On a snowy March day in 1964, over ten thousand white parents walked from the Board of Education Building in Brooklyn to city hall in Manhattan to protest against school desegregation in New York City. Carrying signs reading, “We oppose voluntary transfers,” “Keep our children in neighborhood schools,” “I will not put my children on a bus,” and “We will not be bused,” the marchers called their coalition of local organizations “Parents and Taxpayers.” They hoped to persuade the school board to abandon a school pairing plan that called for students to be transferred between predominantly black and Puerto Rican schools and white schools. “Most of the demonstrators were taking their case into the streets for the first time,” the New York Times reported, noting that more than 70 percent of the demonstrators were women.1 “For every mother who’s here, there’s another one sitting at home with both her children, wishing she could be here,” said Joan Adabo, a mother from Jackson Heights, Queens.2 While the protestors sought to influence policy at the city level, television news captured the scope
of the march for a national audience. On NBC and ABC, rooftop camera shots showed a long line of protestors snaking through the wet streets of the city, while another camera angle depicted marchers, ten abreast, emerging from the fog as they crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. A street-level shot panned down to capture the marchers’ reflection in the curbside puddles, an artistic image emphasizing that the protestors braved inclement weather to be heard and seen. Television news, as well as newspaper coverage and photographs, gave the protestors national visibility. One mother spoke frankly to an NBC reporter about why Parents and Taxpayers opted for a public protest march: “We feel like we can prove as much as our opponents to use the same tactics. We have as much right as they do. These are our civil rights and we’re taking advantage of them.”

The white protestors were borrowing tactics from the African American and Puerto Rican protestors in New York who organized a school boycott a month earlier that kept over 460,000 students out of school to demand that the school board create a plan for desegregation. This pro-desegregation boycott was, in 1964, the largest civil rights demonstration in the history of the United States (bigger than the 1963 March on Washington), but the event is

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**Figure 1.** “Fifteen thousand white mothers” march across Brooklyn Bridge to protest “busing.” *NBC News*, March 12, 1964.
largely absent from histories of civil rights. The *New York Times*, which insisted that there was “no official segregation in the city,” criticized the boycott as “misguided.” Given this climate, New York’s civil rights activists recognized that the white protestors, while much fewer in number, would command much more attention from politicians. Civil rights veteran Bayard Rustin, recruited by Reverend Milton Galamison to organize the pro-desegregation boycott, planned a second rally at city hall in response to the white parents’ march and said, “We will be successful if we can top the anti-integration people by one person. . . . I’ll be happy with 15,000 and one Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and whites.” Doris Innis, a member of Harlem’s Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), later reflected, “When 10,000 Queens white mothers showed up to picket city hall against integration, it was obvious we had to look for other solutions.”

These civil rights activists understood that the white “antibusers” marchers conveyed a powerful message visually and rhetorically. By 1964, the public protest march was a tactic closely identified with African American civil rights demonstrators. This made the white protestors particularly
newsworthy, because they offered television and print reporters a new angle on a familiar story line. The newness of the white protest march also helped emphasize the view that white citizens were entering the school fight for the first time, after being pushed too far by school board officials. In reality, school officials and politicians structured housing and school policies around the expectations of white citizens. What these white “antibusers” were making public was their fear and frustration that this settled expectation was being disturbed.7

By calling themselves Parents and Taxpayers, these white protestors made an implicit claim that they occupied a higher level of citizenship than black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, who were also parents and taxpayers. Parents and Taxpayers advanced a similar argument to the hundreds of segregationists in the South and North who, in the years after the Brown decision, wrote to the Supreme Court to complain that the court was violating their rights as taxpayers.8 The news media and politicians paid special attention to Parents and Taxpayers because they were white, while also affirming the group’s assertion that their resistance to “busing” for school desegregation was about their rights as parents, taxpayers, or homeowners, not about race. The simultaneous assertion and disavowal of white political power made it difficult for civil rights advocates to counter Parents and Taxpayers and similar “antibus” groups.

Perhaps no one took more notice of the white “antibus” march than the legislators who were debating the Civil Rights Act in the spring of 1964, where several United States senators mentioned the New York protest. Senator Absalom Robertson of Virginia read to his colleagues directly from the news ticker the day of the protest: “Nearly 15,000 parents opposed to planned busing of their children for public school integration descended on city hall today in the largest civil demonstration there in years.”9 Later in March, Louisiana’s Russell Long said to Indiana’s Birch Bayh, “I presume the Senator noticed that on a cold, snowy day in New York City 15,000 white mothers got out and protested. I have heard that half a million whites have joined in a counter protest to the mobs marching and taking over. It could happen even in Indiana.”10 Mississippi senator Strom Thurmond returned to this talking point in April: “In New York, where students were ‘bused’ around, such a howl went up that 15,000 people assembled in protest against the practice.”11 “Fifteen thousand white mothers,” Georgia’s Richard Russell reiterated in June, “walked in the snow to protest any action to correct [racial] imbalance by the assignment of children to schools outside their residential areas.”12
For southern senators who opposed the Civil Rights Act, the white parents’ protests against school desegregation in New York highlighted what they saw as the hypocrisy of the Civil Rights Act’s different treatment of school segregation in different regions. In addition to recognizing New York’s standing as a cosmopolitan city and international media hub, southern senators stressed the New York protests because U.S. congressman Emanuel Celler, who represented Brooklyn, had played an important role in drafting the legislation and shepherding it through the House of Representatives. Celler, as the southern senators repeatedly pointed out, oversaw the bill as one amendment stripped federal power to investigate and remedy “racially imbalanced” schools and another amendment drew a line between desegregation of schools in the South (“‘Desegregation’ means the assignment of students to public schools and within such schools without regard to their race, color, religion, or national origin”) and desegregation of so-called de facto segregated schools (“‘Desegregation’ shall not mean the assignment of students to public schools in order to overcome racial
imbalance”). Illinois senator Everett Dirksen and Montana senator Mike Mansfield successfully proposed another “antibusing” amendment to Title IV, section 407: “Nothing herein shall empower any official or court of the United States to issue any order seeking to achieve a racial balance in any school by requiring the transportation of pupils or students from one school to another or one school district to another in order to achieve such racial balance, or otherwise enlarge the existing power of the court to insure compliance with constitutional standards.”13 Regarding this amendment, Mississippi’s James Eastland argued, “It appears that the draftsmen of the Dirksen-Mansfield substitute are so zealous to protect the States of New York, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Missouri, and California, where de facto segregation is now such an important factor in life, that they go so far as to deny the court itself the power to enlarge its existing decisions regarding the achievement of racial imbalance.”14

While they vehemently opposed the Civil Rights Act, these southern politicians saw clearly that the legislation’s “racial imbalance” loophole would allow school segregation to exist and expand in northern cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit. For these southern politicians, the “15,000 white mothers” were a symbol of how resistance to school desegregation in the North was accorded more political respect than similar efforts in the South. Seeing the white parent protests against “busing” as a “white backlash” to civil rights, as the news media and scholars would later describe them, obscures the fact that these protests encouraged northern congressmen to exempt northern schools from the Civil Rights Act’s desegregation provisions.

This chapter examines how New York emerged as the focal point for the battle over “busing” for school desegregation in the late 1950s and early 1960s, how “busing” developed as shorthand for politicians and parents to describe and oppose school desegregation in polite terms that distinguished them from the South, and how protests in New York shaped the wording of the Civil Rights Act. These early demonstrations against school desegregation in the North offer an example of how local protests worked their way into national debates and how, in turn, the resulting national policies shaped what kinds of changes were possible at the local level. These early “busing” protests and the resulting “antibusing” provision in the Civil Rights Act limited the federal authority and political will to uproot school segregation in the North, and encouraged local, state, and national politicians to take up “busing” as a way to oppose civil rights. At the same time, early “busing”
protests emboldened northern school boards to delay taking action to address school segregation. “Fifteen thousand white mothers” marched in New York a decade before Boston’s “busing crisis” garnered national attention, and these early “busing” protests help explain both why Boston and other northern cities were able to postpone desegregating until ordered to do so by a federal court and why “busing” resonated so powerfully as a way to oppose school desegregation. Taking a long view of the “busing” battles makes clear the important role that anticipation and fear played in motivating opposition to “busing.” White parents in New York and elsewhere organized to stop “busing” even before school boards or courts ordered that buses be used for school desegregation and despite the fact that most cities had used buses to maintain segregated schools. News media coverage of “busing” protests and plans played an important role in fostering this anticipation and fear. Desegregation plans designed for a handful of schools in two neighborhoods could become citywide stories via newspapers, or national stories via magazines or television broadcasts. Parents in Seattle, Pontiac, and Los Angeles, like the senators in Washington, DC, watched and read about the “fifteen thousand white mothers” protesting “busing” in New York, and this news contributed to existing local fears that “busing” might soon come to their cities. The white parents who took to the streets to protest school desegregation on a wet and cold day in March 1964 walked less than three miles, but their protest rippled across the country, and their opinions shaped civil rights for years to come.

**NEW YORK AFTER BROWN V. BOARD**

In 1954, New York City had the nation’s largest black population. New York’s black population had grown from 60,000 (under 2 percent of the total city population) to 750,000 (over 9 percent of the total city population) in the prior five decades, as migrants from southern states and immigrants from the Caribbean joined African Americans who had lived in the city for generations. Significant black neighborhoods developed in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Brownsville, with people drawn by the vibrant cultural life in these areas but also restricted by racially discriminatory housing policies and a lack of affordable housing in other parts of the city. The majority of black students in New York attended segregated schools, but school officials maintained they were not to blame for this situation. “We did not provide
Harlem with segregation,” insisted New York City school superintendent William Jansen in 1954. “We have natural segregation here—it’s accidental.” Counter to Jansen’s suggestion, in New York as in other northern cities, school zoning policies worked in concert with housing discrimination to segregate schools. Black parents and their white allies had protested the New York schools in the twenty years before Brown, calling for equal education, an end to teachers’ corporal punishment of students, and removal of textbooks with racist text and imagery.

Ella Baker and Dr. Kenneth Clark, two of the most important African American thinkers and activists in the twentieth century, played central roles in pushing for educational equality in New York. Baker, best known for her grassroots organizing in the South for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), had lived in New York City since 1927. Baker traveled across the country in the 1940s organizing black communities as the director of branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and served as the president of the New York NAACP in the early 1950s. Baker grew frustrated both by the poor condition of education for black students in New York and the NAACP’s reluctance to prioritize racial discrimination in New York and other northern cities. “They were always talking about the poor people down South,” Baker later recalled. “And so the question was, what do you do about the poor children right here?”

Kenneth Clark, famed for the doll experiments that would be cited in the Brown case, was also well aware of the racism and educational inequality black children faced, having founded the Northside Center for Child Development with his wife Dr. Mamie Clark to provide mental health care to Harlem’s children. In the summer of 1952, Baker and the Clarks organized meetings of black civic leaders and parents at the Clarks’ suburban home in Hastings-on-the-Hudson to discuss educational issues in the city. The following summer the ad hoc group formally became the Committee on New York Public Schools, with Kenneth Clark serving as chairman and Baker leading the organizing effort. This committee was the foundation for the Intergroup Committee on New York’s Public Schools, an interracial coalition of twenty-eight social, welfare, civic, labor, and religious organizations. Formed in April 1954, the Intergroup Committee included Clark as chairman and Baker on the steering committee.

In the months before the Brown decision, Clark and Baker worked to make school segregation in New York an issue that school officials and politi-
cians could no longer ignore. In a February 1954 speech at the Urban League’s Negro History Week dinner, Clark surveyed the problems of gerrymandered school zones and overcrowded and deteriorating black schools, and called on the board of education to study the conditions of the city’s public schools and racially segregated schools “where they exist in fact, but not by law.” Clark repeated this call at the Intergroup Committee’s April 1954 conference on New York City’s Public Schools and gained the endorsement of over forty organizations that attended, including the United Parents Associations of New York City, the NAACP, and the Urban League. New York Superintendent William Jansen strongly disagreed with Clark’s statements, and he tasked his assistant superintendents with providing evidence to refute Clark’s assertions. The U.S. Supreme Court’s May 1954 ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, which held that state school segregation laws were unconstitutional, buoyed Clark and the Intergroup Committee, as did the important role the landmark case assigned to Clark’s research on the negative psychological impact of school segregation on black children. Facing local and national pressure, Arthur Levitt, the president of the board of education, asked the Public Education Association (PEA) to “test by impartial inquiry the validity of the appellation ‘Jim Crow,’” an announcement that received front-page coverage in the New York Times. In other words, New York’s school officials praised the Brown decision but wondered if it applied to them.

The New York Amsterdam News, one of the city’s leading black newspapers, continued to press the issue in the summer and fall of 1954, encouraging the PEA to conduct a “real study and not a whitewash” and reminding school officials that they were “duty bound to see to it that educational services and facilities in no community fall below those in any other community.” The Amsterdam News also ran an editorial cartoon titled “Siamese Twins” that featured two figures wearing academic caps and gowns, joined at the hip, labeled “New York City’s School System” and “The South’s Jimcro [sic] tradition.” To counter what he called the Amsterdam News’ “calculated campaign of opposition to the Board of Education,” the school board’s public relations assistant advised Jansen to make a “good faith” effort to implement the PEA report’s recommendations and establish a Commission on Integration, made up of board members and civic leaders. Accompanying the formation of the Commission on Integration in December 1954, the board of education passed a resolution that took note of the Supreme Court’s Brown ruling against segregated schools, and tasked the commission with
recommending “whatever further action is necessary to come closer to the ideal, viz., the racially integrated school.” While this amounted to little more than a promise for additional study, Clark praised the move as a necessary starting point.

Thanks to regular newspaper coverage, the debate over school segregation in the months before and after the Brown decision reached a large audience among white New Yorkers. June Shagaloff, who had worked with Clark to conduct historical and social science research for the Brown case and later led NAACP efforts to challenge school segregation outside the South, recalled that “the word ‘desegregation’ was a new word” for white citizens, school officials, and the white press. “These were issues that were new to them.”

Clark also saw public awareness as the first goal of the Intergroup Committee’s work: “To focus public attention on the fact of de facto segregated schools in New York City [was] an important goal, because we felt that the people of New York City were not aware of public school segregation as an issue which faced the city itself.”

For their part, school officials remained cautious about the legal ramifications of school segregation receiving wider attention. Following a press release on the PEA’s school study, schools superintendent Jansen wrote to Rose Shapiro, who was directing the zoning portion of the PEA’s report, to ask her to avoid using segregation in relation to New York schools. “The use of the word ‘segregation’ in releases is always unfortunate,” Jensen wrote. “Segregation means a deliberate act of separating. In Kenneth Clark’s allegation, he alleges that we deliberately segregate children which is false. . . . The statement of principles also implies that racial segregation exists in our schools. There is no justification for charging this to our schools.”

Many other northern school officials, politicians, and parents shared Jensen’s distaste for the word segregation, preferring words like separation and racial imbalance. These word choices emphasized that northern-style school segregation was innocent, natural, and lawful, while perpetuating the myth that racism structured spaces and opportunities in the South but not the North.

The PEA report, released in October 1955, found that 71 percent of elementary schools enrolled either 90 percent or more black and Puerto Rican students or over 90 percent white students. While describing this as “a state of affairs which we should all deplore,” the report also insisted that this issue “cannot be placed at the doorstep of the Board of Education” and drew a clear distinction between “separation” and “segregation”: “Many conditions conspire to promote such a separation of children in schools but in a strictly legal
sense of the word there is no such thing as segregation in the school system of New York City.”30 While the report did not make a formal recommendation regarding integration, it recommended that information on school district lines be made publicly accessible and that “whenever a superintendent can further integration by drawing district lines he should so do.”31

Despite these modest recommendations, the report became a subject of controversy among white parents and teachers, and it was here that the term busing first appeared in news reports, public hearings, and rumors as a way to describe and discourage school desegregation. The Wall Street Journal was the first major newspaper to sound alarms over “busing” by overstating the scale of the school board’s zoning plan. After describing two hundred black children who were bused to PS 93 in the Bronx, journalist Peter Bart warned, “This is only the beginning. A ‘master plan’ to speed up the integration process for New York’s 925,000 public school pupils has been drawn up by the subcommittee on zoning of the Board’s Commission on Integration. If approved, the plan will take effect next September. It proposes extensive use of city-financed buses to create racially balanced schools and suggests that racial integration should be the sole objective of school zoning.” Describing what he called an “enforced mass migration of school children,” Bart alerted readers that white children were already being “bused”: “Hundreds of New York students are already criss-crossing the city by bus and subway to schools far from home. . . . Not only are children from Negro sections of Harlem traveling to hitherto all-white schools; in some instances, white pupils are crossing regular school zones to enter all-Negro schools.”32 The Associated Press also picked up the story in spring 1957, noting that “five words: ‘Selective use of bus transportation’” had sparked “fiery protests” in New York. While the AP’s report was less alarmist than the Wall Street Journal, the AP story made clear the national implications of the New York case: “The nation’s biggest city has gone beyond legal requirements that all races be admitted to schools on an equal basis, and is taking additional direct action to foster interracial student bodies. The move could set a trend.”33 In addition to these news reports, white residents in East Queens and other neighborhoods received reprints, sent anonymously, of pamphlets such as “The Ugly Truth about the NAACP” and “The Red Hand in New York Schools,” which attacked the NAACP and school integration as communist.34 These publications stoked existing fears in the white community and fueled rumors that the school board was calling for extensive cross-city “busing” for school desegregation.
In their letters to the board of education, many parents were unambiguous in listing the reasons they feared and opposed school desegregation. One father asked, “Do you gentleman honestly believe that you can then ship our children back to some slum school . . . to spend their lunch hours in streets that are civic cesspools . . . without a fight on your hands?” An “Irate Parent” framed opposition in the language of homeowners’ rights: “Do you think that I and so many others like me moved to this neighborhood so that our [children] would be uprooted and have to travel to a place at an uncomfortable distance!” The racism in other letters was explicit. “The Negro is emerging from ignorance, savagery, disease and total lack of any culture,” one letter stated. “Is it necessary to foist the Negro on the White Americans for fair play?” Another letter simply said, “We don’t want our children integrated with Blacks.” These letters offer a snapshot of the feelings that underscored opposition to school desegregation and suggest how, in the privacy of homes and neighborhood spaces, such sentiments propelled rumors that “busing” was imminent.

Well aware of the growing public sentiment on desegregation, Superintendent Jensen and his colleagues held public meetings in white neighborhoods and issued statements to newspapers in an attempt to quell these widespread “busing” rumors. “We have no intention whatsoever of long-distance bussing or bussing of children simply because of their color,” Jansen told the New York Times in response to a report on the more than two thousand letters the board of education had received criticizing the integration plan. “These rumors are completely false,” Jansen later said to a gathering of seven hundred parents, teachers, and principals in Queens. “No such action is planned.” True to his word, Jansen’s report on zoning, issued in July 1957, reflected the concerns of parents who had rallied against the potential of “busing.” The report identified “the neighborhood school concept” as the heart of the school’s zoning policy and stated, “Pupils should not be transported by bus from one school to another solely for the purpose of integration.” Jensen also reasserted that the issue of school segregation was largely beyond the control of the school board: “The homogenous character of some school neighborhoods is an effect of segregated residential patterns, a condition which the schools cannot deal with directly.” While Jansen’s report may have placated the desires of white parents and teachers, it drew the ire of Commission on Integration members like Ella Baker who worked on the preliminary zoning report. “There is a unanimous revolt of the Integration Commission against Dr. Jansen’s position,” Kenneth Clark told the New
York Times. “We feel that the Superintendent is deliberately confusing, delaying, distorting, and sidetracking the reports of our commission. He is no more likely to implement our reports than he was two years ago. . . . The people of the city will not tolerate this sabotage.”

Clark was frustrated not only that Jansen had delayed and watered down the zoning report but that “busing” came to dominate the public discussion over school desegregation in New York. Clark argued that the Commission on Integration’s zoning report became the basis for a tremendous amount of local and national distortion. Before we knew it, it was rumored that this subcommittee was recommending that children from all white neighborhoods should be taken by bus to schools in the heart of Negro ghettos. It was even stated children would be brought from Staten Island to attend schools in Harlem. Those of us who had worked for two years with the Commission on Integration, and who were in constant touch with the activities of each subcommittee, were first shocked and then alarmed at what we were reading in some areas of the press. It was not long before we became aware of the fact that these distortions and rumors were not accidental. They seemed to have been planted and they received wide circulation throughout the city and the nation. . . . Systematic study of the report on zoning revealed that at no place in the report is there a suggestion that young children be “bussed” any considerable distance in order to facilitate integration. . . . I should like to add one other fact not found in this report: namely, there were until last year instances in which buses were used by the Board of Education to transport white children away from a near Negro school to a more distant non-Negro school. It is fascinating, in the observation of this whole process, to note that there were no national press alarms about this fact.

Writing in 1958, Clark identified how making “busing” the frame for the debate could derail school desegregation. In addition to eliding the earlier use of buses to transport students to maintain segregated schools, “busing” made school desegregation less about the constitutional rights of black children and more about the desires and fears of white parents. Fears of “busing” in New York outpaced the numerical reality of students transferred for school desegregation, a pattern that would be repeated nationally. Focusing on “busing” also gave equal weight to black protests against segregated schools and white protests to maintain these segregated conditions.

Superintendent Jansen, for example, described integration and “busing” as issues that had “stirred extremists on both sides,” some who wanted to “build Rome in a day” and others who “resist every step.” Jansen’s framing
of the “busing” issue borrowed from President Dwight Eisenhower, who answered a question regarding violence against school integration in Clinton (Tennessee), Mansfield (Texas), and Sturgis (Kentucky) by comparing “extremists” who “are so filled with prejudice that they even resort to violence” with those “on the other side . . . who want to have the whole matter settled today.”45 (President Richard Nixon expressed a similar sentiment in 1969, arguing for a “middle course” on school desegregation between “two extreme groups . . . those who want instant integration and those who want segregation forever.”)46 Like Eisenhower before him and Nixon after him, Jansen’s use of “extremists on both sides” allowed him to present official inaction as a fair middle ground rather than as the maintenance of an educational status quo that benefited white students and harmed black students. Instead of seeing school desegregation as an issue that necessarily involved changing structures of racial discrimination, “busing” enabled parents, school officials, politicians, and the media to frame the story around the preferences and demands of white parents.

**CIVIL RIGHTS PRESSURE**

As black parents and civil rights advocates escalated their demands for quality education and achieved an important legal victory, white parents organized simultaneously to restrict desegregation measures. White protests and the threat of such protests influenced school policy preemptively, throttling the school board’s already slow movement on school desegregation. In the mid- and late 1950s, several parent and community groups organized to address the school conditions faced by black students. One group was a coalition of black and Jewish parents and community members, led by educational activist Annie Stein, Brooklyn NAACP branch education committee chair Winston Craig, and Reverend Milton Galamison, minister at Bedford-Stuyvesant’s Siloam Presbyterian Church. This group called for zoning changes to integrate JHS 258 in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The school opened in the fall of 1955 with an enrollment of over 98 percent black students despite the school board’s promise earlier that year to end “racially homogenous” schools.47 Two years of community rallies, petitions, and calls on the school board to zone for desegregation were not enough to overcome the board’s concerns about how white parents would respond to rezoning. “It is known that the Board of Education members are deeply concerned by the issues
involved in desegregating the school,” the New York Times reported. “Several members said privately that if white children were forced to attend, violence among the parents might break out.” The NAACP’s national leadership also factored the potentially violent responses of white parents into its thinking: “If zoning is so conducted as to arouse substantial resistance in some part of the school community, and if the resistance should in fact have a violent outcome (or be susceptible to depiction as such) the consequences to the overall desegregation program, North as well as South, could be incalculably damaging.” Concerned about alienating supportive donors in New York and other northern cities, the NAACP’s national leadership made their decision to not support the Brooklyn branch’s protest of JHS 258.

In Harlem, a concurrent school boycott resulted in an important legal victory and ultimately pushed the school board to establish an “open enrollment” policy. A group of Harlem mothers organized in 1956 to protest school conditions in their neighborhood, forming the Parents Committee for Better Education and enlisting young black attorney Paul Zuber. The committee expanded quickly and joined forces with local chapters of the NAACP, the Negro Teachers Association, Harlem’s Parents Committee for Better Education, and other local organizations to form Parents in Actions Against Education Discrimination. The coalition worked to organize parents across the city throughout 1957, culminating with a protest and rally at city hall at the start of the school year that drew several hundred people. The Amsterdam News’ headline, “Don’t Forget N.Y. Has Its Own School Problem,” connected the rally to the ongoing school integration crisis in Little Rock, as did a protester’s sign that asked, “Is Brooklyn, New York above the Mason Dixon Line?” While the protest did not result in any immediate changes in the schools, the group continued to organize parents. The following year parents of twenty-one black children in Harlem and Brooklyn kept their children home in a boycott aimed at forcing the school board to allow their children to transfer to integrated schools with better resources and more experienced teachers. The Amsterdam News dubbed the Harlem mothers the “Little Rock Nine of Harlem,” and the six-month boycott was a clear indication of the resolve of black activists to fight school segregation in the North. The school board took the parents to Children’s Court. Judge Nathanial Kaplan found four of the parents guilty of violating the compulsory attendance law, while two other mothers appeared before Judge Justine Wise Polier, who dismissed the charges. Judge Polier’s ruling in the Skipwith case validated many of the black parents’ critiques of the school board. Judge Polier found that half the teachers
at majority–black and Puerto Rican schools were unlicensed, compared to only 30 percent at majority-white schools. “So long as non-white . . . schools have a substantially smaller proportion of regularly licensed teachers than white . . . schools, discrimination and inferior education, apart from that inherent in residential patterns, will continue,” Polier wrote. “The Constitution requires equality, not mere palliatives. Yes the fact remains that more than eight years after the Supreme Court ruling in *Sweatt v Painter* and more than four years after its ruling in *Brown v Board of Education*, the Board of Education of the City of New York has done substantially nothing to rectify a situation it should never have allowed to develop, for which it is legally responsible, and with which it has had ample time to come to grips, even in the last four years.” As a result, Polier ruled the parents should not be bound by the compulsory attendance law: “The Board of Education has no moral or legal right to ask that this Court shall punish parents, or deprive them of custody of their children, for refusal to accept an unconstitutional condition which exists in the schools to which the Board has assigned their children.” After initially appealing Polier’s decision, the board of education ultimately reached an agreement with the parents for their children to transfer to a different junior high school in Harlem that had a pilot project to provide enhanced guidance and counseling services and cultural programs. Judge Kaplan, who had convicted the mothers who were in his court on the same charges, followed Judge Polier’s lead and declined to sentence the mothers if they enrolled their children at the new junior high school. It took six months, but the parents successfully forced the school board to transfer their children to better schools. While *Skipwith* did not set state or federal legal precedents, parents and civil rights activists viewed the decision optimistically in their fight against school segregation in the North. The *Amsterdam News* praised the decision and published the ruling in serial form over four issues of the newspaper. “The Polier decision,” Kenneth Clark said, “was the initial and dramatic first step in a series of tests to see whether it is possible to get relief from de facto segregated schools.” Over the next half dozen years, groups of New York City parents used school boycotts in an effort to get their children transferred to better schools. Influenced by the Harlem parents he represented in the *Skipwith* case, attorney Paul Zuber encouraged parents in New Rochelle, New York, to keep their children out of school, protests that resulted in *Taylor v. Board of Education of City School District of City of New Rochelle* (1961), the first ruling against school segregation in a northern city
after Brown. In Brooklyn, Reverend Milton Galamison, who had left the NAACP to form the Parents’ Workshop for Equality in New York City Schools with Annie Stein, threatened a large-scale boycott of schools in the fall of 1960. Under continual pressure from black parents and civil rights advocates, in 1960 the board of education formalized an “open enrollment” or “permissive zoning” policy, allowing students to transfer to schools with empty seats outside their districts. This “open enrollment” plan resembled the “freedom of choice” plans southern school districts utilized to evade complying with the Brown decision. These plans, in both the North and the South, advanced a color-blind ideology that allowed communities to avoid integration without publicly supporting segregation.

White communities who had raised alarms two years earlier over “busing” and proposed zoning changes saw the expansion of open enrollment in the city as a threat to the neighborhoods and schools they sought to protect, despite the fact that white students had benefited disproportionately from the permissive zoning that functioned on an ad hoc basis. In the summer and fall of 1959, white parents in the Glendale-Ridgewood section of Queens organized to protest the transfer of four hundred black and Puerto Rican students from overcrowded elementary schools in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Days after the board announced the transfer, the Glendale-Ridgewood parents marched outside city hall on a rainy morning, carrying signs reading “Neighborhood Schools for All,” “Bussing Creates Fussing,” “We Have Just Begun to Fight,” and “When We Are Right We Fight.” A small group of black mothers and children held a counterprotest, with signs reading, “This Is N.Y.C. not Little Rock” and “Are These the J.D.s [juvenile delinquents] That Glendale fears?” As the opening of school neared, “blockbusting” real estate agents used the transfer plan to stoke homeowners’ fears that integrated schools would lower property values. After trying unsuccessfully to sue the board of education to block the transfer, the Glendale parents organized a one-day school boycott that kept over 40 percent of white students home. While these protests did not thwart the transfer plan, the students bused into Glendale faced racial harassment. Students found the message “Blacks Go Home” scrawled on the front and side of one Queens elementary school. At another elementary school, the principal ordered all the black students to be searched for weapons, based on rumors circulating among white parents.

The controversy over this student transfer plan highlights the predicament that faced the board of education and the way white concerns over...
"busing" figured in how school officials addressed school desegregation. On the one hand, the school board expanded its open enrollment policy to make themselves appear compliant and as a concession to the increasingly vocal demands of black parents for better schooling options. On the other hand, white protests of even small-scale desegregation efforts led school officials to downplay school integration as a policy goal. The Bedford-Stuyvesant to Glendale-Ridgewood transfer plan, for example, involved only four hundred students across five schools, and it was a one-way transfer that did not bus any white Queens students. That even a modest one-way “busing” program could spark months of organized protests speaks to the level of resistance to school desegregation that shadowed every school board decision. School officials characterized the transfers as temporary emergency measures to deal with school overcrowding rather than part of a larger school desegregation policy.

**Figure 4.** White parents from Queens (NY) protest the proposed transfer of four hundred black and Puerto Rican students from the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. This was a one-way “busing” plan that would not have transferred any white students. Associated Press photo, June 25, 1959.
In explaining the Glendale transfers, Charles Silver, president of the school board, said, “The purpose of these transfers is not based on the integration program but on the policy of providing full and equal educational opportunities for all children.” Superintendent Theobald agreed, promising that the board was “firmly committed to the concept of neighborhood schools.” In trying to neutralize protests from two vocal constituencies, the school board adopted modest desegregation policies to appease black parents and advocated “neighborhood schools” to satisfy white parents. These political calculations did not result in a middle point between the demands of black and white parents, but rather were doubly negative for supporters of school desegregation. The school board’s desegregation policies were small scale and defended half-heartedly because they already factored in the expected white community response regarding how much desegregation was realistic or acceptable. Modest desegregation programs fell short of the expectations of black parents and civil rights activists but still managed to lead to significant white protests. These white protests in turn served to caution the school board against taking bolder steps to desegregate schools.

The school board’s open enrollment policy reflected these limitations. Facing protests from parents and civil rights organizations, the board formalized its open enrollment policy in 1960 and expanded the policy over the next three years to include more schools. The program represented a compromise that failed to meet activists’ citywide desegregation demands, but many viewed it as an important intermediary step toward school desegregation. The New York Times praised “free choice in city schools” and saw a school board adopting “a new policy that will no longer regard neighborhood boundaries as immovable barriers.” The Amsterdam News also applauded the open enrollment policy as a sign that school board members “[have] rounded the turn on the road to integration and are coming down the home stretch under full steam. We do not hesitate to say that we are happy about this.” The school board, however, did little to publicize or explain the program to parents, and in some cases school personnel actively discouraged parents from participating. “In almost every school I have anything to do with, Open Enrollment was not only not pushed but talked against,” remarked one civil rights activist. “Parents got lectures about how hard it is to travel and go to a school far away.” A school official noted that “field sabotage” undercut the program: “Principals and teachers often did not inform parents about Open Enrollment options…. Some principals told
parents about the plan in ambiguous or technical language that they could not understand. . . . Another technique was to discourage parents by telling them of all the difficulties involved—from bussing their children to segregated classes in receiving schools.” The language of “open enrollment” and “freedom of choice” was rhetorically powerful because this option purported to offer all students, regardless of race, equal access to the school system’s educational resources. In practice, these “openings” or “choices” were very difficult to access. Open enrollment policies placed the burden of school desegregation on black and Puerto Rican families and led to little actual integration. In light of the school board’s limited publicity, groups like Brooklyn’s Parents’ Workshop distributed fact sheets to parents with information on receiving schools, reading scores in the schools, and the distance between schools. Despite these efforts to spread the word about open enrollment, after five years less than 5 percent of eligible students were applying for transfers annually and the 22,000 students who did transfer made up less than 3 percent of black and Puerto Rican students.

Beyond offering minimal support to open enrollment, the school board also fanned rumors in white neighborhoods that the open enrollment policy would lead to citywide “busing.” New York schools superintendent Dr. Calvin Gross responded to a sit-in protest at the board of education headquarters by describing Reverend Milton Galamison and the two dozen other demonstrators as “extremists” who want “instant racial balances.” “The things they apparently want,” Gross continued, “can only be achieved by the involuntary bussing of children over a long distance.” “Busing is not the issue,” the NAACP’s June Shagaloff argued, “but it has been used and misused to justify the status-quo of school segregation. It has been used and misused to cloak the basic question: What plan can most effectively achieve meaningful desegregation throughout the city?” In a radio interview days after he was arrested for the sit-in protest at the board of education, Galamison said, “Dr. Gross’ remarks about instant integration and his remarks about busing in my opinion have been designed to . . . incite . . . the white community. It’s been like waving a red flag and it’s designed, I feel, to bring opposition to what we want to achieve and the thing to which he committed himself.” Responding to Gross’s characterization of civil rights advocates as “extremists” demanding “instant integration” (which reprised remarks made seven years earlier by President Eisenhower and Gross’s predecessor, William Jansen), Galamison responded drily, “It’s my personal opinion that three years is a reasonable period of time in which to . . . provide a plan.”
BOYCOTTS

By 1964, the black community’s frustration with the glacial pace of change in the schools led to a boycott that was the largest civil rights demonstration in the history of the United States. The boycott was a high point for the New York Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools. For a brief period, this committee brought together relatively moderate local chapters of the NAACP with more militant local chapters of CORE, as well as the Parents’ Workshop and Harlem Parent Committee. Led by Brooklyn minister Milton Galamison and organized by Bayard Rustin, the civil rights stalwart who organized the 1963 March on Washington, over 460,000 students stayed out of school on February 3, 1964. Groups of students, parents, and some teachers marched in front of three hundred schools and the board of education headquarters, chanting “Jim Crow must go” and singing “We Shall Overcome.” Rustin was particularly encouraged that in addition to hundreds of thousands of black students, the boycott had support from over one hundred thousand Puerto Rican students. “I think we are on the threshold of a new political movement—and I do not mean it in the party sense—that is going to change the face of New York in housing, in jobs and in schools,” Rustin remarked. At a rally on the eve of the boycott, Puerto Rican community leader Irma Vidal Santaella declared, “This is the beginning of the partnership between the Puerto Ricans and our sisters and brothers.” Tina Lawrence, a black college student who helped organize the boycott, saw the massive protest as a challenge to New York City’s white residents. “They thought it was all right when it was happening in Jackson, Miss., but now it’s happening here,” she said. “The people are going to wake up.” The boycott, however, did not draw significant support from white liberals and moderates. Organizations that supported school integration, like the United Parents Association, Public Education Association, Anti-Defamation League, Catholic Interracial Council, and American Jewish Congress, opposed the school boycott as an inappropriate tactic. The *New York Times*, which had supported modest zoning changes for school desegregation, described the boycott as a “violent, illegal approach of adult-encouraged truancy.” The *Times* raised the specter of “busing” to explain why the civil rights demands were “unreasonable and unjustified.” “Given the pattern of residence in New York City, the Board of Education can do just so much to lessen imbalance in the schools,” the editorial argued. “To ask more is to ignore the facts and figures of school population and pupil
distribution. You can bus children just so far. You can hire bus drivers when
you ought to be hiring teachers. You can put children into buses for an hour
and a half or more each day—as the board plans to do for some—but what
do they learn in the bus?”
The *Times’* position sounded strikingly similar to James Donovan, president of the New York City School Board, who a month
earlier said, “Everyone in the City of New York has rights . . . and there is [sic]
simply limits of feasibility that arise. . . . You simply cannot put one million
children on wheels and send them all over the city of New York.” Donovan
wildly overstated the number of children who would have been reassigned to
desegregate New York’s schools. New York in 1964 was transporting annu-
ally fewer than ten thousand students, mostly black and Puerto Rican chil-
dren, through open enrollment and programs to aid integration and lessen
overcrowding.
Even a tenfold increase in this number would still have been only 10 percent of Donovan’s “one million children” figure. Opposition to
“busing,” of course, was never really tied to empirical evidence. The *Times,*
like Donovan and “antibusing” parents and politicians, argued from a gut
belief that “busing” for school desegregation was unrealistic.
This *Times* editorial illustrates how the news media covered civil rights
developments in the North with much less moral clarity than similar stories
in the South. Speaking to a conference of editors and publishers in 1963, New
York *Times* managing editor Turner Catledge recognized that his and other
northern papers brought a different scrutiny to civil rights stories in the
South. “We’ve had open season on the South here now for some time,”
Catledge remarked,
and it seems to me that, especially when you read the editorial pages in the
North, some people are too much concerned about what’s going on some-
where else and too little concerned about what’s going on right at their own
doors. . . . There seems to be a disposition, especially on our editorial pages, to
demand that the Southerners accept some sort of an emotional change in this
matter, which they’re not going to do. Integration is coming to the South . . .
but it’s not wanted. Is it wanted any more in Minnesota or in New York? I
think this is the question our readers are entitled to have us explore.

While Catledge recognized that the *Times* covered civil rights stories “at their
own door” timidly, the paper’s editorial positions on school desegregation in
New York did little to change this dynamic. The *Times* was critical of civil
rights advocates in New York and reluctant to ask white readers to confront
the emotional, legal, and political issues raised by school desegregation.
Hodding Carter III, managing editor of the *Delta Democrat-Times* in Greenville, Mississippi, argued that “most newspapers in America today, no matter where they are . . . are in a large sense representatives of the *status quo* . . . and geography and history make a vast difference in the attitude of the editor toward his society.” While Carter was discussing small-town southern newspapers, on the question of civil rights in New York, the *Times* was no less parochial. Writer Margaret Halsey criticized the *Times* and other white newspapers for failing to recognize this parochial quality. “It is within ‘the power of the press’ to make Negroes feel less like voices crying in the wilderness and more like people who are being listened to,” Halsey argued. “It is within the power of the press to open the eyes of white people to their own insularity.” In their coverage of “busing,” the *Times* failed on both counts.

This *Times* editorial also highlights how the school board’s failure to clearly explain or defend their desegregation policies made it possible for “busing” to dominate the discussion. Reflecting on the board’s poor communications, a city official recalled asking the board to make a public statement endorsing a specific desegregation plan. “You have a series of possible integration measures,” he said. “You have a policy position on integration. Use these measures. Use them sensitively. Use them combined. Use them one after another. Use them however you want to, but make clear where you stand.” The official recalled being rebuffed and misunderstood. “They heard us saying that we wanted them to bus large numbers of children for miles and miles, which we never said. That wasn’t even relevant.”

While the boycott succeeded as a public demonstration of unity among blacks and Puerto Ricans, these alliances began to fray shortly after the boycott. Eager to build on the success of the boycott and to keep applying pressure on the school board, Galamison planned a second boycott for March 16. Galamison’s plan failed to draw support from the national leadership of the NAACP, CORE, or the Urban League, who worried that another boycott would only alienate white moderates and hamper potential negotiations with school officials and city politicians. The National Association of Puerto Rican Rights withdrew from the boycott coalition, and local Puerto Rican organizers shifted their emphasis to community control of schools, including bilingual education. Bayard Rustin, whose organizing skills had proved crucial to the success of the first boycott, also did not support the second boycott because he felt that Galamison was moving in a militant direction that would result in an all-black protest and foreclose the possibility of interracial organizing for school desegregation.
chapters of CORE, the Parents’ Workshop, and the Harlem Parents Committee supported the second boycott, as did Malcolm X, who told a local television news reporter that he had come to “see the successful exposé of the New York City school system, it proves you don’t have to go to Mississippi to find a segregated school system, we have it right here in New York City.”

Galamison’s decision to go forward with the second boycott despite limited support from former civil rights allies reflected both his frustration with the school board’s slow pace of change and his belief that grassroots protests would be more likely than boardroom negotiations to force the school officials to take action. Among those influenced by the grassroots civil rights protests were Parents and Taxpayers, a coalition of white neighborhood groups who had organized protest marches and a boycott against school desegregation in 1964. Building on over eight years of white parents’ complaints and demonstrations over proposed zoning plans and “busing,” the Parents and Taxpayers rally on March 13 drew over ten thousand parents. The protestors called on the board of education to abandon the “Princeton Plan,” a school-pairing plan that called for predominately black and Puerto Rican schools to be paired with predominately white schools and for students to be transferred between the schools. Marchers held signs reading, “Keep Our Children in Neighborhood Schools” and “I Will Not Put My Children on a Bus.”

Media coverage helped frame these protests against school desegregation and “busing” as equivalent to earlier civil rights protests in the city. Television news established this equivalency in two ways. First, television producers presented pro–civil rights and anti–civil rights protest marches using similar camera angles, shot sequencing, and interview questions. The white demonstrators purposely modeled their protests on civil rights marches, and television news production techniques heightened these similarities, shaping the protests into segments that looked very similar. Second, television news featured representatives for the different movements in brief point-counterpoint segments. Segments, for example, would cut between Parents and Taxpayers leader Rosemary Gunning and boycott leader Milton Galamison answering questions regarding school desegregation. NBC likely opted for this point-counterpoint structure as a way to comply with the Federal Communication Commission’s (FCC) Fairness Doctrine. The FCC emphasized the “balanced presentation of opposing viewpoints” in outlining the Fairness Doctrine in 1949. The agency sent all licensees a notice in July 1963 about their obliga-
tion to comply with the Fairness Doctrine, indicating that “when the licensee permits . . . the presentation of views regarding an issue of current importance, such as racial segregation, integration or discrimination . . . he must offer spokesmen for all responsible groups within the community similar opportunities for expression of the viewpoints of their respective group.”

While this point-counterpoint structure worked well to highlight areas of disagreement between Gunning and Galamison, it rendered demands to maintain school segregation as equivalent to demands to desegregate schools. Framed in this way, the white defense of school segregation in the North looked much more reasonable and justified than similar efforts in the South.

Conversely, viewing the movements as equivalent made it possible to argue that both were too extreme. After Parents and Taxpayers organized a “white boycott” in September 1964 that kept over 275,000 students out of school to protest the school board integration plans, the New York Times editorialized, “When this current demonstration is over, we hope there will be no more of these boycotts, whether sponsored by white or black. They succeed in nothing except to make a good many New Yorkers a little ashamed of their city.” Unstated in the Times editorial was that an end to demonstrations, “white or black,” would maintain a segregated school system and only benefit the white communities who wanted the school board to stop additional efforts to desegregate schools. Whether framed as equally valid or equally extreme, media coverage benefited Parents and Taxpayers more than New York’s civil rights activists.

A week after the white student boycott of schools, the Times ran a story headlined, “Poll Shows Whites in City Resent Civil Rights Drive,” regarding a survey commissioned to study the extent of “white backlash” sentiment in the city. “While denying deep-seated prejudice against Negroes,” Fred Powledge wrote, the majority of white New Yorkers surveyed “said they believed the Negro civil rights movement had gone too far” and “spoke of Negroes’ receiving ‘everything on a silver platter’ and of ‘reverse discrimination’ against whites.” The article, one of the first to use the term white backlash, pointed to several developments that had led to white resentment, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act, civil rights protests in New York over schools, jobs, and housing, and riots that summer in New York, Rochester, Chicago, and Philadelphia. While the story presented “white backlash” as a new development, Powledge need only have looked at his own paper’s archives to see that white resistance to civil rights had developed alongside black protests for years before 1964.
The “white backlash” story line failed to capture how white resistance to “busing” and school desegregation set policy limits at the local and national level. In New York City, the school board took years to adopt modest desegregation programs in deference to white parents’ fears of “busing,” and then undercut these programs when white communities organized protests. At the national level, politicians shaped the 1964 Civil Rights Act to protect school segregation in the North so as not to offend the sentiments of white voters in the North, whose protests against “busing” were fresh in the congressmen’s minds.

When President John F. Kennedy sent civil rights legislation to Congress in the summer of 1963, the “Desegregation of Public Education” section called for the commissioner of education to, on request from local school boards, “render technical assistant in the preparation, adoption, and implementation of plans for desegregation of public schools or other plans designed to deal with problems arising from racial imbalance in public school systems.” The administration’s bill referenced “racial imbalance,” the phrase preferred by northerners to describe their own school segregation, eight times. When it reached Congress, House Judiciary Committee chairman Emanuel Celler assigned the administration’s bill to Subcommittee No. 5, which he also chaired and which had a majority of northern Democrats who were likely to support strong civil rights legislation. Celler, a Democrat from Brooklyn, Ohio Republican William McCulloch, the ranking minority party member on the subcommittee, and deputy attorney general Nicholas Katzenbach played important roles in crafting a subcommittee bill that would have enough support from northern Democrats and moderate Republicans to overcome opposition in the House and Senate from southern Democrats and conservative Republicans. At McCulloch’s suggestion, the education section of the bill was amended to delete references to “racial imbalance,” thereby making the law applicable only to de jure school segregation in the South. When the subcommittee bill came to the House floor in February, Florida Republican William Cramer expressed concern that a recently decided case, Blocker v. Board of Education on Manhasset (1964), which found unconstitutional school segregation in Long Island, New York, could expand the scope of the bill. If the subcommittee had been able to consider this case, he argued, “I think . . . we would have taken another look at the bill and probably put something specific in it saying that it is not the
intention of Congress to include racial imbalance or de facto segregation.”

To remedy this, on February 6, 1964, Cramer introduced an amendment to section 401b so that the section’s existing definition of desegregation (“Desegregation’ means the assignment of students to public schools and within such schools without regard to their race, color, religion, or national origin”) was followed by a clarification: “Desegregation’ shall not mean the assignment of students to public schools in order to overcome racial imbalance.” In introducing the amendment, Cramer made clear that it aimed to prevent “busing” for desegregation: “The purpose is to prevent any semblance of congressional acceptance or approval . . . [for] any balancing of school attendance by moving students across school district lines to level off percentages where one race outweighs another.” Celler accepted the amendment without discussion, and this wording was enshrined in the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Southern senators, who already opposed civil rights legislation, were incensed by the blatant hypocrisy of the bill’s education section and the way the amendment so clearly catered to white northerners’ concerns. “I do not blame the two distinguished Senators from New York, for they desire to protect New York City, as well as Chicago, Detroit, and similar areas. But why should they attempt to penalize our part of the country?” Mississippi senator James Eastland asked. Referring to New York senators Jacob Javits and Kenneth Keating, Eastland continued, “In my opinion the two Senators from New York are, at heart, pretty good segregationists; but the conditions in their State are different from the conditions in ours.”

Eastland’s fellow Mississippian John Stennis and Alabama senator John Sparkman made the most explicit connection among Celler, the white parent protests in New York, and the “racial imbalance” loophole to protect segregated Northern schools in an exchange on the Senate floor on May 1, 1964:

STENNIS: As the bill came to the Senate, it contained a provision prohibiting the busing of children from one part of a city to another, in an attempt to achieve racial balance in the schools. Was not that amendment agreed to by Representative Celler of New York, the manager of the bill in the House? Did not he agree to it, on the floor of the House, rather than make a fight to keep the other provision in the bill? Is not that true?

SPARKMAN: Yes. I do not know what motivated the Representative from New York; but he is from New York, and undoubtedly he had received many protests. In fact, probably he read in the New York Times, as we
did, about 15,000 white mothers who protested against the busing of their children. Does the Senator from Mississippi remember that incident?

STENNIS: Oh, yes.

SPARKMAN: At one time the busing of schoolchildren was done; and 15,000 mothers in New York—in Westchester County and the adjoining areas—vigorously protested against it. I do not know whether their protests had any influence on Representative Celler. . . . I do not know what motivated him to do that; but . . . when the bill was brought up in the House, a provision was written into it by someone who wished to make certain that the ghettos . . . remain just as they are; and Representative Celler accepted the amendment. . . . By the way, the administration did not ask for that provision. 112

Stennis, Sparkman, and the other senators who criticized Celler were not invested in desegregating New York’s schools; rather they wanted southern states to have the same latitude to define and largely ignore school segregation that New York, Ohio, Illinois, and other northern states enjoyed and would continue to enjoy under the bill.

Still, the senators’ repeated references to the New York protest speak to the imprint these parents left on the bill and the actual double standard the bill enshrined. The timing of the New York protest, coming days after the Senate opened debate on the Civil Rights Act, made the “fifteen thousand white mothers” representative of like-minded white parents who protested against school desegregation in other cities in the prior months. Surveying “recent school and residential troubles in New York City, in Philadelphia, in Cleveland, in Chicago, in Detroit, and elsewhere,” Florida senator Spessard Holland argued that these protests “make it completely clear that millions of people in our Northern States prefer de facto segregation, or something very much like that, or at least do not want to adopt any program of compulsory mingling of the races.” 113

While northern senators disagreed with their southern colleagues’ charges of hypocrisy, they agreed that the civil rights legislation was amended to prohibit “busing” for school desegregation. New Jersey senator Harrison Williams described how “segregationist propaganda” had created confusion among his constituents and had led many to write to him that “busing should be forbidden.” Williams received these letters, he said, “despite the fact that section 401(b) in title IV of H.R. 7152 specifically prohibits the busing of students across town, in order to achieve racial balance in the public schools.
That provision clearly related to busing, and legislatively prohibits busing in order to achieve racial balance in the public schools.\textsuperscript{114}

The legacy of New York’s school desegregation battles in the 1950s and 1960s is threefold. First, New York City schools were amply and intentionally segregated, but in the wake of the Brown decision, white parent protests warned New York City’s school officials against taking substantial steps to address school desegregation. In the mid- and late 1950s, desegregating New York’s schools was demographically possible, if politically controversial. By 1964, however, white flight to the suburbs and suburban school districts and longstanding white protest meant that there were over two hundred segregated schools in New York, compared to fifty-two in 1954.\textsuperscript{115} Second, the white parents’ protests influenced the amendments ensuring that the Civil Rights Act would not apply to school segregation and “busing” in the North. Finally, the white parents’ protests and the Civil Rights Act debates and legislation codified “busing” as the way to discuss and oppose school desegregation. This framing appeased northern sensitivities and distinguished their protests from those occurring in the South.

New York continued to play a leading role in “antibusing” politics for the next several years. Parents and Taxpayers paid a political lobbyist in Albany to encourage state legislators to pass regulations prohibiting “busing” for school desegregation in the state, and politicians proposed such legislation every year from 1964 to 1969. In 1969, an “antibusing” bill sponsored by state senators Norman Lent of Long Island and Joseph Kunzeman of Queens passed the New York House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Nelson Rockefeller, before being found unconstitutional by a federal court the following year.\textsuperscript{116} The Lent-Kunzeman “neighborhood schools” bill generated national interest among integration opponents and became a model for similar “freedom of choice” school legislation in several southern states, including Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Alabama.\textsuperscript{117} New York’s “antibusing” bill also influenced U.S. senator John Stennis of Mississippi, who in 1970 introduced an amendment calling for a uniform national school desegregation policy, with the hope of sparking more national opposition to “busing” and desegregation.\textsuperscript{118} As a U.S. congressman representing Long Island in 1972, Lent proposed a highly publicized constitutional amendment, H.J. Res. 620, to bar “busing.”
In explaining the series of protests for and against civil rights in New York, Senator Jacob Javits told his colleagues, “New York is a great center of communications, and when people demonstrate in New York, they are not demonstrating for the New York Senators alone. It is fair to say that they are demonstrating for the Nation and the world.” As Javits understood, parents in New York were engaged in neighborhood battles with implications that reached well beyond New York. New York’s fights over “busing” were both intensely local disputes that contested neighborhood boundaries on a block-by-block basis and national disputes that shaped the ways school desegregation would be debated and defeated for years to come.