he described it, his active involvement in school life resulted in many positive relationships with teachers and administrators: “Quite a few of them invested a lot of their time and energy into me.”⁸⁹ It was the strong bonds formed with Central faculty that led Williams to proclaim that his experiences at Central were generally “positive,” though he did not feel consistently challenged academically.

Central's 1993 MMAT results, which included both themes, dropped in every category; math, English, science and social studies when compared to 1992 data, and all scores but math were below district averages; they were well below state averages.⁹⁰

Williams's comments about the academics at Central and more generally, the district, support the data:

Because I grew up in the military, my academics were, I've got to say it, were far superior compared to my counterparts. So a lot of my peers, even though they were in high school, some of them were reading on a seventh or eighth grade level. When I got to Kansas City, when I was in elementary school they didn't have anything for me to challenge me as far as math, science, and reading...so before gifted and talented, it was just stuff that I had already learned.⁹¹

However, Williams did add that once he identified the most challenging teachers at Central he was pushed harder: “When I found the right teachers to challenge and push me, I was

⁸⁸ Quincy Williams, conversation with author 2 August 2013.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “Process/Product Evaluation (Formative).”

⁹¹ Quincy Williams, conversation with author, 2 August 2013.

definitely challenged. There are definitely some who challenged me more than others.”⁹²

Williams took advanced placement classes in math and English, but he recalled still feeling inadequately prepared, specifically in English, once in college. In reference to his college preparation, Williams stated:

From the science aspect of things, I think I was definitely prepared. I think I was from a peer support, being able to socialize, I think I was definitely prepared. You know being able to navigate the waters, definitely prepared. The one thing that I would say that I wish would have been done differently, even though I did AP English, when I got to college, I found out I couldn't write.⁹³

Evans, too, found English a challenge in college, particularly English literature, which she attributed to lack of preparation in high school:

Literature was not something taught; I don't think. It was English. It's called English, maybe English composition. But I kind of remember reading like, the big book at the time was Malcolm X. But I'm talking about the great literary works. Never cracked those...I was exposed to a couple of the Shakespearean plays, but that just was a very tiny component of English literature. I mean even some of the great works now: Lord of the Rings. Didn't hear of it until it became a movie, knew nothing about it. I'm just trying to think. Things like that where all the other kids have things that they were well versed in it and knew all about it. We never knew anything of that.⁹⁴

Nonetheless, both Williams and Evans still today have a certain affection for Central and feel that Central's magnet program presented opportunities and experiences that were beneficial. Williams claimed that he “liked the magnet aspect” of his high school experience and “wouldn't change a thing.”⁹⁵ Likewise, Evans suggested that Central “cultivated” her interest in computers. Both Williams and Evans have found professional success.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Melanie Evans, conversation with author, 30 July 2013.

⁹⁵ Quincy Williams, conversation with author, 2 August 2013.

Williams graduated from Central in 1993 and headed directly to Missouri Valley College, where he earned his bachelor of arts degree in human service agency management and recreation administration before moving on to Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri and receiving a master's degree and education specialist degree in educational leadership. After working with a national not-for-profit for four years, Williams eventually landed a position in higher education at Grand Valley State University, where he currently serves as the Undergraduate Program Coordinator for the School of Public, Non-profit, and Health Administration. Though Williams resides in Michigan, his parents still live in Kansas City, and he continues to follow the happenings with his alma mater, a school that he claims has affected him in a positive way.

Evans graduated alongside Williams and then enrolled at Penn Valley Community College in Kansas City, where she spent one semester before entering the workforce. Not long thereafter, however, Evans was back in college, but this time at Rockhurst University. At Rockhurst, Evans's six years in a computer-themed magnet program at Central Middle and Central High served her well; she earned a bachelor's degree in computer science and then landed a job with Associated Wholesale Grocers as a programmer before entering her current position in business analysis with UMB Bank. Since assuming her position at UMB, Evans returned to school and received a master's degree in managing information systems at Friends University. Evans always intended to go to college and was a driven student; she conceded that she likely would have gone to college with or without the magnet curriculum, but she remains appreciative of the opportunities that Central's well-resourced computer magnet program provided.

The 1993-1994 academic year marked the beginning of the third full year of magnet programming in the new Central senior building. Student enrollment was holding steady at twenty percent white, still well below the forty percent goal, yet vastly improved from previous decades during which Central was consistently ninety-nine to one hundred percent black. Academic achievement, however, showed little improvement from 1988 to 1993. Yet, district officials had articulated early on that magnet success would take time. What remained to be seen was how long it would take. Patience among district constituents was thinning, and the media were growing increasingly more critical of the expensive magnet program, especially at Central, where the elaborate new building was often targeted as excessive. Still, as of 1993, the new Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School had not produced a graduating class who had experienced four years of high school magnet programming. The first class to graduate having spent four years in the new Central High School was the class of 1995.

The Class of 1995

Terrence Lasker did not live in the Central attendance area but was attracted to the Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School for its computer program and brand new building, which he described as “amazing” and “unrivaled,” claiming: “It was like nothing I had ever experienced in my school life.”⁹⁶ Lasker hoped to someday find a career in computer programming, which made the bus ride from Sixty-Eighth and Prospect where Lasker lived north to Central at Thirty-Second and Indiana well worth the journey. Lasker’s parents, whom he described as committed to placing education first, were fully supportive of him attending Central High School. Lasker said that he

⁹⁶ Terrence Lasker, conversation with author, 13 August 2013.

transitioned into Central nicely and made friends quickly, partly because Lasker joined Central's fencing team soon after he arrived. Though he did not have a background in fencing, Lasker had participated in karate earlier in his childhood. He was not necessarily interested in fencing but was talked into it:

Actually when fencing was introduced, I didn't really, I did enjoy it, but I didn't plan to go out for the team. The coach at the very start of the year [Steve Butler] promised me that we would do a lot of travelling if I joined the team."⁹⁷

As promised, the fencing team did travel, and the decision to join the fencing team would prove to be a life-changing decision for Lasker; he recalled that his first trip with the fencing team was to Vail, Colorado:

The very first trips we took were on charter busses, and we went to Colorado. We went to Vail, Colorado. That's the very first place that we went, and it was very exciting for all of us. I think that's really where a lot of the bonds happened, I mean all of those bonds lasted the whole four years. I met my best friend on that trip, actually, and well, you know, we're still friends today. He's a doctor of chiropractic medicine in California, and he's actually currently at the world championships because he's the head trainer for U.S. fencing.⁹⁸

In time, the fencing trips became more extravagant, including several trips to Europe: "We spent a lot of time in Paris. We went to Hungary. We went to Rome."⁹⁹ Indeed, the district-funded fencing trips for the school's top fencers, their coach, Vladimir Nazlymov, and the program administrator, Willie Mahone, to places like Spain, Germany, and Italy, which were not cheap. According to a district memo, a trip to Germany for four people, two students and two adults, from November 25 through December 6 was estimated to cost around seven

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

thousand dollars.¹⁰⁰ While travel for the fencing team was most impressive, the weightlifting team and swimming team traveled extensively, too. Mahone claimed that he had been “all over the world” with weightlifting, fencing, and swimming teams: “I’ve been everywhere.... We traveled everywhere; I mean, in style too... we traveled first class.”¹⁰¹ The fencing and weightlifting teams, however, were performing at a very high level. Lasker, by 1993, was the top-ranked fencer in the United States in under-seventeen sabre, had won the gold medal in the February 1993 Junior Olympics, and finished sixth in the world in under-twenty sabre.¹⁰² Additionally, the men’s and women’s weightlifting teams were Kansas City High School weightlifting team champions; the women’s team placed third at the United States Junior Weightlifting Championships, as well as the AAU National Junior Olympic Championships; the men finished second at the AAU National Junior Olympic Championships and the Canadian Interprovincial Championships.¹⁰³ Central, especially in fencing and weightlifting, seemed to be living up to the school’s goal to “train students to their potential in athletics, with the possible outcome for an outstanding athlete or Olympic-level participation.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, by 1995, the entire junior national team in fencing, Lasker explained, were Central graduates and products of Nazlymov’s fencing program: “It was

¹⁰⁰ Walter Marks memo to the Board, 9 November 1993, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 185D.

¹⁰¹ Willie Mahone, conversation with author, 24 October 2012.

¹⁰² United States Fencing Press Release, 2 March 1993, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 185D.

¹⁰³ “Olympic Style Weightlifting Program, Central Senior High,” Press Release, 23 December 1993.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Rainwater Deposition, 2 November 1988.

very shocking for the rest of the country to have the entire national team from our inner-city high school in Kansas City, Missouri.”¹⁰⁵

Lasker, despite his participation in fencing, remained on the computer side of the Central programming, a so-called “hybrid” because he was in the computer magnet but participated in an individual Olympic sport as well.

Monika Anderson, Lasker’s classmate and also a graduate of Central’s class of 1995, was not so fortunate. Anderson had hoped to enter Central on the computer side but was not given the opportunity. She explained that she came to Central High from a Spanish magnet and was told that students entering Central Computers Unlimited Magnet High School from one of the computer magnet feeders would get priority, so Anderson entered Central on the classical Greek side; she was committed to attending Central, a “family high school,” stating, “I always knew I wanted to go to Central High School.”¹⁰⁶ Anderson’s family moved out of the Central attendance area when she was a freshman, but she continued attending Central and was able to do so as a result of the magnet system. Like Lasker, Anderson depicted her education at Central in a positive light, even portraying it as “great.”¹⁰⁷ Anderson, however, was a committed student and found that the education she received at Central was a reflection of her dedication and hard work; she stated, “I think it was all in how well you applied yourself.”¹⁰⁸ For Anderson, it was an intrinsic motivation, as her parents were not particularly involved or supportive of her schooling. Anderson’s mother, she explained, never really had to worry much about her school performance and

¹⁰⁵ Terrence Lasker, conversation with author, 13 August 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Monika Anderson, conversation with author, 9 December 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

thus remained mostly on the periphery. Her father left the home when Anderson was in fifth grade and was never involved nor concerned with her schooling.

Whereas Anderson's parents did not provide a strong support network, Central's teachers, Anderson suggested, did: "I feel like I was very supported...I feel like the teachers were very supportive."¹⁰⁹ Lasker, like Anderson, found the learning environment at Central to be a positive one:

The teachers made it easy. I'm sure that I had the best math teacher that I've ever had at Central High School...Math and science were always my favorites, and the computer classes that I was able to take went very well. I mean, I don't really have a comparison as I didn't attend another high school, but I mean, I felt like the environment was conducive to learning. And I know that the teachers were certainly making an effort.¹¹⁰

In 1995, the majority of Central's teachers were white, and Anderson remembered an instance when race affected her schooling, a particular disagreement she had with one of Central's white teachers:

I took an elective my senior year, and it was the yearbook. And she had said, "This year, I really want to focus on getting exposure to the white students here because you don't see much of them, or you don't know about them or what they're doing." And I remember making a comment to her, "I'm sure if you go to Shawnee Mission North you're not going to see many black students in their yearbook either."¹¹¹

Anderson explained how she was hurt by this particular teacher's thought process. Despite the teacher being one of her favorites, Anderson dropped the class out of principle. She was angered with idea of highlighting only white student success in a school that was still in 1995 overwhelmingly majority black at eighty-one percent.¹¹² Percentages at Central had

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Terrence Lasker, conversation with author, 13 August 2013.

¹¹¹ Monika Anderson, conversation with author, 9 December 2013.

¹¹² Arthur Benson, unpublished demographic data.

hovered around eighty percent black and twenty percent white between 1992 and 1995, but by 1997 the gap had widened with a student population of only twelve percent white. The percentage of white students continued to fall in subsequent years. It is not surprising, then, that Anderson did not recall a noticeable increase in the number of white students at Central during her time there, though she suggested that certain sports, such as fencing, did attract mostly white students.

Lasker was indeed one of only a few black fencers at Central, as he explained, “There was me, and there were a couple of others [black fencers] that kind of flowed in and out.”¹¹³ He estimated that at the height of fencing’s popularity at Central, twenty percent of the fifteen or sixteen students were black. The others, the white fencers, Lasker suggested, were coming from all over Kansas City:

My best friend, he was coming from Independence, Missouri. We had, oh my gosh, we had people coming from Blue Springs...they were coming from pretty far. And I remember they took taxis. There wasn’t a bus that went that far, so yeah, they had taxis pick them up from Blue Springs and from Independence.¹¹⁴

Taxis were most certainly widely used by the Kansas City, Missouri School District to transport white suburban students to district schools, and the cost was heavy. Transportation costs alone, which included busing and taxi services, were estimated to cost the State of Missouri around thirty million dollars per year, and it was a constant source of friction.¹¹⁵ Yet, white suburban residents like Lasker’s best friend and many of his fencing teammates utilized the transportation funds and rode taxis to and from school on a daily basis. Such a

¹¹³ Terrence Lasker, conversation with author, 13 August 2013.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ William Celis, “Kansas City Praises Desegregation, But State Officials Say It Isn’t Enough,” *New York Times*, 25 September 1991, B6.

luxury was short-lived, however, as the transportation budget was slashed in 1995, and the state was thus no longer mandated to cover transportation costs for suburban transfers.¹¹⁶ As a result, the number of white students attending Kansas City, Missouri School District's magnet schools fell rapidly thereafter.

Although Lasker entered Central on the computer side and fully intended to find a fruitful career as a computer programmer, it was fencing and not computers that had the most significant impact on his life. "Fencing," Lasker stated, "derailed my plans."¹¹⁷ When Lasker graduated from Central in 1995, the senior national team and 1996 Olympic games were reasonably within his reach. Thus, Lasker enrolled at Longview Community College in Kansas City and continued training with Vladimir Nazlymov and competing in fencing competitions all over the world. Lasker's Olympic dream was never realized, though he made the national team in 1997 and had a real shot at the 2000 Olympics, but he fell short due to financial constraints. Lasker was having to pay his own travel expenses and could not sustain the amount of travel necessary to make the Olympic team, despite the fact that he was literally one competition away from securing one of two slots. With his Olympic aspirations crushed, Lasker moved to Columbus, Ohio, in 1999 to reunite with Vladimir Nazlymov who had been hired as the head fencing coach at Ohio State University. Lasker then began a career as an assistant fencing coach at Ohio State working with Nazlymov and has since developed into, according to Nazlymov, "one of the best sabre coaches in the country."¹¹⁸ Today, Lasker is a sabre coach with Nellya Fencers, a private fencing club in

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 8.

¹¹⁷ Terrence Lasker, conversation with author, 13 August 2013.

¹¹⁸ Vladimir Nazlymov, conversation with author, 22 July 2013.

Atlanta that has produced Olympians, as well as NCAA national champions and all-Americans. Lasker is not shy about proclaiming his affection for Central's magnet program, suggesting that Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School was an "extremely positive experience," one that, he stated, "I wouldn't trade it for anything."¹¹⁹

Although Anderson is not a proponent of the magnet school philosophy like Lasker, she claimed to appreciate what Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School afforded her:

Do I feel like I got a good education? Yes. Do I feel like I would have gotten the education that I got had it not been a magnet school? No. Why do I feel that way? Because they funneled in and they brought in all that money...they wouldn't have done that had it not been a magnet school.¹²⁰

Anderson was one of two individuals to receive a two-year Central High School Alumni Association scholarship to attend a community college. She accepted the scholarship upon her graduation from Central in 1995 and attended Penn Valley Community College in Kansas City, the first in her family to attend college. Anderson spent only a semester at Penn Valley, though, claiming that her lack of knowledge about financial aid and her family's inability to offer assistance left her overwhelmed and lost. But Anderson was determined to get her degree, and she did. In 2004, Anderson, with her husband in the military, received degrees in sociology and criminal justice from the University of Missouri-Kansas City before receiving her master's degree in counseling psychology from Webster University. Today, Anderson is a school counselor, and, despite her initial struggles navigating college life, feels that Central prepared her for life beyond high school: "So far as I'm concerned I felt pushed; I felt challenged; I felt cared about. Because they [Central's teachers] were

¹¹⁹ Terrence Lasker, conversation with author, 13 August 2013.

¹²⁰ Monika Anderson, conversation with author, 9 December 2013.

pushing me, they saw something there, in my opinion. Maybe something I didn't see or didn't notice."¹²¹

Lasker, Anderson, and the rest of Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School's class of 1995 were the first to experience four years of the fully funded and implemented Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek magnet program in Central's new facility. They were also the last. A 1995 Supreme Court ruling began the slow destruction of Kansas City's elaborate magnet program, which included Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School.

Missouri v. Jenkins and Its Implications

The Supreme Court ruling in *Missouri v. Jenkins* on June 12, 1995, signified a major setback for proponents of Kansas City, Missouri's, magnet remedy. In a five-to-four decision, the Supreme Court ruled that Judge Clark had improperly ordered the State of Missouri to help pay for salary increases for teachers and staff; but perhaps the more significant implication was that the Court called into question the broader magnet remedy and capital improvements, as well as the suburban transfer program.¹²² The decision is one that still haunts Arthur Benson:

The Supreme Court really cut us off at the knees. You know, we won in the Supreme Court the time before on the really contentious issue about whether a federal judge can cause taxes to be raised without a vote of the people. We won that five-to-four, and then [Thurgood] Marshall retires. He's replaced with [Clarence] Thomas, and we lose five-to-four. Because of that vote. I mean it's clearly, I mean if Marshall had not retired, or, you know...who knows?

In the years leading up to the summer of 1995, the district had attracted roughly two thousand suburban white students through the magnet school approach, but by the end of the

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² *Missouri v. Jenkins*.

summer had lost hundreds of those same suburban whites.¹²³ The uncertainty of tuition waivers seemed to be the most significant factor in persuading suburban students to look elsewhere, despite the district's guarantee that suburban students could attend Kansas City, Missouri School District schools for free during the 1995-1996 school year; the ambiguity of future years, however, resulted in many suburban families looking for more stable options outside of the district. By August of 1995, just a month after the district and state reached an accord that desegregation funding was to end by 1999, nearly forty percent of suburban students who planned to attend district schools pulled out.¹²⁴ "A lot of people are angry," suggested Al Winder, Kansas City, Missouri School District's transportation director at the time, "A one year deal is not good enough...they [parents] have to make plans."¹²⁵ Whereas the state had been picking up the \$6.4 million annual transportation cost for suburban students to ride taxis from their suburban residences, the Supreme Court's 1995 decision terminated the transportation budget. Beginning in the fall of 1995, while suburban students could attend the Kansas City, Missouri School District for free, no transportation outside of district boundaries was provided.¹²⁶

Further complicating the problem was the disheveled nature of the district leadership. In February of 1995, the Kansas City, Missouri School District's School Board relieved Superintendent Marks of his duties just a week after a television report questioned

¹²³ "Suburban Kansas City Students Are Leaving Magnet Schools," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 27 April 1995, 4D.

¹²⁴ Arthur Benson, Chronology of the Kansas City, Missouri, Desegregation Case. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Schools-Public, Kansas City Desegregation.

¹²⁵ Donna McGuire, "Schools See Loss from Suburbs – Desegregation Ruling's Fallout Begins to Settle on the KC Magnet Program," *Kansas City Star*, 23 August 1995, A1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Marks's medical leave, for which Marks claimed was caused by stress.¹²⁷ With six new school board members having been elected in April of 1994, the board began searching for a new superintendent. One newly appointed board member, Edward Newsome, revealed the district's changing attitude and direction. A 1995 *Wall Street Journal* article described Newsome as "controversial" and "outspoken," stating:

Until last year he [Newsome] was regarded as little more than a gadfly, an angry man who showed up repeatedly to charge the board with neglecting black children. At one meeting, the board, tired of listening, abruptly adjourned and walked out on him. Until now Mr. Newsome is on the board himself, one of four new members, including Mrs. Kurtz, elected last year amid a time-for-change voter groundswell. His views sound closer to those of Clarence Thomas, the black conservative Supreme Court Justice, than to Martin Luther King's.¹²⁸

Benson recalled how the school board changed with the 1994 school board election:

The school board changed because Jim Nutter...I've adored Jim Nutter almost all of my adult life. He's really a, normally a great progressive in the community, but here he made a big mistake. Ed Newsome went to Jim Nutter...and they ran an anti-school desegregation slate and got elected to the school board.

With new faces and some board members looking for a new direction, a bitterly divided board attempted to hire a superintendent.

The school board offered John Murphy, superintendent in Charlotte, North Carolina, the job in September of 1995 amid considerable controversy. Murphy, a white man, was superintendent of the nearly all-black Prince George County Public Schools in Maryland from 1984 to 1990 when he left for North Carolina. At Prince George County, Murphy spearheaded an effort, like Kansas City, to create magnet schools to attract white students, but by 1990 he suggested abandoning the effort, claiming that magnet schools were not the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Dennis Farney, "Fading Dream? Integration Is Faltering in Kansas City Schools as Priorities Change," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 September 1995, n.p.

best approach and that “the problems of the ’90s need different solutions.”¹²⁹ Murphy, Newsome’s first choice, never landed in Kansas City; he declined the \$250,000 package, citing fears of poor support among the school board and instead remained in Charlotte.¹³⁰ Meanwhile, the acting superintendent through the transitional period, Willie Giles, faced complaints of sexual harassment and hiring a relative who had been convicted of stealing from his former job. Giles was eventually suspended by the board and replaced by Associate Superintendent Larry Ramsey in October of 1995.¹³¹ Henry Williams was eventually hired in 1996. Williams, the former Little Rock, Arkansas, superintendent, was a proponent of neighborhood schools, which resulted in a tenuous relationship with some board members, the Desegregation Monitoring Committee, and Arthur Benson.¹³² Williams’s tenure in Kansas City was tumultuous, indeed, resulting in the school board buying out his contract just two years after his arrival.¹³³

While district leadership was struggling to find consistency and a single vision and the magnet school approach was seemingly on its way out, for Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School students Jermaine Wilson, Michael Watson, and William Winston, it was business as usual. Wilson, class of 1997, explained that he and his classmates were mostly unaware of the struggles occurring in courtrooms and district

¹²⁹ Emily Langer, “John Murphy, Pr. George’s Superintendent Who Helped Bridge Racial Gap, Dies,” *Washington Post*, 24 August 2011, n.p.

¹³⁰ Arthur Benson, “Chronology of the Kansas City, Missouri, Desegregation Case.”

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Dunn, *Complex Justice*.

¹³³ Ibid.

offices, suggesting that it was “over our head.”¹³⁴ The decisions being made on the outside were impacting the happenings on the inside, but how were they affecting the lives of students?

The Final Years, 1995-1999

Wilson first attended the Kansas City, Missouri School District in 1990 when a sixth grader, though he grew up not far from Central High School at Thirty-Seventh and Cleveland. Wilson’s grandparents, who raised him, sent him to a private school through fifth grade before deciding to have him attend Kansas City, Missouri’s, relatively new magnet system. Wilson had a particular interest in Greek mythology as a child, so Paul Robeson Middle School’s classical Greek theme seemed like a perfect fit and was, in fact, part of the reason he and his grandparents made the switch from private to public school. While Wilson was excited to attend a Kansas City magnet school, the transition was not an easy one:

I remember it being very difficult...As far as academics, I was well prepared... Teachers in the sixth grade would tell me they didn’t know what to teach me because I already knew what they were teaching and so, you know, “You can go to the back of the room. You can read a book. Just don’t misbehave.” And so, I had to deal with a lot of student issues, I guess, because I was smart...I went from being a good student and then transitioned into the bad student. I think mainly I was bored...I began skipping school and fighting and those types of things, which was kind of the reset button when they pulled me out of that school [Paul Robeson] and moved me to Central Middle.¹³⁵

Despite his rough beginnings, Wilson found success at Central Middle Magnet School Computers Unlimited. When Wilson entered the Kansas City, Missouri School District, he was identified as a gifted student and was encouraged to attend the district’s most academically high performing school, Lincoln College Preparatory Academy. But Wilson

¹³⁴ Jermaine Wilson, conversation with author, 10 July 2013.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

was not interested, claiming, “I didn’t want to leave out of the neighborhood. I wanted to study computers...I wanted to go to Central High School.”¹³⁶

Wilson entered the computer side of Central High School in 1993 and remained until he graduated among the top ten in his class in 1997. Wilson “loved” the new facility, which was just two years old when he was a freshman, but it was the computer programming opportunities that he recalled most fondly:

I got into computer programming really heavy. Internships that my junior and senior year I was doing at companies doing wiring of networks for corporations as a high school student. Because I was a Lantern at the high school, so we would actually do the wiring and the networking for the classrooms. If teachers had issues with their computers, they couldn’t log on, we students took what we learned in those classes and then we had to apply it. We had to go and reprogram the computer, fix their log in, you know, look at the wiring, climbing up at the ceilings to do the wiring and cabling. And I remember when we had the new fiber optic cabling. That was a whole summer project for us.¹³⁷

Wilson, however, appreciated more than just his computer training; he remembered with affection his Central teachers: “I can hardly recall maybe two teachers who I would think, you know, at this point, I would say were subpar.”¹³⁸ He acknowledged the support he received from Central’s faculty and staff: “Our principal knew us by name. Our counselors knew who we were. Our teachers knew us.”¹³⁹ However, the level of support, Wilson explained, was not the same from those outside of the building: “As far as the outside community coming in to support the school, I don’t really recall a lot of outside support coming in. I don’t even recall a lot of parent involvement.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

By the beginning of Wilson's senior year, 1996-1997, suburban students, per the Supreme Court's 1995 order, were no longer given the opportunity to attend the Kansas City, Missouri School District at the state's expense but were required to pay tuition; nor were they provided transportation. Moreover, the school board had approved its 1996-1997 Desegregation Remedy Plan, which trimmed Missouri's desegregation contribution from \$110 million to \$74 million.¹⁴¹ The reduction in funding was in addition to \$34.2 million in cuts the board had approved earlier in the year, and there were even serious discussions about closing one or more of the district high schools.¹⁴² The 1996-1997 school year was the first time in eleven years that the state contributed less than one hundred million dollars to the Kansas City, Missouri's, magnet schools.¹⁴³ The district appeared to be weaning itself from almost two decades of state desegregation funding.

Although 1995-1997 was a period in which Kansas City's magnet plan seemed in serious jeopardy, Wilson, who was a junior and senior during the time, did not notice anything different at Central: "As far as the judicial piece and the equity of the monies, that wasn't something that, you know, I can recall being something that was on our horizon."¹⁴⁴ Wilson, it seems, was not necessarily concerned with the reason behind the magnet schools in Kansas City but rather the opportunity before him—opportunities that, he explained, still seemed plentiful throughout his time at Central, even after the 1995 Supreme Court decision. Wilson was a driven student who enjoyed computers and took it upon himself to

¹⁴¹ Phillip O'Connor, "Plan Calls for State Cut of \$36 Million KC School District's Magnet Blueprint Goes before Judge June 3," *Kansas City Star*, 29 March 1996, C1.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Moran, *Race, Law, and the Desegregation of Public Schools*.

¹⁴⁴ Jermaine Wilson, conversation with author, 10 July 2013.

make sure he was challenged. But Wilson credits his academic success and college-readiness, in large part, to Central's computer magnet theme:

Things I did my freshman year of college, you know, I didn't have to take any remedial courses...we came here prepared. We had students, including myself, that had high ACT scores. I think even the process that we went through with choosing our elective classes...And so we were equipped with that because of our themes and stuff. That was like our major. We had a huge selection, but we knew when we were enrolling in classes we also had to look at our transcript. This is how many credits you need. This is what you need to take. This is what you have to take.¹⁴⁵

Though Wilson did not pursue computers as a college major, he did work at a computer lab during his four years as an undergraduate and eventually taught high school computer classes—at his alma mater, no less—Kansas City's Central High School.

After graduating from Central, Wilson ventured off to St. Joseph, Missouri, and Missouri Western University where he received his bachelor's degree in business administration. He worked as a manager for K-Mart Corporation out of college but found the work unfulfilling, so he landed a consulting position with the Kansas City, Missouri School District working with the Career and Technical Education program. While he was working as a consultant with the district, he was approached by the vice principal at Central High School about filling an opening in the school's business education department; he accepted, got certified, received his master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and then went on to obtain his master's degree in Counseling and Guidance before getting his educational specialist degree in administration. He is now working toward his PhD in education and is the principal at Kansas City, Missouri's, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Wilson served in the role of student, teacher, counselor, and assistant principal at Central and thus has a unique perspective from which to reflect. He remains a supporter of a magnet-type approach to education, stressing the importance of student choice in academic success:

As a guidance counselor, I always told students that “What it is that you like to do is what you will do well.” And so I just believe, you know, that motivational piece and plugging into student interest is still a big piece that was there during the magnet years. I don’t think it’s as much a piece that’s there now unless you have educators and leaders who are building that philosophy into their school environments.¹⁴⁶

Wilson certainly found much professional success after leaving Central, and he is quick to credit his opportunities as a student at Central during the magnet years as one of the reasons for his academic and professional accomplishments, claiming that his time at Central between 1993 and 1997 was “overwhelmingly positive.”

Whereas Wilson was closing his high school chapter and leaving Central behind in 1997, Michael Watson was just beginning his. A junior in the fall of 1997, Watson transferred from nearby Lincoln College Preparatory Academy to Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High where he completed his junior and senior years. Watson’s primary motivation for making the switch from Lincoln to Central was to join Missouri High School Hall of Fame Coach, Jack Bush, and Central’s basketball squad. Watson is a Kansas City native, having grown up in a house near Thirty-Fifth and Prospect not far from Central High School, and attending Kansas City, Missouri School District schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Watson grew up in a single-parent household, but he described how his extended family formed a strong support system:

My mom raised my older brother and I by herself. And so I grew up with an extended family, though, of cousins, and my mother was one of ten. And so we had a

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

huge family....We were like brothers and sisters. We all went to the same schools growing up. We all spent the night at each other's houses. You know, they were like brothers."¹⁴⁷

Watson felt a similar connection with his neighbors that he felt with his extended family:

The neighborhood was, I mean, everybody knew each other. Everyone knew each other. We went to the same schools, the same churches. We shopped at the same grocery store....We shopped at the same malls. We had an understanding of where we were in life. This is the eighties...that was a time when I saw Prospect, you know, in great condition. You had grocery stores. You had businesses...And so for us, it was that ten-to-fifteen square block radius in the city. We knew we had everything we needed right there, and so we rarely ventured out.¹⁴⁸

Watson's most influential supporter, however, was his mother, who, he explained, ingrained in him from an early age a certain pride for himself, his family, and his neighborhood. So when Watson was entering the sixth grade in 1992, a decision had to be made. With the magnet middle and high schools firmly established, Watson had to decide where he wanted to go, and the decision came down to either Lincoln or Paul Robeson. Watson was a gifted student, but he was also a gifted athlete; his mother wanted him to attend the district's most academically rigorous school, Lincoln College Preparatory Academy, but Watson himself wanted to attend the middle school classical Greek magnet at Paul Robeson, where there was a greater emphasis on athletics. In the fall of 1992, Watson headed off to Lincoln, claiming: "I had to go to Lincoln...my mother made me go to Lincoln."¹⁴⁹

Despite some initial hesitance, Watson ended up appreciating his time at Lincoln, a school that he claimed lived up to its reputation and challenged him academically: "As a seventh grader, we were in algebra; eighth grade we were in geometry; ninth grade we were

¹⁴⁷ Michael Watson, personal conversation with author, 21 October 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

in pre-calculus. You know, we were like challenged through the roof.”¹⁵⁰ But Watson’s first love was basketball, and he stated that he realized as early as seventh grade that he aspired to play professional sports, and he was committed to seeing his dream become a reality. So as a twelve year-old, Watson prepared himself for a future as an athlete. But Lincoln was not known for its athletic teams; Watson explained, “The down side to Lincoln was sports; athletics weren’t big...it was all about academics at Lincoln.”¹⁵¹ By the end of his sophomore year at Lincoln, Watson had developed into quite a basketball player, and he was passionate about the sport and finding a way to hone his skills. Thus, with his mother’s support, Watson decided to transfer to Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School in 1997 for his junior and senior years. Central, Watson suggested, “had the best athletes...had an Olympic weight room; they had everything.”¹⁵² Though after transferring to Central, Watson had wondered if he had made a grave mistake.

Watson recounted his initial days at Central and referred to the school environment as a “zoo” compared to what he was used to at Lincoln:

I was like, this is unreal...I mean it was like, you’re in the heart of the inner-city. You’re in the heart of the inner-city, like the hood. Where gang turfs meet. You’re right there...Lincoln was an oasis. Lincoln was a paradise...the only thing we were fighting over [at Lincoln] was school spirit...So I was like, “Oh, my gosh. What did I do.”¹⁵³

Watson attributed at least some of his initial culture shock to the overall size of Central, which in 1997 numbered 1,176 students. Lincoln was considerably smaller with a grades-

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

nine-through-twelve student population of 573.¹⁵⁴ The most striking difference between Lincoln and Central, according to Watson, was in the academic quality and expectations:

You know, the academics... I had done all the classes. I could have graduated [from Central] as a sophomore with the classes that I took at Lincoln... Literally, I would have had to take senior English and another high school credit. I would have graduated... Central was known for bringing athletes. They were known for producing the top athletes, and so academics... they were at the level they needed to be. For me, I already did all that stuff as a seventh grader and eighth grader. I had been in algebra. I had done, you know, all that stuff.¹⁵⁵

But Watson was also quick to point out that he had some “great” teachers at Central, most notably his senior English teacher, a black woman, who he said pushed him and prepared him for college; he stated, “She loved me, and you know, it was tough love though.” Yet Watson admittedly did not transfer to Central for academics; he had gone to Central for the basketball team.

When Watson arrived at Central in 1997, he joined classmate and basketball teammate William Winston. Like Watson, Winston had grown up in one of Kansas City’s inner-city neighborhoods at Thirty-third and Bellefontaine, just two blocks from Central High School. Winston hailed from a large extended family, and all of them, he stated, went to Central; he intended to continue the tradition: “That was my vision. When I was in elementary school, I just wanted to go to Central. I never wanted to go to any other school.”¹⁵⁶ Having grown up in a house with twelve people under one roof, many of them Winston’s older cousins who attended Central, Winston looked forward to the day when he too would don Central gear.

¹⁵⁴ Arthur Benson, unpublished demographic data.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Watson, conversation with author, 21 October 2013.

¹⁵⁶ William Winston, conversation with author, 24 October 2013.

Winston's path to Central was difficult. His father was never in his life, so he grew up with his mother and younger brother, a brother who was often in trouble. Winston, though, vowed to himself not to follow the path of his younger brother and some of his cousins and to avoid the "bad things" that they had done.¹⁵⁷ And while he claimed to have learned from the mistakes of his eleven older cousins, it was his relationship with his mother that kept him out of trouble:

I don't like to see my mother upset, and that's still how I am still to this day. I hate seeing my mother upset. By me being the oldest, you know, it's just something about seeing my mother upset. It just kills me. There were certain things I didn't do as a child because I knew it would break my mother's heart.¹⁵⁸

Winston explained that his mother was always involved in his academic and extracurricular life, but he maintained that he also benefited from a close-knit neighborhood community growing up; he recalled walking to elementary school with cousins, friends, and neighbors:

We used to all just meet up on my porch and just go to school from there. You know, like a lot of the cousins, and a lot of the neighborhood would always meet on my—the corner house was my house—so we all met there and walked to school.

As the district transitioned to magnets in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Winston took advantage of the opportunity to attend a school outside of his immediate neighborhood, and in 1993, like Watson, Winston attended Lincoln, though he always knew his time at Lincoln would be short, suggesting, "I was going to Central regardless."¹⁵⁹

Winston's decision to attend Lincoln was little more than a whim; he remembered how he and a friend decided to attend Lincoln middle over Central: "I was in fifth grade, and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

my homeboy was like, “Let’s go to Lincoln middle, let’s go to Lincoln middle.”¹⁶⁰ So Winston did go to Lincoln for middle school, but he then transferred to Central in 1995 for his freshman year, claiming, “I’m an athlete, and Central breeds the best athletes, and so it’s like, ‘That’s the school for me’”¹⁶¹ Thus, Winston entered Central on the classical Greek side and promptly joined the basketball team, where he and Watson, under the tutelage of basketball coach Jack Bush, would develop into two of the best basketball players in the city.

Upon his transition from Lincoln middle to Central High School, Winston noticed some immediate differences, the most obvious of which was the facility. Winston was not aware of the ongoing court case, but he certainly appreciated what Central had to offer, stating, “We were spoiled, you know.”¹⁶² Winston was impressed with the swimming pool, weight room, and athletic facilities at Central, but he was less enthusiastic about the academics:

I’m gonna tell you, from elementary school through twelfth grade, I really, there wasn’t really a challenge. Or, I didn’t challenge myself. I remember doing work or doing homework, but it’s like I didn’t see how some of that stuff was going to benefit my future.¹⁶³

Winston did recall teachers at Central who challenged him, though he felt that his status as an elite athlete affected how teachers treated him:

When you’re an athlete, you’re a school favorite, and me and Mike Watson were the guys. We ran the school for the most part. It was our school. You know, when you’re an athlete, I guess that’s the way it is. But certain teachers did [push me to excel] and some teachers didn’t...if you asked me, did I get anything out of high school, did I

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

get any knowledge out of it [high school]? I would probably say I needed some more.¹⁶⁴

Yet, Winston described his time at Central as “fun,” especially his time on the basketball court. Central had a history of fielding competitive basketball squads, and by the time Winston made the varsity team in 1997 and was joined by transfer Michael Watson, the school was garnering city-wide attention.

Watson recalled his senior season in the fall of 1998: “it was like we were rock stars. You know, my whole team, everywhere we went, we were rock stars....So everything we did was, like, huge.”¹⁶⁵ Watson was recruited heavily by many Division I schools, but he was compelled to stay close to his mother in the city where he felt connected. Thus, Watson spurned the out-of-state offers and signed with the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the fall of 1998, where he received a full four-year scholarship. Winston did not receive as much Division I interest and ultimately landed a basketball scholarship at Park University in Parkville, Missouri. Park was not necessarily where Winston had envisioned playing his college ball, but his ACT score limited his opportunity: “I got a fourteen the first time [on the ACT]....I got a fourteen the second time, and I settled.”¹⁶⁶ Winston’s struggles on the ACT, he concluded, partly resulted from his lack of preparation at Central; he declared, “I didn’t know nothing about some of those things....never was taught some of those things.”¹⁶⁷ Watson, on the other hand, felt ready for college, but he attributed his college readiness to Lincoln and not Central:

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Watson, conversation with author 21 October 2013.

¹⁶⁶ William Winston, conversation with author 24 October 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

I went to Lincoln College Preparatory Academy. That was the name of Lincoln. . . . So everything we did was college prep. Everything we did was about college. . . . Without Lincoln I wouldn't have been ready for college. There's no way, and my teammates will tell you. You know, because they took their ACT and their ACT wasn't my ACT, you know, because they weren't prepared at Central.¹⁶⁸

When Watson ended his collegiate career at UMKC, he held five Summit League career records, including leading the league in all-time scoring.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Watson had an illustrious college career, which eventually resulted in signing a contract with the Boston Celtics on draft night. Watson had realized his goal, something he had set out to do when he transferred to Central in 1997; he had reached the professional ranks. Though Watson's stint in Boston lasted only a summer, he eventually ended up playing six professional seasons abroad in Poland, France, Turkey, Italy, and Puerto Rico. Watson once again calls Kansas City home, as he returned in 2007 and just recently assumed his new position as Director of Athletics for the very district he grew up attending, the Kansas City Public Schools, in a position that he called a "dream job."¹⁷⁰

Coincidentally, Watson's former teammate, Winston, also works for the Kansas City Public Schools. He began his career in the district as a paraprofessional and has since worked his way up to a position as Coordinator of Recruitment, Retention, and Follow-up in Career and Technical Education, exhibiting the same determination and resolve that got him through college. College did not come easy for Winston, who struggled to find success on and off the basketball court, but he persisted and graduated from Park with a bachelor's degree in business management. Winston suggested that he had every intention of becoming

¹⁶⁸ Michael Watson, conversation with author, 21 October 2013.

¹⁶⁹ Steve Newton, "30th Anniversary Q&A with Michael Watson," 22 December 2011, www.thesummitleague.org.

¹⁷⁰ Michael Watson, conversation with author, 21 October 2013.

a “businessman,” but his passion, he explained, was in working with inner-city students and improving their lives, claiming, “I want to work where I came from.”¹⁷¹

Watson and Winston were among two of the last graduates of Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School. By the spring of 1998, the Kansas City, Missouri School District had begun scaling down the magnet-themed schools in favor of neighborhood schools, part of the board-approved transition plan of 1997 that called for, among other agenda items, school closings and magnet-theme elimination.¹⁷² The intended goal was for the district to achieve unitary status by 2002, thus ending judicial intervention. Certainly, when Judge Russell Clark stepped down in 1999 after overseeing the *Jenkins* case for over two decades and was replaced by conservative U.S. District Judge Dean Whipple, an end to *Jenkins* appeared imminent. Whipple actually attempted to dismiss the case in 1999, asserting that everything possible had been done to remedy all prior constitutional violations, but Arthur Benson’s plea to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which agreed with his reasoning, reinstated court oversight, at least for the time being.¹⁷³ But for all intents and purposes, 1999 signified the end of the magnet remedy, and the district confronted yet another extremely difficult transition period in the face of issues of accreditation, falling enrollment, and financial constraints.

¹⁷¹ William Winston, conversation with author, 24 October 2013.

¹⁷² “Pathways to Excellence: The Action Plan for the Kansas City, Missouri School District, 1997-2002,” Kansas City, Missouri School District, State Historical Society of Missouri, Arthur A. Benson II Papers, Box 569.

¹⁷³ Phillip O’Connor, “Benson Appeals Ruling on Desegregation Lawsuit,” *Kansas City Star*, 17 December 1999, A1.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION: INTERPRETATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The Clock Runs out on Kansas City, Missouri's, Magnet Plan

Reflecting on his work designing Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek

Magnet High School, one of the architects, Arthur Rainwater, claimed to have no regrets:

I personally put everything I had into that [Central]. I mean, I really did. And I think a lot of other people did too, not just me. Arthur, certainly; Arthur Benson. But all kinds of people in the district were very serious about trying to make it work. There were always struggles, certainly. There were people within the district who didn't believe in it. I'll admit, I was a true believer—still am.¹

Rainwater recognized the imperfections of the process, stating, “[d]id we make mistakes? Of course we did.” Yet, Rainwater explained that, in his opinion, the positives of the magnet plan outweighed the negatives:

I certainly think there were improvements in facilities. I don't think that there was any question about that. I think that there were certainly improvements in opportunities. Kids had opportunities in both sides in that program to do things that they would never experience in their life. And to, and to learn within an environment that fit their needs. I mean, I don't think there's any question about that.²

Benson echoed Rainwater's sentiments, claiming, “[F]or the twenty-two or twenty-four thousand kids who went through the system during those ten years, it was hugely important

¹ Arthur Rainwater, conversation with author, 29 July 2013.

² Ibid.

and a really good experience for them.”³ Benson, however, acknowledged that certain components of the magnet implementation were more successful than others:

I’m often asked to kind of grade it [magnet implementation]. And I said, “Well, the only way to sort of grade it is to look at the goals of the litigation.” The judge found that there were those four effects...Back in the seventies, we had two teachers’ strikes. The buildings were falling down, and the school district was bankrupt...I mean it was skeletal. So on funding we get an A. I mean we accomplished that completely. And as to the dilapidated, literally, rotted buildings...we get an A on that too...But for the racial integration, I kind of give us a B-. During the ten years of which our voluntary magnet plan was in effect, we achieved more racial integration than any other school district in the nation under a court order at the time. We were achieving more racial integration year by year than anybody else...and we ought to get an A [until 1995], but after we lost in the Supreme Court, it gradually went away...As to inferior education, we clearly get an incomplete. Because the education was inferior then, and it is still inferior now.⁴

Rainwater, too, while proud of the facility upgrades and improved opportunity, recognized the academic struggles: “I don’t think we made the kind of, certainly, the kind of academic success that I wish we had.”⁵ But Rainwater was quick to follow up with a note on the timeframe, which he claimed was insufficient for adequate change, especially at Central:

And even Central, if you think about it, about how long it takes. I mean, you’re really talking about, from the time that you have full implementation, you’re really talking about ten to fifteen years before you see real, long-term change in terms of kids learning. I believe very strongly...there just wasn’t that much time.⁶

Benson bemoaned the timeframe, as well, but also understood that the people of Missouri were “so anxious” to end the case, something he ascribed to the state and Attorney General

³ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Arthur Rainwater, conversation with author, 29 July 2013.

⁶ Ibid.

John Ashcroft's campaign to convince Missourians that the Kansas City, Missouri School District was a "sink hole."⁷

Indeed, by 1999 when the district began to seriously scale down its magnet plan and started converting magnet schools back to neighborhood schools, Kansas City's bill had exceeded two billion dollars. The money had largely come from the state and Missouri resident taxpayers. A May 2000 *U.S. News and World Report* article summed up the general consensus among most Missouri residents:

The Olympic-size swimming pool, primo indoor running track, and personal computers for almost every student at Central High School in Kansas City, Mo., were supposed to lure white suburban students to the inner-city school. And magnet programs in computer science and classical Greek civilization were supposed to foster high achievement. But for all the grand hopes when Central was completed nine years ago at a cost of \$32 million, the school has achieved neither integration nor excellence. The same is true of nearly all of Kansas City's schools, which are physically impressive but academically struggling, despite an influx of \$2 billion over 15 years.⁸

In 1999, the district graduation rate at fifty-seven percent was twenty-one percentage points behind the state average, and that was up from 1997 when the gap was twenty-four percent and the graduation rate was fifty-one percent.⁹ Moreover, by 2001, just a year before the court declared that the Kansas City, Missouri School District achieved unitary status, sixty-four percent of district tenth graders were performing in the lowest proficiency category in math and only .2 percent were performing in the highest.¹⁰

⁷ Arthur Benson, conversation with author, 23 October 2013.

⁸ Ben Wildavsky, "Kansas City Schools Learn the Hard Way," *U.S. News and World Report*, 8 May 2000, 26.

⁹ "The Future of the Kansas City, Missouri School District," *Ingram's*, May 2002, 57-63, Missouri Valley Special Collections, SC 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

In 2003, Judge Whipple dismissed the case; the twenty-five-year *Jenkins* odyssey was over, and in terms of integration and academic achievement, there appeared to be little to show for it. In fact, a 2002 study conducted by the Harvard Civil Rights Project found that the Kansas City, Missouri School District was among the most racially segregated schools in the country; this, after two billion dollars was spent to integrate the schools.¹¹ Of the 32,670 district students in 2002, roughly seventy percent of them were black.¹² In 1984, just prior to the magnet implementation, there were 36,650 district students, and about sixty-seven percent of the students were black.¹³ The data is discouraging, but this project was not merely about recounting the disparaging numbers but exploring the lived experiences of black students who attended Kansas City, Missouri's, flagship magnet school, Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School.¹⁴ It was in this vein, then, that I set out to address the following questions:

What were the experiences of African American students at Central High School between 1988 and 1999?

What structures of academic and social support existed for African American students at Central during the identified years?

What were African American students' perceptions of efforts to integrate Central during the magnet years?

¹¹ Erika Frankenburg and Chungmei Lee, "Race in American Public Schools: Rapidly Resegregating School Districts," *The Civil Rights Project*, 8 August 2002, 1-23.

¹² Arthur Benson unpublished demographic data, 2000-2012.

¹³ Arthur Benson unpublished demographic data, 1954-1984.

¹⁴ See Chapter 7

How did the magnet theme affect the subsequent lives of the individuals interviewed?

In the next section I will explore some of the major themes that emerged from the oral history interviews.

Oral History Revelations

The experiences of the eleven narrators who attended Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School between 1988 and 1999 varied considerably. Many factors affected each individual's experiences; certainly, the following figured prominently: the individual's support system, the individual's interest level in computers and/or athletics, and the individual's intrinsic drive and determination. Generally, however, the students with whom I spoke were positive about their experiences. This is not to suggest, however, that each individual supported the magnet approach. Karriem-Hardaway, class of 1992, for example, was most critical of the district's magnet schools, which she viewed as essentially catering to white suburban residents. Yet Karriem-Hardaway still expressed a certain admiration for Central, a school that many of her family members had attended as well. Evans, class of 1993, and Anderson, class of 1995, were also somewhat critical of the magnet system, but they too found the school environment to be positive. In fact, all of the narrators' general characterization of their high school experience at Central was positive. It is possible that time-gone-by has resulted in a romanticized vision of the high school experience, but not one of the individuals whom I interviewed remembered their high school experience at Central in a negative fashion. Some of the individuals enjoyed their time at Central more than others, and it appears that their

respective interest in computers and/or classical Greek/athletics had much to do with how each individual experienced the magnet theme.

While Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School was designed to entice students from all over the city with a particular interest in computers or Olympic sport to enroll, of the eleven individuals I interviewed, eight lived within blocks of Central. It was essentially their neighborhood school, and they did not even entertain the thought of attending one of the other district magnet schools. For these students, Central occupied a special place, and it seems that it had quite a lot to do with the fact that their family members hailed from Central. Slaughter, class of 1993, Williams, class of 1993, and Lasker, class of 1995, were the only three students who did not live in the Central neighborhood. Slaughter attended Central for its fencing program; Williams initially attended for computers but switched to the athletic side; and Lasker, though becoming deeply involved in fencing, originally was attracted to Central for its computer magnet. Each of the other individuals lived in the neighborhoods around Central and attended Central, not for its magnet theme, but because of its proximity to their residence. For these neighborhood students, such as Norton, class of 1990; Evans, class of 1993; Wilson, class of 1997; Watson, class of 1999; and Winston, class of 1999, the magnet theme piqued their interest and ultimately shaped their experience. Norton, Evans, and Wilson were all very interested in computers, and both Norton and Wilson participated in the Lantern program providing building-level technical support. All three individuals' affinity for computers, they explained, enhanced their experiences at Central. Watson and Winston's high school experience was enriched, they suggested, by their participation and interest in athletics. For neighborhood residents Shakur, class of 1989, as well as Karriem-Hardaway, class of 1992,

and Anderson, class of 1995 their indifference to the magnet themes resulted in a less dynamic high school experience. Yet they never seriously considered transferring to another magnet; their emotional connection to Central was too great.

A relatively consistent theme throughout the interviews was a recognition that academic rigor was lacking. Eight of the eleven narrators described feeling that they were inadequately challenged at Central. For many, the realization came after they left Central behind and entered a college classroom. Shakur explained how she recognized soon after arriving in Columbia in 1989 to attend the University of Missouri that Central High School had not prepared her for college. This scenario played out routinely in the interviews. Anderson and Winston, similar to Shakur, Evans, and Williams, specifically noted that they realized upon entering college that they felt insufficiently prepared. Slaughter and Watson, two students who transferred into Central from a different high school, claimed to have noticed a disparity in academic rigor upon their transfer into Central. Slaughter, who transferred to Central from Ladue High School in St. Louis in 1991, and Watson, who transferred from Lincoln College Preparatory Academy in Kansas City in 1997, both explained how their former schools presented far greater academic challenges than Central. There were several students, however—Norton, Lasker, and Wilson—who suggested their academic preparation at Central was sufficient. Norton explained that he felt adequately challenged at Central and prepared for life in the military after graduating in 1990, suggesting that two years of computer curriculum readied him for a position as a communication technician in the Navy. Lasker, too, experienced what he described as a challenging learning environment, as did Wilson. Wilson, who attended Missouri Western University as a freshman in 1997, in fact, attributed his college readiness to Central's

Computer Unlimited Magnet theme, which he suggested helped him avoid remediation his first year. There was a sense among most of the narrators that a challenging academic program was absent, but the many and varied extracurricular offerings at Central seemed to enrich their collective school experiences. Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School offered a wide array of extracurricular programming in both computers and athletics, and the majority of students with whom I spoke took advantage of the opportunities and suggested that they benefited from them.

The narrators spoke affectionately about their former teachers, coaches, and administrators, in many instances recalling those by name who provided noteworthy academic and/or social support. For many of the narrators, Central's faculty served a vital support role, and this appeared consistently throughout the identified years, 1988 to 1997. Family support was less consistent; whereas some of the narrators enjoyed actively involved parents or guardians, others received little academic and social support from families. Yet family support did not determine academic success. For example, Shakur, who was raised by a single mother who struggled with alcoholism and was largely absent in her academic life, graduated as valedictorian of Central's 1989 graduating class. Anderson, who also lacked support at home found success at Central, as well. Anderson became one of two students selected for an alumni college scholarship. Shakur and Anderson were both intrinsically motivated and hard workers. And while neither benefited from a strong support system at home, they both found support elsewhere. Anderson credited her teachers for offering much-needed social and academic support, and Shakur explained that she immersed herself in extracurricular activities, where she found support among students and staff as part of student council, track, and cheerleading. She also benefited, she explained, from a

well-connected and supportive neighborhood community, though the strength of the neighborhood community did appear to dwindle over the course of the magnet years. Whereas Shakur and Norton described a dynamic neighborhood community in the late 1980s, that same community, Wilson suggested, was not much involved or supportive in 1997.

The narrators described being mostly unaware of the *Jenkins* case, suggesting that they were interested in the changes that were occurring around them but less concerned with why it was happening. The thrust of the *Jenkins* case was to bring about voluntary desegregation through programmatic innovation and facility upgrades. This, however, did not seem to be of great interest to the former students whom I interviewed. There was a certain awareness among the narrators that more white students were present at Central during the magnet years and that certain students, mostly white students, were arriving at school in taxis, yet it did not seem to garner much notice. Williams, for example, who recognized in 1993 that his Central soccer and wrestling teams were more diverse, explained that it was not something he thought about at the time. This was a common sentiment throughout the interviews, which might have had something to do with the fact that integration was relatively limited in scope. Indeed, Central reached twenty percent white in 1993, but it was short-lived; the percentage of white students at Central fell every year thereafter. Integration, the narrators recalled, was simply not foremost on their minds, but the magnet upgrades most certainly were, especially the new Central High School building completed in 1991.

The students who were genuinely involved in computers and/or athletics appeared to be the ones who benefited most from the magnet money, especially those students who

participated in unique programs, such as the Lantern program, a group of high-performing students that provided technical support within the building; or an Olympic sport, such as fencing. For students such as Norton and Wilson, the Lantern program was most valuable, providing life-long skills and knowledge in computers. Likewise, Slaughter and Lasker found the fencing program to be life changing, shaping their career paths and offering experiences that would have been impossible without the well-resourced fencing program. Yet even students who did not participate in an Olympic sport or have a keen interest in computers, suggested they noticed and benefited from the vast increase in resources during the magnet years, including Anderson and Karriem-Hardaway, who were critical of the magnet approach. The narrators unquestionably noticed and appreciated the expensive magnet changes and referenced such things as the new building, new course offerings, new extracurricular offerings, new computers, new books, new uniforms, new equipment, and expensive travel opportunities. The upgrades resulted in profound life changes for several of the narrators.

Fencers Slaughter and Lasker provide perhaps the most dramatic example of how Central's magnet program affected the subsequent lives of students. Despite the fact that Slaughter participated in Central's fencing program for just two years, it changed the direction of his life. The same is true of Lasker, who benefited from four full years of fencing. After graduating from Central, both Slaughter and Lasker continued to compete in fencing on the national scene. Both individuals today are still involved in fencing as coaches, and both expressed gratitude for Central's fencing program and in particular Vladimir Nazlymov, Central's esteemed fencing coach. Fencing, it seems, provided both individuals an opportunity to get involved in a unique Olympic sport that neither Slaughter

nor Lasker would have likely been able to participate in had it not been for Central Computers Unlimited/Classical Greek Magnet High School. Indeed, Slaughter and Lasker offer quite vivid examples of the influence of Central's classical Greek theme, and their stories are what district leaders had envisioned when designing Central.

Computer students Norton, Evans, and Wilson, who had a real interest in computers, seemed to benefit from the magnet theme as well. Norton described how he utilized his computer education and training from Central as a radio technician in the military, and Evans pursued a degree in computer science before working as a computer programmer, which she attributed, in part, to her experience at Central. Wilson, too, who found a career in education, first taught computer courses when entering the field. On the athletic side, in addition to Slaughter and Lasker, Karriem-Hardaway, Williams, Watson, and Winston all participated in collegiate athletics after leaving Central. Watson even went on to have a successful professional basketball career abroad, and Williams and Winston remained athletes throughout their college experience, Williams in wrestling and Winston in basketball. Karriem-Hardaway, who had a robust high school track career, received a scholarship in track but gave it up just a semester into her college experience to pursue her passion and a career as a beautician.

The power of story and the use of oral history is a tremendous asset in ascertaining a fuller, more complete picture. These eleven interviews provide great insight into the African American experience at Central during the magnet years. Indeed, the intent here is not to generalize but rather to illuminate each individual's life story through oral history and subsequently use these stories to enrich our understanding of how Kansas City's magnet remedy affected the lives of black students.

Concluding Thoughts

In May of 2002, just prior to the official end of the magnet remedy and on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the filing of what became known as *Jenkins v. Missouri*, Arthur Benson suggested that the success of the magnet remedy would be decided in subsequent years:

Within the next several years final grades will be issued, and as a community we should all hope that Judge Clark's optimistic vision for Kansas City schools is fully realized, because, if it is, the reward for the entire community will be profound.

By 2005, total kindergarten through twelfth grade district enrollment had fallen to 27,141, fourteen percent of which were white students, and it would continue to fall each year thereafter.¹⁵ Last year's total district enrollment, for the 2012-2013 school year, dropped to an all-time low, 15,401, and a mere nine percent were white.¹⁶ Academic performance, which was substandard during the magnet years, remained so upon the district's return to neighborhood schools. The Kansas City, Missouri School District's state assessment scores, graduation rate, and composite ACT scores, for example, have remained well below state averages. The poor academic performance in the years following the magnet plan has even resulted in the district being stripped of its accreditation. So, needless to say, in the wake of the magnet plan, the district has not, as Benson hoped it would in 2002, fulfilled Judge Russell Clark's optimistic vision.

Central High School, the city's oldest high school and flagship magnet school, has experienced a similar fate in the aftermath of the district's magnet remedy. Academic performance has consistently remained below even district averages, as has the graduation

¹⁵ Arthur A. Benson Papers, unpublished demographic data.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

rate. The halls, which not long ago were bustling with thousands of ninth through twelfth grade students, dropped to 204 in 2012, of which, literally, fourteen students were white.¹⁷

Clearly, then, issues of segregation and equality in education are very much relevant today in Kansas City and have yet to be resolved, despite sixty years of desegregation efforts including more than two billion dollars in educational upgrades as part of the district's elaborate magnet plan. The plan essentially resulted in the Kansas City, Missouri School District completely rebuilding its physical infrastructure and redesigning its curriculum. The Kansas City, Missouri School District's story is long and complicated, and no school illustrates it better than Central High School, which is why Central served as the impetus of this project.

It is as critical as ever today that we continue to probe and question efforts of school desegregation and ongoing educational segregation. This project is unique in that it attempts to understand Kansas City's voluntary desegregation plan from the perspective of the African American student, not least because it is a perspective that is underrepresented in the literature, but more importantly because it yields valuable insight into how black students experienced the most expensive desegregation remedy to date. Such a line of inquiry is critical to ascertaining a more thorough understanding of desegregation and continuing the process of deconstructing the complex nature of race and schooling in Kansas City, Missouri. Thus, this project might transition nicely into a deeper exploration of the student experience in Kansas City across additional magnet schools during the identified years, or perhaps a study that examines the student experience at the eighteen Kansas City, Missouri School District elementary schools that remained traditional schools during this same time

¹⁷ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

period—the so-called “black corridor schools” that were part of the Effective Schools project.¹⁸ This study could also be used to explore theory, investigating how this research informs theories about educational inequality. Regardless of next steps, this research is critical to better understanding how students experienced desegregation efforts in Kansas City at a time when the Kansas City, Missouri School District once again confronts an uncertain future.

¹⁸ See Chapter 7 for a discussion of the “black corridor schools.”

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VITA

Bradley William Poos was born on March 8, 1978 in Salina, Kansas. Attending Salina Public Schools through junior high, Mr. Poos moved with his family to Wichita, Kansas, in 1992, where he attended high school at Maize High School, part of Maize Public Schools. Mr. Poos then attended the University of Kansas and received his bachelor of arts in history, graduating in 2000. Upon graduating from K.U., Mr. Poos worked as a research analyst at a Kansas City law firm, before embarking on a career in education.

Mr. Poos entered graduate school at Rockhurst University in 2001 to pursue his master's degree in education, seeking certification in social studies. In 2003, he graduated with his master's and began his teaching career at Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy in Overland Park, Kansas, where he taught middle and high school social studies. Mr. Poos again returned to graduate school in 2005, this time working towards his master's degree in counseling at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Upon completion of his master's in counseling, Mr. Poos accepted a counseling position in the North Kansas City Public Schools at Eastgate Middle School and worked as a counselor there from 2007 to 2012.

In 2010 Mr. Poos returned to the University of Missouri-Kansas City to pursue an interdisciplinary Ph.D., majoring in Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations with a minor in the Social Science Consortium. Mr. Poos accepted a graduate research position in the Division of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations in 2012; he worked as a graduate research assistant through 2013. Mr. Poos also served as an adjunct professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and Rockhurst University between 2012 and 2014. Mr. Poos has accepted a faculty position in Avila University's School of Education beginning in the fall of 2014.

While working on his Ph.D., Mr. Poos has presented at numerous local and national conferences and has continued an active research agenda pertaining to issues of race and inequality in education, including a publication in the *Sound Historian*. He has several other manuscripts in progress. Mr. Poos has also served as the vice president for the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Student Council and is a member of the Phi Kappa Delta Honor Society.