

Urban Priests and the Boston Busing Crisis

Interviews Conducted and Transcribed by Bradley Barbour

Boston Busing Crisis

Frederic Jacobs

HNRS-490-061H 2013S- General University Honors

April 30, 2013

Abstract

The oral history "Urban Priests and the Boston Busing Crisis" investigates the roles the Boston Archdiocese and Boston area Catholic schools played in the desegregation of the city's public school system and the resulting "crisis" that peaked between 1974 and 1975. Two interviews subjects were selected for an oral history treatment: Father William Joy of St. Angela's in Mattapan, and Father Walter Waldron of St. Patrick's in Roxbury. Throughout the interviews, a number of topics are discussed, including the Church's relations with Boston's black communities and the Irish-Catholic communities of Charlestown and South Boston, Cardinal Medeiros's racial justice policies, the politics of Catholic schools admitting white students escaping the Boston Public Schools, and efforts of each individual priests in their efforts towards promoting desegregation.

Introduction

"Have you read... the David Horowitz Freedom Center has written a couple books about Muslims in America and the Muslim Brotherhood in the White House... my God, they're just

rock bottom. They're planning violent and nonviolent, what they call the civilized way, to take over our country." Donna's voice revealed an intense zeal, a tone implying desperate truth-telling to the sleeping American public. "And all of the different organizations that are already well established here... ISNA, the Muslim Students' Association... they're already in our country!" Colonel David Hunt, Howie Carr's replacement that Saturday, asked Donna what policy changes she would like in America. "Number one, we have to keep the borders sealed. Number two, we have to follow up on visas. And number three, if you're going to bring in people from other countries that harbor terrorists, you better do a Israeli-style thorough investigation." (*The Howie Carr Show* 2013) Later conversations shifted to the dangers cartels operating south of the Mexican border represent to the United States, and hopeful discussion on the chances that the recent developments in Boston would kill the recent immigration reform bill in the Senate. I soon turned off the live stream of Boston's notorious *Howie Carr Show* on my phone and drifted into a sleep that had eluded me for the past 48 hours. My third trip to Boston was never going to be the most conventional of my research-driven journeys from the moment of its inception: my bus tickets were purchased hours after two explosions ripped through the 2013 Boston Marathon as the world looked on in horror. But there was little to prepare me for the drama that unfolded mere hours after I arrived at Harvard after conducting interviews in Roxbury and Dorchester all Thursday. From then on, it was a surreal, sleepless procession of endless police

vehicles zooming down Starrow Drive across the Charles, obsessive Twitter and local news watching, and the tense boredom of being locked down in a dorm complex for twenty-four hours as armored police patrolled the empty streets of Cambridge. After a day of media bombardment and conversations with the paranoid and the fearful, I asked a friend over the phone if he believed the words "they" and "them" were the most common in the wake of every major national crisis involving minorities.

It was impossible not to relate the events following the Boston Marathon bombing with my reason for being in the city to begin with: the so-called "Boston busing crisis" that occurred throughout the 1970s. The passage of *Brown II* (1955) established a federal court-ordered imperative to desegregate schools "with all deliberate speed." (Sheehan 1984) The doctrine of "freedom of choice" (the "freedom" of parents to live in whatever community they pleased in order to send their child to the local community school) prevented vigorous action against *de facto*¹ segregation for over a decade, but was finally addressed in *Swann v.*

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (1971), which stated "all things are not equal in a system that has been deliberately constructed and maintained to enforce racial segregation." (Lukas 1985), and allowed for unconventional means to rectify this problem, including forced busing of children

¹ Segregation stemming from indirect means, such as mortgage discrimination, high property taxes, and historic demographic homogeneity.

from one neighborhood to another. With this important new statute in effect, lawmakers in Massachusetts saw a perfect opportunity to actually enforce the the Racial Imbalance Act of 1965, which ordered the desegregation of majority black schools in the state, and the stripping of state funding for schools that did not comply. The task of regulating enforcement fell to District Judge W. Arthur Garrity, who appointed Episcopal minister and education administrator Charles Glenn to create a busing plan. Charles Glenn explains, “we developed a plan in early '73, held hearings, hired a Harvard professor to be a hearing officer, held hearings, and in those hearings on our plan, we had followed... the court had ordered that before we develop a plan we develop criteria for the plan. One of the criteria was that no elementary student go more than a mile, no middle school child more than a mile and a half, no high school child more than two miles. We then, using geocodes, 800 little areas with the racial makeup of each geocode. We then developed a plan that created new attendance areas for schools. That included, because there were black kids living within two miles of South Boston, and there were white kids in South Boston living two miles from Roxbury. That included South Boston and Roxbury.” (Glenn 2013) The school district merger of South Boston and Roxbury was the “shot heard around the world” of the busing crisis, as it paired the heart of Irish-Catholic working class with the heart of Boston’s black community, a combination that could never be harmonious. Geography made an alternative linking difficult, and because of federal pressure to jumpstart a

desegregation process that was disgracefully overdue, the flawed plan was instituted. As Boston initiated the policy of forced busing of students in the Fall of 1974 to finally address the widespread *de facto* segregation of the Boston Public Schools, the city ignited into the most volatile racial situation since the heights of the Civil Rights Movement. The anti-busing faction (represented most visibly by the Boston School Board and its president, perennial mayoral candidate Louise Day Hicks), having lost their challenge to Garrity's orders in appeal, dug in for a war of attrition, determined to make the desegregation process so intolerable that any alternative path would be explored. (Lukas 1985) As district schools became chaotic loci for protest and violence, attendance dropped dramatically, and the traditionally homogenous ethnic enclaves of Boston became even more reactionary. Fear and misunderstanding ruled the streets, and the city received a reputation for racism that it has not shaken since.

"Boston got painted with that picture with the busing. It was a picture all around the world, and it's never really lost that image, and that's 34 years ago and it's... it's not the reality on the street anymore." (Joy 2013) These were the final words Father Bill Joy shared with me as we discussed Boston's difficult and seemingly contradictory relationship with race relations. Growing up in the wealthy liberal enclaves surrounding Portland, Maine, this particular picture had been painted several times for me by adults and teachers, characterized by a historical vagueness and a sneering dismissal of the ignorant Irish Catholic population of Charlestown

and South Boston. This is in no way uncommon. The most superficial study of the busing crisis will reveal that class tensions are unique and very strong in Boston, and defined the busing crisis. While there were some areas of Boston were socio-economically mixed (South End at the time of the busing crisis, for instance), the city was generally defined by rigid ethnic enclaves of poor Irish-Catholics and poor blacks, surrounded by suburbs inhabited by affluent, educated whites. Every person I spoke with mentioned the failure of these groups to communicate with and understand one another, with special attention placed on the hypocrisy of suburban white liberals making policy decisions for and rendering judgement upon a city they observed primarily during their morning commute. The polar nature of the participants has made crafting a total picture of Boston during the 1970s difficult for historians; prone to broad strokes and cliches. A story, as busing policy architect Charles Glenn told me, “of hypocritical white liberals, one of salt of the earth white racists, one of screwed up blacks.” (Glenn 2013)

Reality, unsurprisingly, is not so clean-cut. Of the many institutions that played an important role in the busing crisis, none are as unplaceable and resistant to easy pigeonholing as the Archdiocese of Boston. Unwilling (or unable) to create a strong relationship with any of the main factions, the Catholic Church in Boston also faced deep divisions on the busing issue within its own membership. The position the Archdiocese necessarily found itself in was certainly not politically enviable. Although Boston’s Catholic population hovered over 70%

during this time, and historically commanded a deep reverence from the city's working class white population, fewer and fewer residents of South Boston and Charlestown were routinely attending Mass, and the hierarchy's close ties with Boston's Democratic establishment rankled their conservative flock. (Lukas 1985) To further complicate matters, the Church had elected an outsider cardinal of Portuguese descent at the height of Boston's racial tensions, who was prone to making strong statements attacking opponents of busing, that *de facto* segregation in Boston was "in contradiction to the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church... Racism is a moral sickness which is seriously weakening our society." (Pilot 1974) Factor in a generally conservative rank-in-file clergy and a small minority of leftist priests deeply impacted by the religious nature of the Civil Rights Movement, and the picture of the Catholic Church in Boston circa 1974 is one of a ship without bearings, pulled in many directions locally as the Church suffered through an identity crisis worldwide. But the amorphous nature of the Archdiocese's identity and authority granted individual priests and laypeople unprecedented agency to utilize the Catholic faith as a means of engaging with the disenfranchised and building bridges between Boston's disparate racial and class groups. Urban priests faced the difficult challenge of connecting with a black population frequently hostile towards Catholicism, while simultaneously navigating a foot-dragging church hierarchy and a hostile white working-class. Yet these men and women, armed only with their intense faith in God and racial justice, pushed

forwards into this toxic landscape aiming to unite a broken city and to imbue the alien “them” with humanity.

Interview: Father Bill Joy

Father Bill Joy was as close to the archetypal Bostonian as I had ever met. Unpretentious, savvy, generous with his time and resources, and extremely proud of his town, warts and all, Father Joy made for a lively and informative interview. Having worked in the city for over 40 years in parishes as distinct as Charlestown and Mattapan, Father Joy has a unique, total sense of Boston and is a walking encyclopedia of the area's history. I am not the first to take note of this: for years, Father Joy has served as an important resource for area historians, and was one of the key sources for J. Anthony Lukas's seminal account of the period, *Common Ground* (Father Joy reports that Lukas visited him "over 25 times" during the research for the book.) As soon as we sat down in the rectory of St. Angela's in Mattapan, Father Joy began to explain to me how comprehending the geography of the city is critical to understand Boston's reputation as a "city of neighborhoods" and the tension the develops between them.

Father Bill Joy: The city's like your hand, and the neighborhoods go out into the harbor. Parts of Dorchester go out in the harbor, South Boston goes out into the harbor, North End goes out into the harbor, Charlestown goes out into the harbor. So you don't go through those communities. You have to go... they're isolated. You wouldn't go through there if you had to go someplace.

Brad Barbour: Absolutely.



If you went there, you'd have to go there for a specific purpose. And Southie¹ and Charlestown were pretty tough neighborhoods: all white. And the project in Charlestown was the largest one in the city, and it was all white. So in the 70s it was basically a working class community... longshoremen, Teamsters, police, fire, and then you had this whole other stream who were lawyers and that sort of thing. In the 70s, parts of the city began to change, the term "the yuppies" first came, the young, upwardly mobile people. They began to move into Charlestown, and Charlestown began to be discovered because of its proximity to downtown.²

Yeah, it's right across the bridge.



You can walk to work. And at that time there the elevated structure was there, eventually got taken down, the elevated MBTA³ trains overhead went all the way from Dudley and Roxbury into Sullivan Square and Charlestown. When the L⁴ came down, the neighborhood suddenly became much more habitable, and property prices went way up. Way up. So a lot of people took it as time to move. Sell your property, couple hundred.... five hundred thousand dollars or whatever. So there began to be a flight out of Charlestown, but it was... white people were leaving, but other white people were coming in.⁵

¹ Traditional slang for South Boston

² Before the busing crisis reached a head, a fierce battle raged in Charlestown between the Boston Redevelopment Authority and local, working class groups over new urban development. In 1965, the BRA's plan narrowly passed through neighborhood hearings, leading to mass protests and demonstrations. J. Anthony Lukas writes that, "Charlestown, which had long cherished its insularity, now veered towards outright xenophobia, reminiscent of the fierce Puritan distaste for alien intruders." (Lukas 1985)

³ Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority

⁴ The "L" is Charlestown slang for the Charlestown Elevated, the public transit eyesore. The L's destruction was a significant aesthetic development and helped promote the influx of professionals into the area.

⁵ The redevelopment episode had soured the historically strong relationship between the Church and Charlestown to a degree, as the Church was criticized for giving support to the "outsider" BRA in their efforts. Richard Formisano argues that many Townies felt that the Church was being used by the increasing liberal Democratic party, and was being taken over by an increasingly liberal hierarchy. (Formisano 1991)

Outsiders?

Professionals, Yeah, outsiders. Professionals who came to settle in Boston, professionals for the most part. And restaurants and all that sort of stuff started springing up, so that's sort of part of it.

I wanted to talk about Charlestown. So there was already a lot of resentment in the area?

Resentment, yep. It was a tough area of town. My parents, when I said I was going to the parish in Charlestown when I was first ordained, *dramatic gasp* "you're going to Charlestown?" I said, yeah. But it was a tough place: white people didn't go in there, let alone black folks. But, at the time, the way the high school systems were set up, each... there was like two separate high school systems going on in the city. There were schools like the Latin Schools, Boys Latin and Girls Latin, and Boston Tech, which was all boys. And those were exam schools, you took an exam to get in. Superior education. And there was Boston English and Boston Trade, those were citywide schools. Anyone could go there who could get in. Then you had your district schools. There was a high school in South Boston, there was a high school in Jamaica Plain, there was a high school in Roslindale, there was a high school in East Boston, there was a high school in Charlestown. So there were neighborhood type high schools. But each of the neighborhood high schools had a special skill or trade that was taught there, and Charlestown had the electrical school. If you wanted to work as an electrician or anything there were courses at Charlestown High School that you could take. So a lot of black kids went to Charlestown High for the electrical courses. I forget which other schools had what sort of... you know, there was carpentry... each school had a specific. And part of the desegregation order was that... the schools were terrible, I mean, nobody went to college at Charlestown High, I mean, nobody went to college. They went to college in the two Latin schools and Boston Tech. But the other schools, very few kids went to college.

Did a lot of kids in Charlestown go to Catholic schools?

A good number of them went to Catholic schools, and hockey was a big part of that. Hockey was

a way out of the projects. If you kept your nose clean, didn't get arrested, went to a Latin school or a Catholic high school, it was a ticket to... you know the Ivy Leagues, BU, BC, because they just breded hockey players there. So that was sort of the nature of the town, and there were a lot of things going on at that time in terms of class sort of things. The property values are now being discovered. In the early 70's, Charlestown was being discovered and people are coming in and buying up stuff. So the Townies⁶ who used to be able to rent something real cheap, they weren't available anymore.

So even before the busing crisis, the Townies felt sort of besieged?

Besieged. A number of things... and this is sort of my reflection going back... is that near the end of the Vietnam War, a lot of the kids in Charlestown went into the military after high school. A lot of them died. And they came back and of course, Vietnam was not a popular war, and they felt betrayed. I think they felt betrayed. So you have a lot of young people feeling betrayed, you have older veterans who no longer... not within Charlestown, but outside... were looked upon as no longer as highly as they used to be, if you belonged to the American Legion, or the VFW.

Sure.

And then I think that they felt that the Democratic party sold them out as well. The Democratic party decided to get very liberal, and Charlestown was not a liberal place.⁷ And I think they felt alienated from the institutions around them. The government institutions, all the other institutions. And I think they felt a little bit betrayed by their church, when everyone came out as saying "we're pro-busing"... obviously the Church's position was to integrate the schools. And also to better the high schools.

⁶ Traditional slang for working-class natives of Charlestown

⁷ Although the working-class Irish Catholic population represented a bastion of support for the Kennedy clan, xenophobia ran deep in the community, perhaps most famously illustrated by the fascist-leaning South Boston native Gallagher from Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Charlestown and South Boston were also home to some of the most public displays of support for Senator Joseph McCarthy's (a fellow Catholic) campaign against Communist subversion.

How serious do you think the backlash against the Catholic Church was after the Cardinal's support of the Act?

I think it was worse in South Boston.

Yeah?

Because in Charlestown we had the advantage of watching for a year what was happening in Southie. In Southie, the whole community was... they imploded.⁸ In other words, you've probably seen all those videos of the busing and the buses in the streets and the police and all that⁹. But what they did was that they trashed their own stores, they trashed their own shopping areas, so the little old lady was afraid to go out to the grocery store at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, or in the morning. They sort of economically self-imploded, the local merchants and stuff. And in Charlestown, we had a chance to sort of look at that, and we began to strategize, a few of us. And I went to the Bunker Hill Health Clinic, which is still there in Charlestown. It was the first neighborhood health clinic really connected to a hospital: Mass General. So they had great medical care in the Town, they just went right over to MGH. And I went to them and talked about the fact that we ought to look at it as a public health issue.

Really?

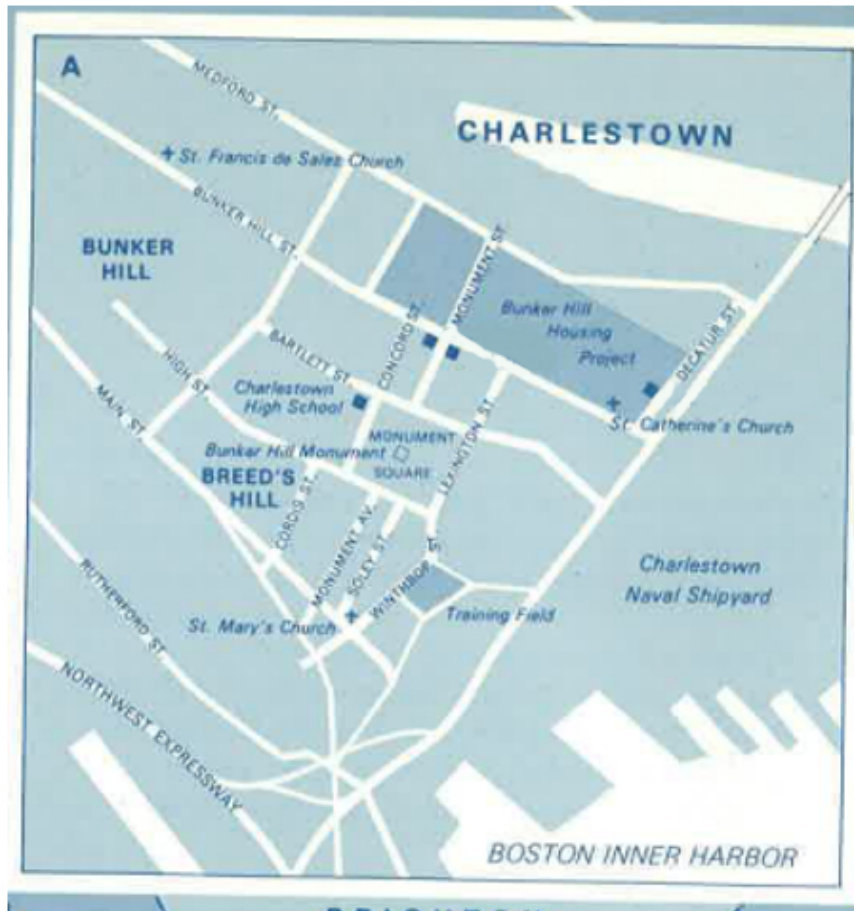
A public mental health issue. And they listened to me, and I said "yeah, look, everyone's going to be on Prozac, they're all going to be running around... but if we look at it as a mental health

⁸ By far the most widespread and damaging protests against busing took place in South, and it was where anti-busing groups found their most dogmatic adherents. In a 1976 survey of over 5,000 Southie residents, 52% reported taking part in rallies and marches, 47% had wrote letters to politicians, administrators, and clergy, and 13% had engaged in violent protest ranging from rock throwing to physical reprisals (Formisano 1991)

⁹ It is unclear what specific videos Father Joy is referring to, but illuminating video and photo coverage of the first day of desegregation for South Boston High School (September 12, 1974) is featured on PBS's *Eyes on the Prize* series and can be found at this URL:

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/resources/vid/21_video_boston_gry.html

issue, as institutions in the community, there was the Health Clinic, the Church, and the Kennedy Center, which was a social service agency. And again, it would be seen by the Townies as liberal, you know, *imitating a Townie accent* "liberals... we don't need these social services, we take care of our own!" That sort of thing, OK? So I went to the directors of those, and I said, "look, we ought to look at it as a mental health issue. As a community mental health issue, and address it as that. And that way we don't get caught into a bind of, "are we



pro-busing or anti-busing?" but we're pro-Charlestown. We're pro- the health and the mental, spiritual, and social health of the people. So I said, "we have to get to the merchants!" And where the stores were in Charlestown were Main Street and Bunker Hill Street. Charlestown is like *gesticulates* Bunker Hill Street on this side, Main Street on this side, and then there's the Hill, the projects were down here, and The Spine was where

most of the Townies lived.

And was the center of town the intersection?

No, there's no real intersection. They just run parallel. And the gentrification was really starting on the St. Mary's side. It's a triangle, and there were three parishes. St. Mary's, St. Francis de Sales which is on the Hill, you see the steeple, and St. Catherine's, which was in the projects.

And I was basically a young priest, so I was basically between the two St. Catherine's... I was in the projects a lot. But, we approached it as, "the community cannot self-implode like South Boston did." So we had some lead time to sort of talk to people, and work with groups... Legion groups, VFW groups, school groups, and all these other groups... and say, "look, we can't let this community implode." And we've got to learn how to deal with this. So it's basically what we did. There was probably a bigger backlash in Southie, where the Church, where the local clergy were absent.¹⁰ They were absent. Whereas in Charlestown, we took on a much more aggressive leadership role. And we kind of had a sense... it was only a couple of us... we kind of had a sense of when not to be at a certain place. People are going to have a rally, they want to vent, yell and scream, well, let them have their time to vent and yell and scream and rally and do all the kind of stuff. So we were able to build up some relationships with the anti-busing group called Powder Keg¹¹. They knew us because we had been in their kitchens, OK? I think I said somewhere in the book, you know, we spent more time around kitchen tables than anywhere else. And if you've been around someone's kitchen table, they're not liable to throw a brick at you so soon.

Hope not! *laughs*

So that was sort of how we strategized about it. And we made the rectory of St. Mary's... you know where the big monument is, Bunker Hill Monument?

¹⁰ Cardinal Medeiros famously reacted to the rejection of the Catholic Church in South Boston in a controversial interview with the *Boston Herald American*, saying, "I've been turned off in South Boston, anyhow. No one there is listening to me. Eighty percent of the Catholics in South Boston do not attend Mass or go to church. They wanted me to go to Charlestown too. To get stoned. They're looking for blood and they'd love to see me dead in the streets so they can sell newspapers. Well, I don't think I will do that willingly. If it is true that I am not accepted in Boston, then what could I do to stop it? They are not doing what I tell them to do. I have appealed a thousand times. My priests appeal. But there is no respect." Medeiros attributed his comments to stress and fatigue, but his indictment deepened the rift between clergy and flock in Boston. (Herald American 1975)

¹¹ Powder Keg represented the Charlestown contingent of Louise Day Hicks' organization ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights), which represented the most powerful voices against forced busing. Powder Keg. Composed primarily of Townie mothers, Powder Keg were key in organizing the women of Charlestown to create some of the most vocal demonstrations in the area. The organization's militant tone and provocative name did little to shake the anti-busing movement's violent reputation, nor did president Pat Russell's comments to reporters that the group was named as such because "we have a very short fuse." (Lukas 1985)

Yeah.

It's a square. And the high school was on that side of the square, St. Mary's rectory was on this side of the square. So the focal point was going to be around the high school. We kept telling people, "don't be targeting little kids, and that sort of stuff." That was going to be the target. So we made the rectory a sort of safe zone, that if a teacher had to get out of there for twenty minutes or half an hour, or if a kid had to get out, they could go into the rectory and it would be a sort of safe zone. So we had a lot of meetings in the rectory during the spring and summer, especially with the principal of the high school. And the principal of the high school was really sort of the father of the town. He was a really imposing figure, and he was an assistant basketball coach at Boston College under Cousy. So he was a big imposing guy. He carried a lot weight. And we also had a very good police captain at the time, Bill McDonald. So, we had those assets, that they didn't have in Southie, that they didn't put together in Southie.

Do you think that's because, before the busing crisis, the Charlestown clergy was closer to the community than in South Boston, or do you think the South Boston crew was dealing with an issue without the benefit of example.

I think maybe a little of both. I think we were very close to people, closer than we realized. And we knew we couldn't be absentee like the Southie people, they were just absentee, they wouldn't go to any clergy meetings or anything. We were able to sort of put some pieces in front... have a sort of a strategy, especially around this sort of community mental health issue. And it was, really, that's what it was. Because people were just going to freak out. You had people who were frightened and poor, people in projects especially. We were able to be a buffer. There was one great picture, it was in the New York Times, and there's myself and Dennis Kearney. Dennis Kearney was the young state rep, an elective state rep¹²...

I've been trying to interview him, actually.

¹² Dennis Kearney was Charlestown's elected state representative throughout most of the 1970s, and was one of Charlestown's "recognized leaders" in the anti-busing campaign, lobbying for the movement through his political capacity. (Lukas 1985)

I don't know where he lives now, I'll have to try to...

He's an attorney in Boston, but...

I'll try to track him down. And there's this great picture of Dennis and I in the middle of Bunker Hill Street, projects on this side and the stores on this side. The TPF, Tactical Police Force, you know, they're on their motorcycles and stuff.

They're scary dudes.

You know, they've got masks and all that sort of stuff. And the crowds over here and we're in the middle. And someone sent me the picture in the mail, and they asked me, "what the hell are you doing out there in the middle of those..." And it was sort of funny. That was the sort of role we took, we were the buffer.

Right.

And during the day, the kids are out there. But during the night, the place would just go crazy. It was September, a warm September, warm nights, kids are out there drinking at night. It became a battle scene at night, and it would be the kids against the cops. And the next day there would be, you know, different issues going on at the same time. So in Charlestown, the Church was very involved, and in Charlestown, the town was 95% Catholic. But we begun to have these ecumenical services with the little Baptist church that was there, and there was a small Episcopal church over near Harvard Street. So we included them into everything. We had a different flavor than Southie had.

You acting as a buffer, I think is interesting, because that's what I feel that the Catholic Church at large acted as in Boston. It's a really uncomfortable position. How did you manage to make an alliance with an extremely hostile white population while at the same

time not selling out your racial justice principles?

Right, right. Well it's funny, we all have anecdotal things. They'd yell and scream at you... right at your face, yell and scream at you. And the next day, they'd go, "my Grandmum's in the hospital, can you go see her?" You know? "My mother's sick." This that and the other thing. "My kid's in the hospital, can you go..." So it was that kind of a relationship with people. We were the sponge in many ways, that was the kind of image we used, we were the sponge that people could use. And it was difficult for folks too. Afterwards, I'm sure they said, "why did I yell at Father Joy like that?" You know? But at the end, when it was all done, there was never that gap there, it was always, "yeah you can yell at me, I can take it. If there's something you need, let me know. You're not selling out to your crowd if you come to me and say, 'my kid's in trouble, my kid needs me...'" You know, kids would be picked up on Friday nights, you know, fooling around with the police, the courts would be up on Saturday morning. Because Charlestown had it's own district court, it was it's own self-contained community. So, there was that sort of relationship that went back and forth. And years later you look back and you see... I went back for a couple funerals, I hadn't been there in a while. February, March, I went there for a funeral for older people who had been there for a long time. The bonds were still there. The bonds were still there.

What did you think about the Catholic Church's positions on racial justice, and on involving black Catholics, what little there were, and the black community at large. Do you think they were dragging their feet under Medeiros?

Good question. It's interesting because there was Cardinal Cushing, who was a Bostonian here for years as cardinal, everyone loved him. Cushing had connections to everything in the community, the Jewish community especially, the black community...¹³

¹³ Cushing's excellent relations with John Kennedy and Pope John XXIII made him a powerful, public leader of Boston's Church. Often bragging about his lifetime NAACP membership, Cushing made several strong statements in favor of the Civil Rights Movement, including his 1964 Pentecost Sunday sermon, saying "I call this city and its citizens to justice. I call them to change their hearts and to raise their hands before the evils (of racial injustice) that we are tolerating."

The NAACP...

His own personal connections. So he dies and a new cardinal comes in, Cardinal Medeiros. Who [was] Portuguese. So the average Catholic says, "he's not one of our own. He's not one of our own. They sent a foreigner in here."¹⁴ Because he talked with an accent. He was from Fall River, from Portuguese descent. And he understood racial discrimination from a very personal point of view for his whole life, so he understood that end of it. So he was very firm in his sense of racial justice and social justice. But the rank and file clergy weren't. The rank and file clergy were still very provincial Irish Catholics whose life experiences really hadn't taken them farther than Boston. And so I think the clergy itself wasn't as open to racial integration as the hierarchy was, or some of the faithful were.¹⁵

So did you feel like a significant minority as an ordained priest involved in racial justice.

Yeah, yeah. In the sense that people really didn't understand why you were doing this sort of thing.

Yeah.

Why were you doing this sort of thing...

Why were you doing this?

Well, my background was, I went to BC High, played sports. And we played with and against

¹⁴ When Bishop Medeiros was informed of his promotion to Archbishop of Boston, he reportedly stated that Bostonians would treat the appointment of a Portuguese-American in Irish Boston to be akin to the events of Gethsemane, the garden where Jesus was betrayed and turned over to the Romans. (Lukas 1985)

¹⁵ James Glinski writes that there were three distinct ideologies in the clergy: the small and visible racial justice clergy like Fathers Joy and Waldron, a majority of fence-sitting priests who reflected the passivity of Cardinal Medeiros, and a conservative contingent who rejected the rise of liberal multiculturalism and were centered in South Boston. (Glinski 2004)

black kids. BC High was part of the City League of teams, and we played against mostly all black schools other than the Latin School. So you had that sort of... you knew kids, you played with them and against them. I had that year of a Deacon internship at the Cathedral with Father Waldron and Father Boyle and others, and we were dealing with pretty much the entire black community. That was an all-black community. And so, when I got to Charlestown, I had that experience of having the experience inside the black community, and understanding it a bit, not totally, but a bit. And not being threatened by it. And realizing that, "we've gotta prepare these folks for what's going to come." There were a lot of people who really stepped up, Townies who stepped out and said, "this is going to be good in the long run." And a lot of them realized that they couldn't blow the place up like they did in South Boston. It's taken this long for Southie's property values to go up. In the last five, six years, the property values in Southie have gone way up because of the development down by the Seaport District.

Yeah.

Well Charlestown started going up in the 70s, and had been going up since then. So it's a very different community than it was back in the day. And it's a sort of gentrified, classy area in the city. And if you get a chance to be around this weekend, walk through Charlestown.

Definitely. I'm definitely going there.

It's really a nice place. Very historic. You've feel like you're walking through Georgetown in Washington.

No kidding. That's a lot different than I thought it was!

You'd see the similarities. It's grown a lot and changed a lot.

What was dealing with... I don't if you personally dealt with them significantly, but if not, the Catholic Church at large, dealing with Powder Keg and dealing with the School

Committee.

Oh yeah. Well, Powder Keg... we knew all the people in Powder Keg, you know? They were funny. They'd yell and scream at us and then go, *in a Townie accent* "come on in and have a cup a' coffee!" You know? I'm trying to think of the names now... but you see, I knew the kids. I knew the kids. Especially the girls, because there was nothing for the girls in town¹⁶. So I started a few things for them. Everything was hockey, all that kind of stuff. So, they knew us, they'd yell and scream at us... and then they had these bad days where they'd just come crying to you. And even the people in Powder Keg... they never really hated us, they sort of respected us, the few priests that were involved, they sort of respected us and eventually they understood where we were coming from, OK? In terms of that we wanted the best for the Town, best for the people there. And then began to see that after a while. When the federal government came in, and the feds came in pretty heavily in terms of law enforcement and that sort of stuff, when they actually saw that they weren't going to turn the buses back... it maybe took a year or two for them to see that. They never really left us, and we never left them. We gave them enough room to rant and rave, and do their protest, and they didn't take it personally.

Did you ever talk to Louise Day Hicks, Pixie Palladino¹⁷...

No, we never had much to do with the School Committee. Never had much to do with the School Committee. Pixie Palladino was around a few times, and she was funny *laughs*. And Bob Boyle, Father Boyle, he's unfortunately got Alzheimer's now, so you're not going to be able to interview him... his experience in the South End, he was a principal for a while at the Cathedral High School.

¹⁶ In an effort to connect with the marginalized of Charlestown as a response to the relative apathy of the clergy of South Boston, Father Joy would organize field trips and conduct casual youth ministry with the girls of Charlestown High School, called "Joy Rides." J. Anthony Lukas attributes this and "innovations" as key to preserving a positive discourse between Townies and the Church. (Lukas 1985)

¹⁷ Elvira "Pixie" Palladino (1932-2006) was elected to the Boston School Committee representing Italian East Boston in 1975, running on a singular platform of anti-busing. Palladino was a fierce demagogue and a loud voice for the anti-busing activists who found themselves marginalized by Louise Day Hicks' political compromise. (Sheehan 1984)

Really?

Yeah, the principal there either died or something. He had to go and be principal for a year, and it's pretty much an all black high school and cathedral in the South End. He had a way about him, you know? He was a big guy, was about 6' 3", big guy, you know? Very outgoing and gregarious and that sort of thing. And there was this one day where Pixie was running for... I don't know, she was running for something, School Committee. And they had these big elderly dinners, all these dinners down at the community schools, or something. And the politicians would come in and go around the tables. Well, Bob Boyle would go around the tables... Bob and I would go around the tables, and of course, he would get more people that she would! *laughs* Yeah, we never had a lot to do with the School Committee or any of that stuff, although Bob Boyle did get subpoenaed by the United States Civil Rights Commission. And some of the anti-busing people were amazed when they saw him there being subpoenaed. It's a great story: you got seven dollars and 50 cents for transportation, they gave you seven dollars and 50 cents for transportation.

Yeah.

And they're all in a room. And you go into those things... you're all in a room, it's one at a time, you don't know what the other person is saying. And so they said to him, "what are you going to do with your seven dollars and 50 cents?" They said, "what are you doing here!" He said, "what do ya mean, I got subpoenaed! Just like you, I got subpoenaed!" And they were all amazed. "What are you going to do with your seven dollars and 50 cents?" And he says, "I'm going to buy the biggest Manhattan in the city of Boston!" *both laugh* So we had those sorts of moments with them, that we kind of watched out for them too. We kind of watched out... they didn't go overboard too far. We did more with the feds, with the federal agents, in terms of them saying, "don't worry, we'll take care of it." And we'd say "back off, back off." We'd tell them to back off. You don't want to get a federal arrest on your record, that sort of thing.

Sure.

So the Church stuff... yeah we had built up a relationship with people over a couple of years that they were comfortable with us. And sometimes they would defer to us, they would say, "well you speak to them." Then the Mayor, Mayor White was there... we used to to have meetings with the Mayor. Secret meetings at night in St. Mary's rectory. You'd come in down a side alley, and go into the rectory and we'd have the meetings there.

So, as a resident of Charlestown at that time, kind of removed from the Church's support of the order, how did you feel about the busing plan itself, and especially linking Roxbury with Charlestown?

You know, it was funny, because I remember in the Summer, in August, they'd have these parents to come over to look at the schools. And I can remember parents going into Charlestown High School... black parents from Roxbury, and they'd say, "my God, this place is filthy! It's a mess! This is terrible!" I mean, it was. And they were sort of amazed to go into Charlestown and see how poor it was. They were amazed to see the huge housing project across the street from the Kent School. They said, "my kids going over to a housing project? I don't want that..." So for many parents from Roxbury, this was their first time ever Charlestown, and they were not impressed. And they were not all that excited about their kids leaving their neighborhood to go over there.

To another bad neighborhood.

To a neighborhood they thought was worse.

Which would be more violent for them to go to, obviously.

So I mean, it was that sort of thing. And I began to really see it more in terms of... then and

even now... it was more of a class sort of thing than a racial sort of thing.¹⁸ The powers that be were in the suburbs, and they wanted to have an integrated school system in the city. For the sake of having an integrated school system. Granted, the school system should have been more integrated, but I don't know if the educational quality grew as well. What they basically did was pit poor people against poor people. And at the same time, going on at the same time here in Mattapan, between '68 and '72 in Mattapan... this was predominantly a Jewish community. This was the largest Jewish community... this was the Jewish community in the city... Mattapan, and this part of Dorchester over here. There were 44,000 Jewish people in the mid 1960s.

Wow.

By 1972, there were fewer than 4,000.

It got redlined?

Redlined¹⁹. It was where redlining first began. It was along these streets here *points outside window*

That's awful.

¹⁸ Richard Formisano has a particularly indicting stance against suburban white liberals focusing on the racial component of busing while forsaking class. "Virtually no scholar looking at Boston and lacking any personal interest in defense of the desegregation process there has failed to see that the lower classes did the desegregating, the middle classes did the fleeing... while the affluent were exempt from the start... Policies designed to defeat racism that do not consider the class structure that institute or perpetuate unequal class participation in state mandated integration will continue to be met with resentment and resistance." (Formisano 1991)

¹⁹ Following Martin Luther King's assassination, a consortium of mortgage banks called BBURG were persuaded by Mayor Kevin White to make \$27 million in mortgages available to lower-class blacks. BBURG made it a policy to only make these mortgages available in one neighborhood, Mattapan, an existing Jewish enclave. Realtors would tell residents that "ghetto blacks" were coming in next door, prompting a panic in which homes were sold for cheap, and mortgages were provided to the new black customers coming in. Widespread occurrences of this "redlining" are responsible for much of Boston's unique demographic situation. (Formisano 1991)

So that was going on over here, so there was white flight from this side of the city. And black began to move in because the banks gave them all kinds of loans. So in many ways, if you stepped back and looked at it, it was really... you could make the case that it was about property. Property changed hands in this side of the city, and in the Charlestown side of the city. Property changed hands. And it was good property. But it changed hands, and the minority community... they got Southern Roxbury, but a lot of property changed hands during those years. And I don't think it was by accident, I think there was forces at work that pushed the whites out, in terms of white flight, they didn't want their kids going to school. I mean, today it's back to the same issue today. They're trying to get local community schools. And people will leave when their kids are school age. So you have... the city has actually gained population, it's one of the few metropolitan areas that have gained population... not a lot, but it has gained some. But the demographics are a lot different. There are fewer and fewer school kids. Fewer and fewer school kids. And so, while the numbers have grown, the demographics are much different. So the school system is still terrible. You have some very good elite schools, the Latin school is always going to be elite good school if you get in, you take the exam in 6th grade. So you'll always have that, you have some high end schools, and you have a lot of low end schools.

Did you think that the, in terms of Catholic schools, especially outside of Boston, did you see that as a serious problem? Did you think that the Church was too lax?

Well, yes. It was... some of those were next to Charlestown, so a lot of Charlestown people tried to get their kids into parochial schools in Somerville and Medford and those places, and get their kids out. You know an interesting story? You know Howie Long, the football player?

Sure.

Howie Long was in Charlestown. And he was a tough kid. Just a tough kid. His family got him out of Charlestown... he went to live with his grandmother I think, out in... it's a town not close by but way outside the city. He lived with her. They were afraid of what was going to happen to him, in junior high. So Howie Long left Charlestown and lived with his grandmother or his aunt,

and went to school out there, he and his brother, just to escape.

How much of that do you think was actually... this is a difficult question to answer, but how much do you think this was race related, and how much of it was, "there's no education happening at Charlestown High School, I need to get them out of there?"

I think a combination of both. I think part of it might have been racial, equating blacks coming in with poor schools. And the fact that, you know, if they couldn't get into parochial school, I need to get them into parochial school somewhere. And that was a fact. And the diocese had a rule, that if you didn't live in the parish, you couldn't go from Charlestown to... but, you know, some schools would try to make ends meet, if two extra kids come into the school, that's extra tuition. So some pastors abided by it, others didn't.²⁰ It was case by case.

Bringing in kids to stabilize the numbers.

Sure. But after a couple years that sort of evened itself out, you know? People realized it didn't work, you know? Unless they're going to move. "If I move to Medford, I want my kid going to Medford." They realized that they were force-busing their kids, and they were suffering for it in other ways.

Do you feel that the Catholic schools in the archdiocese later got their act together later on, into the 80s, in terms of being OK with lay teachers and finances, because the 70s were a bad time for Catholic schools.

I think that people began to understand that you could have lay teachers and have a really good education. Today, we have all lay teachers, it's a matter of being able to finance an education. If it were free, if it was like the Canadian system, or Australian system, where the government pays for education, they'd be wanting their kids in there. Especially minority folks who are not

²⁰ Some Catholic schools outside of city limits were labeled as "segregation academies" by the press, characterized by the actions of Little Flower School's Monsignor John Hogan, who announced that any child from Boston would be admitted into his school. Such flagrant deviations from Church policies were rare, though. (Reinhold 1975)

Catholic. We have a niche in terms of education, discipline, and the finished product of a parochial school, which is different than a public school. Granted, we have some advantages, but we don't have as many resources as public schools. But, there's that sense of parental involvement, and discipline, and expectations, and study.

Today, in 2013, what do you think the relationship is between the Catholic Church and interracial groups, the black community? And also, what is the relationship between Charlestown and the Church today?

It's funny, I know the pastor over at St. Mary's. It's a different world over there now. They have a preschool over at St. Mary's now, I forget what grade it goes up to. And they have young adult groups, like yourself, you know, it's very active... there's a lot of young adults living there. They're strapped with these huge churches that are physically hard to keep up, but they're so beautiful that you can't knock them down. But the Church is I think vibrant over there... maybe not as high percentage Catholic over there, but it a key institution, if not the key institution. And it's sort of, like anything else, morphed with the times. It's sort of moved into different areas. Maybe they don't have as many youth sports leagues, but they have other things that have sort of come in. And there a lot of needs there now. There are a lot of young professionals with little children, and they want to stay in Charlestown, and they need some place for their kids that is local. So, they wind up having daycare centers, you have early childhood education, you have these things that the Church can sponsor. So there's different things, and they've sort of moved with the times in many ways. St. Catherine's is closed, but the rectory is still there, it's a residence. St. Mary's rectory has been sold and closed. So they've sort of moved on and done that, but I think the relationship is still there with the community. In terms of the minority community in the city, I think the Church is stronger now than it was then. Because we didn't leave, and many of the new minorities that ended up coming in were Catholics, like the Haitians... this is a Haitian parish now. And Hispanics and Portuguese... we're a church of minorities here. In 1972, English was probably the only language spoken in all the churches. Now you have twenty-five, twenty-six different language groups, I think it's even more than that, in the city itself, in terms of mass on Sunday. So it's sort of moved in that area. You know,

the schools are different. We have one school now for Dorchester and Mattapan, we have one academy with four campuses. In 1972 there were fourteen, every parish had a school. But now we have one, and there are four sites, one in Mattapan and three in Dorchester. But I think it's links with the minority community are much stronger than they were before. But it's sort of moved with the times. You know? Boston is a minority-majority community now.

It really is incredible, in terms of demographics... the most dramatic white flight in America.

This incident Monday. I think when it all gets sorted out, and the stories are all told... it's going to bring the city... the fabric is going to be tighter. When everyone sees who the victims have been. The victims are all going to be young, who lost their limbs. Our Haitian choir director, his daughter-in-law lost her leg. And the more and more stories I hear, it's young children and teenagers who were amputees.

It's awful. It's also interesting how echoes of race in Boston continue to come up with this whole Saudi...

Boston got painted with that picture with the busing... it was a picture all around the world, and it's never really lost that image, and that's 34 years ago and it's... it's not the reality on the street anymore.

Do you think Boston has become a significantly more open place?

No doubt about it. And I think this incident here will sort of open the world to the fact that it's not the same city that people thought it was.

Interview: Father Walter Waldron

In a city defined by its Irish Catholic heritage and its Italian enclaves, Father Waldron has made a career of preaching to a lesser-known flock. A 49-year veteran of the Church, and the pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Roxbury for 29 of them, Father Waldron's deep convictions towards social and racial justice have guided him to head several minority-majority parishes, and placed him firmly in the center of the Church's often troubled relationship with the black community. I asked Father Waldron about the Archdiocese's racial policies during the timeframe of the Boston busing crisis, and inquired on the controversial relationship between white flight and Catholic school admissions at this time.

Father Waldron, how did you receive the calling and begin your career with the Catholic Church?

I grew up in the Church, we call it in this area. Some people just grow up in the Church, like an extension of the home or the family. And when I was young, that was certainly true. So much of life at that time centered around the Church and all that kind of stuff. And I liked to attend Mass



and be associated with it. So there wasn't some sort of bright lightning bolt that hit me, I just sort of grew into it. I said, "this is good, I like God, I like people. What a combination!"

Sure. So, you've been known as an urban priest, someone who's made ties with racial justice groups. How did that begin? Did you have strong feelings for

racial justice early on?

I'm not sure. I was away when the Civil Rights stuff was going on, because I lived in Rome for four years in the beginning of the 60s, so it wasn't as prominent over there as it was over here. But I had contact with people in the seminary who were in my class, and they would keep me informed in what was going on here. I had contact with people in the seminary who were in my class, and they would keep me informed in what was going on here. And when I came back to the States I was assigned to the North Shore in Beverly Farms, and I kept up the contact with some of those seminarians who were now priests and they worked in Roxbury. So I spent a lot of my time when I was on the North Shore, my days off, in Roxbury with these priests who were very civil rights oriented, and I just got caught up in it... all of this was in my interest. So then I finally asked the Cardinal archbishop of Boston after two years in Beverly Farms if I could be assigned to Roxbury or a similar kind of place. So then he agreed, and I was assigned to the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in the South End on Washington Street and continued the contact with the priests in Roxbury. And eventually we found an association at that time called the ABUP, the Association of Boston Urban Priests¹, and then I became the president of that. So it was just a whole part of my life when I was in the South End and Roxbury. That's where I've been for the last 47 years I think.

Wow.

In this area... I don't move far *laughs*. But I decided "this was me." I fit in, people fit in with me, and we just pursued a lot of different, what we considered to be civil rights... social justice issues in Roxbury and in the entire area of Boston.

Roxbury is a traditionally black neighborhood. Was your congregation mostly African-American Catholic as well?

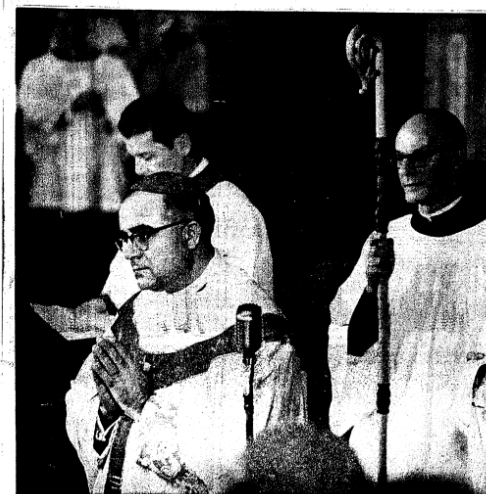
¹ In 1967, twenty priests from Roxbury and South End formed the ABUP in a effort towards "making the church more relevant to African Americans and addressing the problems of inner-city poverty and decay." (Leonard 2004) The ABUP was a constant pressure on Cardinal Cushing to expand efforts and attention towards the black community, and later stressed the need for certain "white reparations."

I would say during the desegregation movement I was actually in the South End at the Cathedral, and that was a mixed bag of people, but most of the Catholics I worked with were African-Americans, although there were a number of others... Spanish and white Americans. Roxbury, interestingly enough, way back was an Irish population, of people who immigrated from Ireland. And most of them immigrated to Roxbury... that's why this church is named St. Patrick's...

Sure.

It was huge. And that just changed over time. So now St. Patrick's is a combination of English speaking, Spanish speaking, and Cape Verdean speaking people. But during the desegregation times I was in the South End.

Have you seen vast demographic shifts in Roxbury in the last 40 years?



FIRST SERMON—Newly installed Archbishop Humberto R. Medeiros preaches to deliver his first homily as Archbishop of Boston in the Holy Cross Cathedral yesterday. Behind the archbishop is Magr. Joseph Maguire, who was master of ceremonies. At right is Rev. John W. Bush, pastor of Our Lady of Good Voyage parish, Gloucester. (Harry Holtzworth photo)

Archbishop Installed, Ailing Cardinal Cheered

By George M. Collins
Globe Staff

Richard Cardinal Cushing ended his reign and Most Rev. Humberto R. Medeiros began his as Roman Catholic archbishop of Boston yesterday in cathedral ceremonies marked by cheering reactions for the aged, ailing South Boston priest.

Archbishop Medeiros was installed amid tumult

phal rites reminiscent of pre-Vatican II days while Cardinal Cushing watched from the chair along the sanctuary wall.

In an emotion-packed address that followed the installation, Cardinal Cushing said: "These few words of mine mean to some degree to a kind of farewell..."

After his remarks he was embraced by his successor, "Calling of Boston," as

Pope John XXIII called him in his elevation to the College of Cardinals, ended his career amid spontaneous, tumultuous cheering and applause.

So ill that his associates feared that he might not be able even to sit through the installation, the cardinal summoned his emcees, bowed his back, looked straight ahead as his tongue continually moti-

ated his lips and marched through the ceremony amid thunderous ovations.

Backed with pain from a long illness, which he announced as the cause of his voice being reduced to a muted replica of the famous South Boston cry which identified him around the world, he

mounted into the Cathedral of the Holy Cross at the

end of a line of hundreds of priests, religious, nuns, bishops, archbishops and three other cardinals. The throng applauded him all the way to his sitting in the sanctuary opposite his former throne.

He looked straight ahead as he forced himself to walk, carefully negotiating the steps as his aides told him of their proximity.

INSTALLATION, Page 14

I wouldn't say vast. By the time I got to Roxbury, a lot of the white folks had already left, or were in the process of leaving. And African-Americans were moving in. And at that time, a Spanish speaking population started to arrive, and since I've been here people from Cape Verde began arriving, and even more recently more Africans have come into the area.

I want to ask about the Catholic community at large in relation to social justice issues. Were you aware of the Catholic urban organizations that had been created before yours, like the Catholic Interracial Council²?

² In 1957, the Catholic Interracial Council (CIC) was formed with the goal of making the Church's presence in the

I was familiar with that, that was the only other one I was aware of. I don't think there were any others that I can recall.

Did you feel that there was a large contingent of figures in the priesthood that were involved in social justice?

I wouldn't say a large number. I would say a significant number, that it was a priority with us, whereas with the majority of priests it wasn't a priority. But it was our priority. I suppose it was just natural, that we all lived in the area, and also we all wanted to be here. There was a magnetic attraction between the neighborhood and ourselves, and we kind of picked up on where people were at and what was missing in our society.

In creating these organizations and your initial actions, was there a reluctance from the Bishop, the Cardinal in you activities?

Yeah, there definitely was. There wasn't a constant butting of heads, but there were things that indicated the way we were going was not particularly where the archdiocese would have preferred. Because Cardinal Cushing was the cardinal who at that time would always brag that he was a lifetime member of the NAACP, and that would satisfy a lot of people. The leadership of the archdiocese was definitely on the right track. I think why we were a thorn in the side³, and that's what we called eventual, was because we took a more active approach, a more vocal approach. An approach of getting the Church and the people and the government to take seriously the problems we all felt they should take seriously. That we were bogged down in a kind of inertia and we had to break out of it. So I think that the leadership of the Church stands

black community felt, as well as prodding the hierarchy to accept more progressive goals. The organization was primarily a lay one, as opposed to Waldron's all-clergy ABUP. The CIC operated under Cardinal Cushing during a time when Boston was dramatically less polarized on race issues, and as such was generally more harmonious with the hierarchy. (Leonard 2004)

³ James Glinski comments that, although groups like the ABUP placed significant pressure onto Cardinal Medeiros to embrace further integration of Catholic schools and services, "these reformers encountered considerable resistance, both bureaucratic and philosophical, from the church. (Gliski 2004)

on one hand, and ours stands on the other.

Did you think that Cardinal Cushing or Cardinal Medeiros were taking these issues more seriously, especially given the controversial time that Cardinal Medeiros stepped in?

Yeah, Cardinal Medeiros was not opposed to us in any way. I think perhaps because he came from a minority background himself, in the Azores. So he was more inclined to go along with us and saw the righteousness of what we were all about. I think Cardinal Cushing, at one time he and I were great friends, but the differences impeded that relationship, and when I look back, I can see where he stood was OK for that time. And I can look back and see that there were things I said and did back then that I wouldn't do now.

Right.

It's that kind of thing. I suppose in a way, growing up, someone said, "If you're not liberal when you're young, you're crazy; when you're not conservative when you're older, you're dim-witted." Or something like that. So I look at some things now like, "we could have done things differently," but maybe we wouldn't have because it wouldn't have had the impact that we did have in the city.

In terms of Cardinal Medeiros, Medeiros obviously supported the Racial Integration Act, and that was a controversial position. How vehement would you consider anti-Catholic sentiments based on the Catholic Church's... I would say moderate pro-busing stance, within the community? Did you feel that the Irish community felt a backlash against the Church?

Oh yeah, I definitely think so. And even more, Cardinal Medeiros felt that backlash throughout his career here. It was difficult for the traditional Irish Catholic population here to even begin accept a non-Irish person as the Archbishop of Boston. So when deseg⁴ took place, he was

⁴ Boston colloquialism for the school desegregation process

hardly welcome in South Boston at all. Because there was that feeling among the white Catholic community that they were being betrayed by the Church, and looking back, I can see that. From the ordinary person's view, not from the political point of view. I think white politicians used the racial issue in an unfair way too, and in a way exploited their own people. Instead of lifting them up and having them go forward, they wanted them to stay where they were and resist this inevitable change that was occurring.

Sure. Did you think at the time that there was any way that these racial justice issues can be tackled... busing, integration within the Church itself, and at the same time appeasing the traditional Catholic base, which was the Irish community... 70% of Boston was at the time was Catholic. So did you feel that there was a way that all parties could be satisfied while at the same time advancing racial justice, or did you feel that it would have to be one or the other?

No, no, no. I think I always had kind of a confidence that there would be an acceptance of this new reality. I realized that it would be a slow process but that it would happen; there was enough good, I felt, both in religion and in the Catholic Church that would compel people, despite some prejudices, despite some attitudes, to see the rightness of people coming together and working together and that kind of stuff. And I think that is proven true over a period of time. It took longer than I thought, but I think right now there is an acceptance of diversity, there is an acceptance of "we're all in this together." There's great support in the archdiocese for Catholic parishes in the inner city so... it's come about.

It's taken a long time...

It's taken a long time, but it's come about, yeah.

At the time of the busing crisis, let's say '72 to '77, where were you, and what do you think characterized your involvement with Boston and this crisis at large?

Yeah, very specifically early on, the Association of Boston Urban Priests took a stance of supporting the desegregation order. My role aside of being in this organization, the head of it, what I mainly did... we would go out when deseg started, to the bus stops where kids were leaving, in the South End... that's where I was, were leaving to Charlestown or to South Boston. Just basically being a visible symbol of support. I think at that time, it's so interesting, you have this whole theoretical and political argument about the rightness of desegregation, and on the other level, you have this very personal thing of kids being involved...

Absolutely.

... and their safety all of a sudden becomes primary, even over the goodness of the issues that you talk about, that's how life is. So basically I supported the kids getting on buses... this is the first time they had ever got on buses for school. In the suburbs, people always got on buses, because they lived so far away. So this was totally a new experience, and altered, I'm sure, their approach to schooling and to education. So we were there to say, "this is the right thing, we're here to support you, we're here as people, we're here as the Church, to make sure that you stay safe." That was basically what my involvement was. If I remember there were other priests that rode the buses with the kids. These were, I think, the priests who were in Roxbury, so they rode the buses to South Boston at that time.

I always thought it was ironic that so many of the people who were crying for the safety of the children were the ones throwing rocks at buses. Did you feel a sense of unease... were you ever attacked?

No, no, never. Because I did not ride the bus, my job was just to be at the bus stop. So I never had that kind of violence or that kind of direct confrontation with people. And I think at that time, if I'm not mistaken, that we did meet with priests and religious figures from South Boston in South Boston, and I got a new appreciation for the Church in South Boston, which had a terrible reputation in my eyes.

And what was that?

That they were just all for the white folks, all that kind of stuff. But then we actually sat down and met... it was interesting: their concerns were the same as ours. It was basically that everyone be safe, that education go on, so that in a way was an eye opener. And I think it was at that point that I started to realize, to think that something had to be done, but that maybe this reorganization plan was not the best way to go. It was pitting the poor of one section of the city against the poor of another section of the city, which it did. And I began to think, "why didn't Judge Garrity include surrounding communities, you know, Brookline, Newton, and the rest of them..."

The community that he lived in... *laughs*

He did, he did, very interesting, I won't go in that direction, of course not *laughs*. ⁵ But looking back, I was beginning to think of at that time that that was really the direction it should have gone. Because it was easy for people on the outside, in a way, to be on our side. Because we had to deal with these racists in Charlestown and South Boston. I wonder what their attitude would have been if they were included in this whole busing plan. It was easy to stand outside and throw rocks.

Just standing outside the border, arms crossed, saying "what are these people doing?"

Yeah, yeah exactly!

In terms of Cardinal Medeiros, I've read many accounts, he seemed like an incredibly holy man, a very wonderful person. Do you feel like, as a negotiator, as a people person, that

⁵ The suburban left pro- busing faction was a frequent target of vitriol by residents of Charlestown and South Boston, for their outsider standing on the issue. Since the Supreme Court decision of *Milliken v. Bradley*, where the court ruled in a 5-4 split that forced desegregation of cities plans did not constitutionally have to include suburban schools outside the city limits. The yankee liberals, critics argued, pushed a moral urgency in changing policies within the city while not addressing the harsh realities of *de facto* segregation in areas like Brookline and Newton. "Liberals were predisposed to see nothing but racial prejudice in the anti-busing movement." wrote Christopher Lasch. "Liberals' claim to stand on high moral ground, in the bitter controversies over busing and affirmative action... was suspect to the start." (Lasch 2004)

he was equipped to deal with the radical elements of all sides, and this crisis that deeply affected the Catholic Church?

Yeah, he was very strong in some positions he took. He looked at some sections of the city, at that time Hyde Park, West Roxbury, Roslindale, and was insisting that those schools do not take in white kids from the neighborhood in order to avoid the whole process of desegregation. So he took a principled stand on all of that. But I think the nature of the man... he was kind of laid back. He wasn't a bomb thrower, that wasn't his style. He knew that he had trouble fitting into the Boston Archdiocese as an outsider to begin with, let alone a minority outsider.

Absolutely.

Yeah, and given his laid back nature, he wasn't out front leading the troops, but he definitely was in his own way supportive of integration of at least the schools and probably the neighborhoods, he was in that direction.

Sure. It's also an interesting thing to me, trying to get into the mind of a Charlestown and South Boston resident... feeling like you're under siege by outsiders, and also your own cardinal of the organization that you hold very dear is also an outsider...

Yeah, that's a great insight, I think that is a great insight. Because I didn't have a lot of friends in Charlestown and South Boston, that attitude didn't affect me that much, of how much they must have been hurt, and the Church turning against them. And there were some priests I knew in Charleston, I think Father Joy was over there at that time, but I knew some that were over there at that time. But they played a good role in Charlestown of calming people down and associating with them, but not stepping back from the necessity of this change. They were just great... they were better than I am, because as you would put it, they were among the enemy, holding this cause. While in the South End, deseg was a popular cause. Charlestown, it was very unpopular. So they stood their ground, but they were very well liked by the people over there.

Actually, a lot of the inspiration of this project came from me, months ago, reading Common Ground, which I'm sure you've read, and just the depictions of Father Joy and his compatriots in Charlestown as this kind of calming presence...

Yeah, and that was true, that was absolutely true.

Yeah, so I continued to look into that element. I want to talk about the Catholic schools. Cardinal Medeiros, one of his major policies was that he put a cap of enrollment... if enrollment was to increase by more than 4%⁶, funding would be cut at that point.⁷ There's been a lot of academic work after the fact that is stating that one of the most overlooked and damaging parts of the Catholic Church's involvement with the busing movement was that they didn't do enough to prevent a white flight situation out of Charlestown, out of South Boston, and into the mostly suburban Catholic schools. Did you feel that there was a significant move towards.... do you think the Catholic Church was permissive towards these transfers?

Yeah, I went back and forth. I went back and forth. I don't know how much in reality the Church could have done. I think there was an attitude at the time that when the Church ordered something, everybody walked in lockstep, all Catholics walked in lockstep with the Church...

And is that not the case?

I don't think it was. People's personal interest I think topped it. I think people who fled the city, so-called "white flight", what was their motivation? I think in most cases their motivation you would say was good. They wanted the best education for their kids, and they weren't seeing it

⁶ A slight inaccuracy, the cap was actually at 5% (Hannon 1984)

⁷ Cardinal Medeiros's official policy stressed the denial of applicants who did not already have children in the school or were changing residences. (Globe 1975) However, with the lack of an agency to enforce these policies at the school level, and the fears of limiting the autonomy of individual parishes, the Church faltered in preventing certain Catholic schools from providing a "safe haven" to the children of anti-busing families. (Glinsk, 2004) The church then relaxed guidelines for the Fall 1975 school year, allowing transfer students to fill vacancies open "through normal patterns such as transfer or drop out." (Archdiocese of Boston 1977)

in the Boston Public Schools... to begin with, let alone with this upset on top of everything. So they were like most good parents, "I need to find a place where my kids are going to get a good education and grow up." So, when I look back at it now, it wasn't necessarily anti-black... although I think some of it was, but it was more, "what can I do for my kids now, because they're only going to be eight or nine years old for one year, and I can't let them miss out on a decent education because of all this turmoil going on." Plus the reputation the Boston Public Schools had at that time, of being lousy education. So, looking back, there was a whole spectrum. I don't think anything was as clear or as clean as I thought at that time.⁸ I think there were so many mixed motivations that were going on, and we would sometimes pick the worst of those motivations and say, "yeah that proves we're racists," and all this other kind of stuff.

Yeah, I think that characterizes the entire time, you know, there were so many different angles, and I think it's really difficult to pin down something, like "oh it was the racists" or "oh, it was the Catholic Church."

You're absolutely correct. It was a mixed bag at best. I'm glad we were involved in it, I'm glad we were involved in it the way we were involved in it, because we did present another side of the Church, if you will. That was a legitimate part of the Church, and it was necessary at that time to move this process along, to open up neighborhoods, to open up schools.

Do you think that, after the fact, the rift between jaded Irish... and some Italian... Catholics and the Catholic Church itself based on the busing crisis... do you think that healed? Do you think that was a significant deciding factor in a lack of attendance in Catholic schools in the late 70s. Basically you have stable enrollment in Catholic schools throughout the 50s, 60s, even until the late 70s, I think it was '72 where it begins to drop significantly. Was this a deciding factor, would you say, in the disillusionment with the

⁸ On the question of "to what extent were suburban Catholic schools contributing to white flight?", James Hannon argues that the relationship is not as clear as both critics and the Church illustrated it to be. While "enrollments in the archdiocesan school system had not increased significantly, nevertheless, significant numbers of transfers had occurred... Implementation of the desegregation order suggests a total loss of between 5,000 and 10,000 white students from the public school system, almost all within the first two years (Rossell 1977). Two thousand transfers to the Catholic school system accounted for 20-40% of this outmigration." (Hannon 1984)

Church within some people?

I'm not sure deciding. Maybe somewhat. I think there was also the issue... and it still going on now... the expense of Catholic education. Because when I look back the 70s, it wasn't that expensive, but probably in terms of money in that day, it was expensive. When I went to school in the 50s, Catholic schools... you didn't pay a dime.

Yeah.

You never even thought of it. And all of a sudden tuition comes in. And when you put in tuition for a private education in a poor area, and you have to charge tuition, that becomes a deciding factor more than anything else, I think... more than anything else. There's so many things that go into it. One of things that went into it... I forget the name of the book, I even forget the name of the author.⁹ But I was interviewed by him. It was interesting, how Boston came out of this loggerhead mentality, you know, "us versus them." And he put a lot of it on the Boston Celtics!

Really!

Yeah. And it was a great book, and reading it, I see that they did have an influence in calming down the racial tensions. Just because they were mixed racially, because they were popular, they could go to South Boston, they could go to Roxbury. They just carried a lot of this, "let's get along together" by the way they played ball and how they interacted in the community. It was a fascinating story.

How do you feel about the Catholic Church's relationship with inner-city groups today, versus in the 1970s? Do you think it's a stronger relationship? How do you feel about 2013?

⁹ Father Waldron refers to *Rebound: Basketball, Busing, Larry Bird, and the Rebirth of Boston* by Michael Connelly.

Oh, I think it's a much, much, much stronger relationship. One of the things that was interesting was... you've heard of this group called the Ten Point Coalition¹⁰, which was a big group in Boston across church lines. And the first major meeting of that group was held up at Cardinal Bernard Law's house, with some of us priests from the inner-city, and some of the black ministers from the different religions coming together. And it was under his auspices, under Cardinal Law's auspices, that the Ten Point Coalition was established. So it was that active reaching out that eventually happened, which was very significant. And the Church has been very good, as far as I can tell, making sure that the Church's presence is alive in these different areas of Dorchester, Roxbury and so forth.

¹⁰ An ecumenical organization founded in the 1990s to combat the rise of gang violence and street crime in Boston

Works Cited

Boston Herald (Staff) "Cardinal Rejects City Leadership." *Boston Herald American*, May 16, 1976.

Eyes on the Prize. "Massachusetts: Segregationists in Boston (1974)." *Eyes on the Prize*. PBS. compact disc, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/resources>

Formisano, Ronald. *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Glenn, Charles. "Charles Glenn Interview." March 28, 2013.

Glinski, James. *The Catholic Church and the Desegregation of Boston's Public Schools. Boston's Histories*. Edited by James M. O'Toole and David Quigley. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.

Hannon, James T. "The Influence of Catholic Schools on the Desegregation of Public School Systems: A Case Study of White Flight in Boston," *Poulation Research and Policy Review* 3,221. 1984.

Hunt, David. "The Howie Carr Show" Recorded April 20 2013. WRKO. Web

Joy, William. "Father Joy Interview." April 18, 2013.

Leonard, William. *The Failure of Catholic Interracialism in Boston Before Busing. Boston's*

Histories. Edited by James M. O'Toole and David Quigley. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.

Lukas, J. Anthony. *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*. New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

Malloy, Ione. *Southie Won't Go: A Teacher's Diary of the Desegregation of South Boston High School*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Reinhold, Robert. "Many Boston Students Switch to Parochial Schools," *New York Times*, September 10, 1975.

Rossell, Christine H. "Boston's Desegregation and White Flight," *Integrated Education*. January-February. 1977

Sheehan, J. Brian. *The Boston School Integration Dispute: Social Change and Legal Maneuvers*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1984.

Waldron, Walter. "Father Waldron Interview." April 18, 2013.