

HANDOUT

Year-by-Year Summaries | Boston Educational Justice Timeline

Teacher Instructions: The following pages include a timeline of events related to the pursuit of educational justice in Boston, focusing primarily on the 1960s and 1970s. This timeline is designed for use by students engaging with this inquiry as part of a high school US history course. The year-by-year summaries provide additional historical context for the events cards (**Handout: Event Cards | Boston Educational Justice Timeline**) that students will analyze in the activities for Supporting Question 2.

If using this timeline for classroom instruction, print these pages and post them in chronological order around the room. Events that appear on the event cards have an asterisks (*) preceding the entry.

1946–1960

1946

Mendez v. Westminster. Federal courts rule that racial segregation of California schools is unconstitutional. The suit was filed by five Mexican families on behalf of their children and 5,000 others of Mexican ancestry in Orange County. They were supported by the NAACP, the Japanese American Citizens League, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the American Jewish Congress, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

1951

Ruth Batson runs for Boston School Committee: She is the first Black person to do so in the twentieth century. She is not successful, but she becomes a leader in the movement for civil rights and educational justice in Boston.

1954

Brown v. Board of Education. The US Supreme Court outlaws racial segregation in all of the country's schools in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

1955

December – **Rosa Parks is arrested** for refusing to move from a bus seat reserved for white people, sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama.

1957

September – **The “Little Rock Nine” integrate Central High School:** Nine Black students are blocked by police, National Guardsmen, and white mobs from entering Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. President Eisenhower sends the Army 101st Airborne division to enforce the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and permit the students to enter the school.

1960

November – **Ruby Bridges integrates her New Orleans elementary school:** Six-year-old Ruby Bridges is escorted by four armed federal marshals as she enters her New Orleans elementary school as the first Black student to attend.

1961

Freedom Rides begin: Black and white “Freedom Riders,” many of whom are teens and young adults, take bus trips throughout the South to protest segregation on buses. They often encounter threats and violence from segregationists.

1962

1963

About 98,000 students attend Boston public schools: 85% of students are white. 15% are from a variety of minority groups, but mostly African American.¹

*** June 11 – The Boston NAACP presents demands to the Boston School Committee (BSC):** Led by Ruth Batson, the NAACP presents a list of 14 demands to the Boston School Committee. The first demand is that the committee recognize that de facto segregation exists in Boston schools, creating educational inequality that the committee must take action to end. The BSC refuses to acknowledge that segregation exists in the schools or to take any action to address unequal education between white and Black children in the city.

June 12 – Medgar Evers is murdered: NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers is murdered by a white supremacist in Mississippi.

*** June 18 – Thousands participate in Boston’s first “Stay Out for Freedom”:** Organized by hundreds of parents and civil rights activists, nearly 3,000 African American high school students stay out of public schools and attend six Freedom Schools instead. At Freedom School workshops, students learn about African American history, citizenship,

¹ Adapted from “Boston School Desegregation Timeline,” compiled by Jim Vrabel from *When and Where in Boston: A Boston History Database* (unpublished) and shared with Facing History and Ourselves.

and nonviolent protest, and they are taught by leaders in Boston's African American community, including Celtics legend Bill Russell.

August 28 – **Hundreds of thousands join the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**, where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech.

September 15 – **Four girls are murdered in Alabama church explosion:** White supremacist terrorists bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, a rallying place for civil rights activists in the city. Four young girls die in the explosion.

1964

February 26 – **More than 20,000 students participate in the second “School Stay Out for Freedom”**: 35 Freedom Schools offer workshops for students that day.

July – **President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964**: The law forbids employment discrimination due to race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.

1965

February – **Malcolm X is assassinated.**

March – **Nonviolent civil rights marchers are met with violence by the Alabama Highway Patrol in Selma.**

* *April* – **The Kiernan Report documents harmful effects of “racially imbalanced” schools in Massachusetts:** State Commissioner of Education Owen Kiernan issues a report concluding that the state’s schools are “racially imbalanced” (an indirect way of saying “segregated”) and that this is “educationally harmful and should be eliminated.” After the report is released, Boston’s mayor, John Collins, acknowledges segregation in the city’s schools and calls for its end. Boston School Committee chairperson Louise Day Hicks publicly disagrees with the mayor.

April 22–23 – **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visits Boston:** During his short stay, a proposed meeting with the Boston School Committee is canceled after he is informed by Louise Day Hicks that if local civil rights leaders accompany him, they will not be allowed to speak. Dr. King is, however, welcomed by a joint session of the Massachusetts legislature at the State House, where he decries school segregation. The next day, he leads a mile-long “March on Boston” from Carter Playground to Boston Common,

where he tells a crowd of more than 20,000 people, "The vision of the New Boston must extend into the heart of Roxbury."²

April 28 – Rev. Vernon Carter begins his protest against school segregation outside the Boston School Department headquarters: A minister at All Saints Lutheran Church, Carter vows to continue his vigil day and night for 114 days, until the state legislature and governor take action.³

*** June – The NAACP pressures the Massachusetts legislature to take action in response to the Kiernan Report:** Ruth Batson explains: "At the height of bitter frustration, and in desperation, black parents, community organizations and concerned citizens realized that they had no other recourse but to challenge the Massachusetts Legislature with the responsibility of legislating quality education for all. This was the one method that had not been tried."⁴

August 6 – President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to outlaw racially discriminatory voting requirements.

*** August 18 – The Commonwealth of Massachusetts enacts the Racial Imbalance Act (RIA):** The African American community's pressure on the state legislature pays off. The law requires local school boards to ensure that no schools have a student body that is more than 50% non-white. The state can withhold funding from districts that do not comply. The

² "Boston School Desegregation Timeline," compiled by Jim Vrabel from *When and Where in Boston: A Boston History Database* (unpublished) and shared with Facing History and Ourselves.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ruth Batson, *The Black Educational Movement in Boston: A Sequence of Historical Events* (Northeastern University, School of Education, 2001).

Boston School Committee resists the law and attempts to have it repealed.

October – **President Johnson signs the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965:** The act ends quotas established in 1924 that restricted immigration levels by race and nationality. This leads to increased immigration from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

*** African American parents found Operation Exodus:** Led by Ellen Jackson, the community-funded program provides transportation for children from Roxbury to public schools in other Boston neighborhoods that have open seats and better resources.

According to historian Jeanne Theoharis, the program was part of an effort to challenge the idea that Black parents did not care about their children’s education. She writes: “Parents believed that if they began busing Black students to these open seats, they would shame the school district into complying with the state law [Racial Imbalance Act] and taking over the operation and funding of the buses.”⁵ But the school system refused, and Operation Exodus ended in 1969 due to lack of funding. Hundreds of students participated in the program in each year of its existence.

*** African American parents found the Roxbury Community School:** It is the first of four alternative Black independent schools. Each of the four schools serves grades K through 6 and enrolls between 75 and 200

⁵ Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 52–53.

students. The principals and a majority of the faculty at each school are Black, and the schools give parents significant voice in their operation.

Historian Tatiana Cruz writes: “With parental involvement at the center of this community school model, the black independent school curriculum and pedagogy reflected the commitment to self-determination as well as racial pride. Community members donated materials to create hands-on learning activities centered on ‘real world’ problems, while other lessons focused on questions of identity and instilled pride in students’ African and African American heritage. Schools adorned African flags and posters of black freedom fighters, and some schools like St. Joseph’s even centered student evaluations on their proficiency in the seven principles of Kwanzaa.”⁶

⁶ Tatiana Maria Fernández Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown: Racial Politics, Community Development, and Grassroots Organizing, 1960–1985” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2017), 147.

1966

*** The Boston School Committee manipulates racial classifications to avoid “racially imbalanced” schools:** The Boston School Committee reclassifies 650 Chinese American students from “non-white” to “white” in an effort to prevent two schools from being in violation of the Racial Imbalance Act. A 12th-grade Chinese American student tells the *Boston Globe*: “The School Committee can’t make us white just by saying so.” Another Chinese American student tells the newspaper, “How can the School Committee suddenly decide I’m white? It’s not only ridiculous, it’s unfair to us.” A Chinatown businessman adds, “So the School Committee wants our children to be white to help them solve the racial imbalance mess. But will our kids be considered white in other circumstances?”⁷

*** Ruth Batson helps begin the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO):** METCO is a program (still operating today) that arranges for students of color from Boston to attend schools in participating suburban school districts and provides transportation for the students to get there.

⁷ Ken Botwright, “He’s Not White And Proud of It,” *Boston Globe*, October 20, 1966, 1.

1967

Planning begins for new Quincy School in Chinatown without community input: As the Tufts-New England Medical Center rapidly expands in Chinatown (displacing many families in the process), the hospital and various city agencies begin to draw up plans to replace the Josiah Quincy Elementary School with a new school building and community center.

The Quincy School building was one of the oldest in the country still in use, and about half of the school's 650 students were Chinese American. The rest of the students came from nearby Black, Latinx, and white neighborhoods.

1968

January – **The Bilingual Education Act is signed by President Johnson:**

The law offers money to school districts to create innovative educational programs for students who speak little or no English.

April 4 – **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis.**

March 5 – **Mexican American students in Los Angeles walk out of**

school in protest: Thousands of students in Los Angeles public schools (where a majority of students are Mexican American) walk out of their schools to protest unequal educational opportunities and to demand an education that values their culture and identities.

* *August 15* – **Quincy School planners meet with Chinatown, Castle Hill, Bay Village, and South End residents:** Planners from the Tufts-New England Medical Center and the city share their detailed plans to replace the Josiah Quincy School building in Chinatown, one of the oldest and most dilapidated school buildings in the city. The residents are outraged that the plans for the new building have already been made without consulting anyone in the community. They challenge the planners, asking: “By what right did they plan for, rather than with, the community?”⁸

⁸ Quincy School Community Council and Quincy School Project Staff Planning Office, Tufts-New England Medical Center, “Program Requirements and Design Specifications for the Quincy School Complex” (1969), 111.

* *September* – **The Quincy School Community Council is formed in response to residents’ demands to have a voice in planning for the new school:** The new council includes Chinese American, Black, Latinx, and white representatives from the communities served by the school, the city of Boston, and the Tufts-New England Medical Center. The council takes over planning for the new Quincy School. While the committee agrees to make decisions by majority vote, they are able to arrive at nearly all decisions by consensus. They issue a new plan the next year that envisions an educational program and building centered on the needs and cultures of a diverse community.⁹

* *Fall* – **African American students in Boston protest for culturally responsive education:** A protest by African American students at English High School over their school’s lack of Black faculty and staff, lack of Black history courses, absence of a Black student union, and the school’s shirt-and-tie dress code sparks larger protests by African American students throughout the city. Little more than a week after the initial protest at English, more than 6,000 African American students boycott Boston’s 16 high schools. The boycott lasts four days; the schools agree to adjust their dress codes but do not give in to the other demands.

⁹ Quincy School Community Council, “Program Requirements and Design Specifications,” 112.

1969

* *Summer* – **Latina mothers create Latin American Summer:** It is a summer educational program for 400 Latinx children. One in eight children who attend have never been to school before.¹⁰

* *September* – **Latinx activists kick-start more bilingual classes in BPS:** Under pressure from Latinx activists, the Boston School Committee approves an expanded number of bilingual classes. According to historian Tatiana Cruz, “Latino parents and members of the Spanish Federation (a mostly Puerto Rican group that organized around education) took community control of the implementation of these bilingual programs. They found unused locations for the clusters, furnished classrooms, advertised the programs in the community, recruited students, and screened and hired teachers.”¹¹

* *September* – **Two Latina mothers, with support from several community volunteers, establish the Acción School:** It offers a school-readiness program for 30 Latinx children.

* *September* – **The Quincy School Community Council issues its final report with plans and specifications for the new school and**

¹⁰ Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 148.

¹¹ Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 149.

community center: Created by a committee of Chinese American, Black, Latinx, and white Bostonians, the plan envisions an educational program and building centered on the needs and cultures of a diverse community.

1970

1971

* **Massachusetts enacts the Transitional Bilingual Education Act:** The law requires schools to create bilingual education programs if they have at least 20 students of a single minority language group who are not proficient in English.

* **Boston Public Schools' first bilingual school, the Rafael Hernández School, opens:** Latinx parents vote to name the school after Hernández, a Puerto Rican poet, composer, and musician.¹²

¹² Cruz, "Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown," 157.

1972

*** The Boston NAACP sues the Boston School Committee in federal**

court: After having exhausted efforts at the city and state level to desegregate Boston schools and achieve educational justice, the NAACP sues the Boston School Committee in federal court. The case is known as *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

1973

Sources:

In addition to footnoted entries, the following sources provided significant information for this timeline:

- Cruz, Tatiana Maria Fernández. "Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown: Racial Politics, Community Development, and Grassroots Organizing, 1960–1985." PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2017.
- Delmont, Matthew, and Jeanne Theoharis. "Introduction: Rethinking the Boston 'Busing Crisis.'" *Journal of Urban History* 43, issue 2 (March 2017): 191–203.
- Liu, Michael. *Forever Struggle: Activism, Identity, and Survival in Boston's Chinatown, 1880–2018*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020.