

TIMELINE

Timeline of Movements for Educational Justice in Boston, 1972–1979

1972

- **The Boston NAACP sues the Boston School Committee in federal court:** After having exhausted efforts at the city and state level to desegregate Boston schools and achieve educational justice, the NAACP sues the Boston School Committee in federal court. The case is known as *Morgan v. Hennigan*.
- **Fifty out of 201 Boston Public Schools have majority African American student bodies:** 356 of the 4,500 Boston Public School teachers are African American. 85% of Boston students are bused to schools outside of their neighborhood (without complaint from white parents), including thousands of white students who are bused past majority-Black schools that are closer to their homes than the schools they attend.^{1##}

1974

- *January* – **The Supreme Court rules unanimously that the San Francisco public schools’ failure to provide special help in learning English for non-English-speaking students violated their civil rights:** The ruling in the case, *Lau v. Nichols*, brought by Chinese parents in the city, has a wide impact on students and schools across the country.
- *June 21* – **Judge Garrity orders immediate desegregation of Boston’s public schools:** Judge W. Arthur Garrity finds the Boston School Committee guilty of intentional and unconstitutional school segregation and orders nearly 17,000 students to be transferred by bus in order to desegregate Boston’s schools.^{##} Judge Garrity’s ruling makes no mention of Latinx or Chinese American children in Boston schools and does not consider the impact of the ruling on bilingual education programs.^{**}
- *Summer* –

¹ Matthew Delmont and Jeanne Theoharis, “Introduction: Rethinking the Boston ‘Busing Crisis,’” *Journal of Urban History* 43, issue 2 (March 2017): 197.

- **Anxiety grows over the school transfer (or “busing”) plan ordered by Judge Garrity:** The plan includes transferring African American students from Roxbury to South Boston, an ethnic Irish neighborhood with a reputation for racism, and white students from South Boston to Roxbury. Ruth Batson explains: “We were sunk when we heard some of the remedies, the one of busing to South Boston because those of us who had lived in Boston all our lives know that this was going to be a very, very difficult thing to pull off.”²
- **Freedom House provides support to African American families in preparation for new school assignments:** Founded the year before and led by Ellen Jackson, Freedom House’s Institute on Schools and Education takes the lead on providing information and support to African American families for the new student busing plans.
- **The Latinx community braces for the impact of the court order:** The Latinx community begins to organize at social service organizations such as La Alianza Hispana to obtain information about Judge Garrity’s order in Spanish and advocate for children and parents. They are concerned about children being transferred away from needed bilingual education programs, as well as the arbitrary classification of Latinx children as white or Black by the school system to meet the requirements for racial balance.⁺⁺
- **September 9 – White protestors chase Senator Kennedy:** A new organization formed by white parents against desegregation, ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights), demonstrates in front of the federal building at Government Center in downtown Boston to protest Senator Edward M. Kennedy’s support for Garrity’s desegregation order. Kennedy attempts to speak to the crowd but is chased into the building, and the building’s glass doors are shattered by the crowd behind him.
- **September 12 –**
 - **The first day of the school year:** On the first day of school, attendance is much lower than usual. Many white students stay home as part of a city-wide boycott organized by ROAR. Other families keep their children home out of fear for their safety.
 - **Violence erupts in South Boston:** A crowd of white residents gathers around South Boston High School as 56 African American students from Roxbury arrive on buses. As school is dismissed, buses carrying the Black

² Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam, 1990): 596.

students home to Roxbury are attacked by the crowd as they leave South Boston.

- **Additional incidents of violence and harassment of Black students are reported across the city.**
- **Protests and demonstrations continue through the fall**, while images of violence and unrest in Boston make national and international news.
- **October – The mayor and Black leaders seek federal help:** Mayor Kevin White asks the federal government to send federal marshals to Boston to help restore order. A coalition of Black agencies writes to the Congressional Black Caucus and the US attorney general asking for federal troops.⁺⁺
- **December 11 – Black students are trapped in South Boston High after a white student is stabbed:** During a confrontation between white and Black students at South Boston High, a white student is stabbed by a Black student and seriously injured. A mob gathers outside the school. Several dozen Black students are trapped inside the building. Decoy buses are used to distract the mob while other buses are able to safely load the students and take them home.
- **December – El Comité de Padres Pro-Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe (the Parents’ Committee for Defense of Bilingual Education) is founded:** Led by Latina mothers Daisy Díaz and Natividad (Nati) Pagán, the committee works to protect bilingual education programs from being eliminated as a result of Judge Garrity’s court order and to ensure that Latinos are classified as their own racial group rather than being divided into two (“Hispanic-white” and “Hispanic-black”). 200 people attend the first meeting in Jamaica Plain.⁺⁺
- **1974–75 school year – Many Chinese American middle and high school students are bused from Chinatown to schools in the North End:** Despite the challenges of going to new schools in white neighborhoods, there are no reports of protests or violence toward the Chinese American students.^{3^^}

1975

- **January 23 – Judge Garrity allows El Comité to “intervene” in the *Morgan v. Hennigan* case to represent the interests of Latinx families and children** after they present him with more than 1,600 supporting parent signatures.⁺⁺
- **May 10 – Judge Garrity announces that the desegregation busing plan will continue for a second school year**, this time with more students being transferred to new schools.⁺⁺

³ Michael Liu, *Forever Struggle: Activism, Identity, and Survival in Boston’s Chinatown, 1880–2018* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020), 70–71.

- *May 17* – **40,000 Bostonians participate in a march in support of school integration.**⁺⁺
- *May* – **James and George Tam, immigrant teenagers from Hong Kong, are arrested and charged with murdering a white Charlestown teenager, Patrice Borden:** Chinese American Bostonians fear Charlestown residents will seek revenge for the murder by threatening Chinese American children. The Tam brothers are found innocent of all charges one year later.
- *June* –
 - **Chinatown’s elementary school students are incorporated into the desegregation plan:** Parents of students at the Quincy and Lincoln Schools receive letters from Boston Public Schools informing them that their students will be reassigned to different schools. The letters are written in English, but many of the families cannot read the language. Some families turn to 25-year-old bilingual Quincy School teacher Suzanne Lee to help them understand.^{^^}
 - **The Boston Chinese Parents Association (BCPA) is formed** when Lee convenes a meeting with a larger group of parents to explain the letters. Parents are worried for their elementary school children’s safety when they learn that 1,000 Chinatown children will be assigned to schools in Charlestown and the North End, where racial tensions are high.^{4^^}
 - **Judge Garrity adopts El Comité’s recommendations in the remedy-phase decision,** protecting bilingual classes in Boston Public Schools.⁺⁺
- *Summer* – **Members of the Boston Chinese Parents Association write letters to both Judge Garrity and Boston Public Schools but receive no reply.**^{^^}
- *July* – **Chinese American parents learn they are excluded from parents councils:** Chinese American parents attend elections for the court-mandated “parents council” at the Harvard Kent School in Charlestown, where many of their children have been assigned. While white parents demonstrate outside of the building, Chinese American parents learn that only Black and white parents may be elected to the council.^{5^^}
- *July 30* – **Chinese American parents issue a list of demands to protect their children:** BCPA spokesperson Lai Miu Yu holds a press conference and issues nine demands to the school system. These include “a set minimum number of Chinese students, teachers, and aides in each school to which Chinese students were bused; a set number of Chinese escorts on buses; the hiring of Chinese administrative staff

⁴ Liu, *Forever Struggle*, 71–72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

who could communicate with parents; and a variety of safety measures to protect students.”^{6^}

- **August 6 – School committee members walk out on Chinese parents:** During a public hearing at which the BCPA is presenting its demands to the Boston School Committee, three committee members walk out.[^]
- **September 7 – Boston Chinese Parents Association votes to boycott schools:** After weeks of being ignored, members of the BCPA vote to have their children boycott the opening of schools. They declare: “Chinese parents are united in boycotting all schools because we feel that school and court officials, by not taking concrete action on our demands, have demonstrated an overall disregard for the rights of all Chinese parents and students.”^{7^}
- **September 8 – First day of school:**
 - **Chinese American student boycott begins:** Nearly all Chinese American students assigned to schools outside Chinatown boycott school. A US Justice Department Chinese American staff member demands an immediate meeting with Suzanne Lee and BCPA, pleading for an end to the boycott. According to Lee, he told her, “We need the Chinese kids as a buffer” between Black and white students.^{8^}
 - **New school assignments cause confusion for Latinx families:** Some children who are supposed to be in bilingual programs are not assigned to them. Siblings in some families are arbitrarily assigned to different schools.⁹⁺⁺
 - **JFK’s birthplace is attacked:** The home where John F. Kennedy was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, is firebombed, and the name “Bus Teddy” (a reference to Senator Edward Kennedy’s support for desegregation) is spray-painted on the sidewalk in front of the house.
- **September 10 – The Boston Chinese Parents Association Boycott succeeds:** After the third day of the BCPA boycott, the Justice Department and Boston Public Schools agree to nearly all of the Chinese American parents’ demands. The boycott ends.[^]
- **December 9 –**
 - **Judge Garrity fires the principal of South Boston High School** and places the school under control of the federal government instead of the Boston School Committee.

⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁸ Liu, *Forever Struggle*, 74–75.

⁹ Tatiana Maria Fernández Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown: Racial Politics, Community Development, and Grassroots Organizing, 1960–1985” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2017), 200–01.

- **The NAACP headquarters in Roxbury is firebombed.**
- **1975–76 school year – Latino student enrollment in the district increases to between 6,000 and 7,000 students**, over half of whom participate in the bilingual education program. According to historian Tatiana Cruz: “Thousands were still receiving an inferior education, out of school or on the waiting lists for the bilingual program, and new migrants were arriving to Boston each day.”¹⁰⁺⁺

1976

- **January – Latinx students boycott South Boston High School:** Historian Tatiana Cruz explains: “Pedro Berrios, a 14-year-old student there who had recently arrived from Puerto Rico, led a group of 22 Latino students in the bilingual program in a boycott, stating that they were not learning anything and were isolated from other students. Along with the support of their parents, El Comité, and other community groups, the protest lasted close to two months, as they tried to convince the court to transfer the bilingual program to another school. While they were boycotting, the students attended tutorial classes at La Alianza Hispana, where they received instruction in math and science, which were not offered at South Boston High.”¹¹⁺⁺
- **February – Judge Garrity rules in favor of the Latinx students at South Boston High** and transfers their bilingual program to Roxbury High.⁺⁺
- **April 5 – A Black lawyer is attacked by white students outside Boston City Hall:** Ted Landsmark, a Black lawyer, is attacked while rushing to a meeting at Boston’s City Hall by South Boston students leaving the building after a reception with Louise Day Hicks. The photo of a student hitting Landsmark with an American flag (titled “The Soiling of Old Glory”) goes viral. After the attack, African American community leaders declare Boston unsafe for people of color.
- **April 19 – A white man driving through Roxbury is attacked by Black teens** throwing rocks, who then pull him from his car and beat him to the point of unconsciousness. The victim, auto mechanic Richard Poleet, is left in a coma and never recovers. Mayor Kevin White calls for a “Unity March Against Violence.”
- **April 26 – 50,000 people join the “Unity March Against Violence”:** Many prominent white and African American leaders do not attend.
- **July 4 – Boston celebrates the United States Bicentennial:** 400,000 people gather along the Charles River to watch fireworks and hear the Boston Symphony Orchestra play in celebration of the country’s bicentennial.

¹⁰ Cruz. “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 200.

¹¹ Cruz, “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” 202.

- **The new Josiah Quincy Elementary School opens in Chinatown:** The complex includes a community center and offers services and programming for children and families in the neighborhood. The Quincy School Community Council later becomes the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center and continues to work in the community today.^{12^^}

1977

- **July – El Comité de Padres Pro-Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe voices continuing concerns:** El Comité releases a letter voicing Latinx families' concerns over the school department's plan to relocate more than 2,000 students to different schools in the upcoming school year. The letter points out that over 40% of bilingual students will be reassigned and that this will result in the loss of 18 bilingual programs and harm 21 others. Judge Garrity declines to intervene.¹³⁺⁺
- **Boston's bilingual education program is criticized by parents and Judge Garrity for being underfunded, understaffed, and mismanaged.**¹⁴⁺⁺
- **Louise Day Hicks loses her city council seat.**
- **John O'Bryant becomes the first African American to be elected to the Boston School Committee.**

1979

- **Latinx parent-organizers lead the formation of a multiethnic/multiracial coalition to demand better bilingual education in compliance with the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court ruling:** The coalition represents Latinx, Chinese American, Haitian American, and Cape Verdean American communities in Boston. Spokesperson Carmen Pola declares: "We don't want our children to be separate, to be shuffled into some basement classroom and given the leftover crumbs of this department—we want them to get basic services, using their own language and learning English, so that they can receive an education which will prepare them to deal effectively in this country."¹⁵⁺⁺
- **April – The Boston School Committee agrees to the demands of the multiethnic/multiracial coalition for bilingual education.**⁺⁺

¹² Liu, *Forever Struggle*, 53.

¹³ Cruz, "Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown," 201.

¹⁴ Cruz, "Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown," 203.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

Sources:

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

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

