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Chain Link and Concrete:

Discipline, Surveillance, and Policing in Los Angeles Schools, 1945-1985

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of

Philosophy in History

by

Araceli Centanino

2021

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Chain Link and Concrete:

Discipline, Surveillance, and Policing in Los Angeles Schools, 1945-1985

by

Araceli Centanino

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Kathleen Lytle Hernández, Chair

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is home to one of the largest independent school police forces in the nation. Until recently, the Los Angeles School Police Department commanded a \$70 million budget and possessed a weapons arsenal that included grenade launchers, M-16s and a tank. How and why LAUSD got to this point is the subject of this dissertation. In other words, this dissertation analyzes the nature of the relationship between LA city schools, discipline, surveillance, and law enforcement between 1945 and 1985. As Los Angeles's racial demography changed in the postwar period, the schools relied on disciplinary policy, and eventually, law enforcement to manage the fluctuating racial boundaries of the city. What was initially created to foster a sense of fairness and impartiality in schools experiencing integration later became a vehicle to confine the agency of Black and Chicano students, especially after the 1965 Watts uprising. Students resisted enclosures in waves of protests and

boycotts that rocked the district between 1967 and 1970 and put forth their own vision of abolitionist education. In the years that followed the student rebellions, Los Angeles schools increased security personnel, cooperated with law enforcement truancy sweeps and perimeter patrolling, and installed evermore security hardware and surveillance systems, before finally making the police a permanent fixture in select campuses. Moreover, I argue that LA schools serving Black and Chicana students became a laboratory for the expansion of the carceral state into public education, and by century's end, they became nearly indistinguishable from other carceral institutions. Indeed, schools, jails, and prisons shared the same practices: constant surveillance, detention and punishment. The proliferation of zero-tolerance policies and school resource officers in the 1990s and 2000s was made possible because Los Angeles city schools experimented, refined, and modeled it for the nation between the years of 1945-1985.

Keywords: Los Angeles, schools, police, surveillance, carceral state, Black and Chicana students, student rebellion

The dissertation of Araceli Centanino is approved

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Kathleen Lytle Hernández, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Nicolás Centanino, whose experiences growing up inspired this research. You show me that it's possible to get back up, and it's never too late to change your life. Love you, bro.

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Vita

Araceli Centanino received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History with an emphasis in Race, Ethnicity, and Migration from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). At UCSD, Centanino was a McNair Scholar, and received the Armin Rappaport Prize for best history honors thesis. She graduated in 2012 with honors and magna cum laude. In 2015, Centanino earned her Master of Arts degree from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). This dissertation marks the completion and final requirement of her doctoral degree in History at UCLA.

Centanino has presented research and partial chapters of this dissertation at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians in April 2019, and at the American Federation of Teachers, local 1931, in April 2018.

At UCLA, Centanino has received the Graduate Summer Research Mentorship award, a research grant from the Institute of American Cultures, and a Summer Research Travel Stipend from the History Department that was made possible by the Hoxie Fund.

Introduction

When I am asked about the origins of this dissertation topic, I usually give two answers. One is academic and the other is personal. The personal story that fuels my academic interest has been with me the longest. Growing up, my twin brother and I shared everything together, including our educational experiences. We attended the same schools, knew the same kids, and occasionally shared the same teachers. In 2006, I was a senior in high school in San Diego, California. In our senior year, my brother and a handful of his friends had their property searched and were detained by campus police officers. That encounter became the basis for their expulsion. I went through the rest of my senior year, with all of its milestones—prom, senior picnic, graduation—without my twin brother. It seemed like the entire campus knew about my brother’s expulsion, and I felt it implicitly in the silences from teachers, staff, and classmates every time I went to school without him going forward. Time passed, and eventually the sting of my brother’s expulsion dulled a bit enough to talk with him about it. When I asked him about his interaction with the campus police officer and the search and seizure of his belongings, my brother said one thing that burned itself into my brain: “On campus our consent is implied.”

I grew up in the era of school shootings and zero tolerance policies. The fear of students as aggressors and sources of violence justified draconian disciplinary policies that did little to actually ensure safety. Instead, they made going to school a potentially precarious exercise particularly for students like my brother, a young, brown-skinned Latino. Zero tolerance policies are disciplinary measures that standardize harsh punishment for certain categories of student misconduct, and usually result in suspensions and expulsions. Zero tolerance policies became popular with school administrators nationwide and were implemented as a strategy to catch and deter students from bringing weapons on campus as part of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994.

This act required local educational agencies receiving federal funds to have strict expulsion policies for students suspected of weapons possession.

Philosophically, zero tolerance is similar to other crime policies of the mass incarceration era, such as “broken windows” policing. “Broken windows” theory, advanced by James Q. Wilson, argued that small acts of disorder later escalate to serious crimes. Using this theory, law enforcement agencies across the country were encouraged to focus on arresting minor offenders, bloating the jail and prison systems. In a similar way, zero tolerance policies penalized a myriad of infractions beyond weapons possession—such as drug and alcohol possession (including Aspirin or Midol), vandalizing, talking back to a teacher or principal, and schoolyard scuffles. Any infraction deemed disruptive or potentially threatening could result in a suspension or expulsion. Recent social science research has uncovered the extent of the harm that harsh disciplinary policies have had on the lives of students of color, particularly Black and Latine/x/o students. According to a 2014 report by the Department of Education’s Civil Rights Office, Black and Latinx students were more likely than their white counterparts to be suspended, expelled, and referred to law enforcement for a school-based offense. The findings also revealed that the severe punishment that students of color experience in public education begins as early as preschool. Black children represent only 18% of preschool enrollment but nearly 50% of preschool suspensions.¹ This data indicates that harsh disciplinary policies are less about confiscating weapons on campus, and more about policing the behavior of Black and Brown bodies.

Zero tolerance policies have also coincided with the introduction of police across public school campuses nationwide, only increasing the likelihood of an encounter between Black and

¹ “Expansive Survey of America’s Public Schools Reveals Troubling Racial Disparities.” *U.S. Department of Education*, March 21, 2014.

Latino students with law enforcement. Often called school resource officers (SROs), school police perform a variety of functions on campus aside from security and discipline. They often serve as de facto counselors and teachers, particularly in underserved, low-income schools. Studies show that Black students are more than twice as likely to be arrested at school than their white peers.² The arrival of police on school campuses has been steadily increasing since 1975, though some urban school districts, like Los Angeles, have had informal and collaborative relationships with law enforcement several decades prior. In 1975, about 1% of schools across the country had cops on site. In 2003, 36% of schools nationwide had school police.³ Thus, by the time I entered high school, cops on campus were becoming a normalized part of the educational experience.

I didn't realize the impact that this experience had on me personally until I began graduate school at UCLA. I was researching the Civil Rights Congress, a multiracial leftist organization that fought against civil rights violations during the Cold War era. They committed themselves to a variety of struggles, which included immigrant rights, labor rights, segregation and housing discrimination, and police brutality. Their Los Angeles chapters were especially strong and vocal on issues of police repression and the policing of youth. I was originally interested in researching the history of multiracial activism in Los Angeles, particularly among Black and Mexican American communities and the Civil Rights Congress was a perfect prism for this kind of study. In their archival records, I found the story of Michael Wright. In November of 1950, an African American mother named Marie Wright came to the Eastside chapter of the Civil Rights Congress in Boyle Heights for help. Her 13-year-old son Michael had

² "Bullies in Blue: The Origins and Consequences of School Policing" American Civil Liberties Union, April 2017.

³ Ibid

borrowed “about 3 or 4 nickels” from a white classmate, Carl Seminoff, and was slowly paying off his debt. Perhaps his pace of repayment was too slow for Carl Seminoff’s taste, because at home Seminoff told his mother that Wright had stolen from him.⁴ Mrs. Seminoff promptly lodged a complaint against Michael Wright with juvenile authorities. The next day, officers Conine and Zoellner interrupted class at Hollenbeck Junior High and arrested Michael Wright, charging him with beating up a boy at school, and “disturbing the peace (threatening to beat up other boy).”⁵ Marie Wright complained to the Civil Rights Congress staff that her son had been arrested and detained in Juvenile Hall without ever having been notified by the school Principal that Michael had done something wrong in the first place.

The Civil Rights Congress took up the Wright family’s grievances and immediately began working to pressure Hollenbeck Junior High to rectify this wrong. Michael Wright’s story was published in neighborhood and city newspapers, including the *People’s World*. In an effort to combat ubiquitous representations of nonwhite youths as delinquents, publicity for the Wright case made sure to emphasize his innocence and character. Michael Wright was not only a stellar student, with “a high average of between A and B in his studies,” but he was also a responsible and hardworking son “who had been working after school hours to supplement his 12-member family income.”⁶

In addition to publicizing Wright’s case, the Civil Rights Congress actively involved community members from Boyle Heights-Belvedere to protest the school’s handling of the incident, and to demand Michael’s release from Juvenile Hall. This community protest took

⁴ “Case Sheet, Michael Wright, November 29, 1950” in Civil Rights Congress Papers, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, Box 1, Folder 25 (hereafter cited as CRC Papers).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Don Wheelidin, “Negro schoolboy held charge: a nickle [sic] ‘theft’” in *People’s World* 20, December 1950 in CRC Papers, Box 1, Folder 25.

place outside of Hollenbeck Junior High, while a nine-person delegation met with school officials. The newspaper reporting on the incident and demonstration made it a point to emphasize that the makeup of the crowd and delegation was multiracial-- “including Negroes and Mexican-Americans.”⁷ In the meeting, the delegation presented the Principal and Vice Principal with a list of demands, which they later agreed to. The list included: the immediate notification of parents or guardians in cases of juvenile arrests, and that stopping the use of juvenile officers in cases of school infractions.⁸ Unfortunately, it is unclear whether this alone was enough to get Michael released from detention. Shifra Meyers, organizational secretary of the Civil Rights Congress, seemed hopeful in her report. Having a community demonstration outside of the school, she suggested, applied the right amount of pressure to get the Wright case to advance positively. The demonstration and delegation were “definitely a success, and accomplished a lot that merely legal approach could not have done.”⁹

Sitting in the Southern California Library reading Michael Wright’s story brought back memories of my own family’s history with police-student interactions on campus. I knew firsthand how school discipline, especially when delivered through law enforcement, can leave a lasting mark on students and their families. In Michael Wright’s story, I saw my brother, his friends, and countless other students whose education has been interrupted by draconian school discipline that has relied on law enforcement to handle student misconduct. But the initial pang of my painful memory was pacified by the fact that the multiracial Hollenbeck community rallied around the Wright family to help achieve justice for Michael and also ensure the safety of

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Shifra Meyers, untitled report, in CRC Papers, Box 1, Folder 25.

⁹ Ibid.

students to come. Black and Mexican American community members wanted Hollenbeck Junior High to be a safe space for their kids, where they wouldn't have to worry about law enforcement breaking and entering classroom doors. The remedy to such violence was community pressure, carried by Black and Mexican American residents finding common struggle.

The connection between zero tolerance, school resource officers, and the age of mass incarceration was a correlation I understood thanks to growing education and social science research. Most of the literature pointed to the 1980s and 1990s Drug War as the context driving these hyper-punitive policies. But as I encountered the story of Michael Wright in the Civil Rights Congress files, I was left wondering about postwar Los Angeles. How was it that in 1950s Los Angeles, Michael Wright was forcibly removed from his classroom by law enforcement 40 years prior to the advent of zero tolerance policies and school resource officers? Nearly 10 years after my senior year of high school, I sat in an archive wondering about the historical processes that spanned decades to connect Michael Wright and my twin brother. In other words, I set out to study postwar Los Angeles, policing, and public schools in order to better understand what happened to my family in San Diego in 2006.

As I rummaged through the CRC archival records, I learned that Michael Wright's case was dramatic, but not unique. Between 1949 and 1950 the CRC listed ten cases of police brutality or repression, eight of which involved Mexican and African American juveniles and young adults. Two years prior to the Michael Wright incident, the *Daily News* reported that the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) rounded up 60 children, ranging between the ages of 8 years old and 16, in an Elysian Park playground searching for the person who allegedly threw a rock at a fireman. As in the Wright case, none of the children's parents were notified of their detention. Captain Robert Bowling, of the Juvenile Division of the Police Department "refused

to announce that hereafter parents and the playground officials would be notified when children were picked up by police for investigation.”¹⁰ When placed in this context, it is clear why the community of Boyle Heights-Belvedere responded so quickly and assertively to the Wright case. Indeed, if the LAPD had transformed city streets and public playgrounds into veritable battlefields for youth of color, Mexican and Black communities could not allow the classroom to also become a potential site of danger for their children. Newspaper articles that publicized the Wright case echoed this sentiment and reported, “the East Los Angeles community won’t sit still for cops coming into the classroom.”¹¹

Unfortunately, despite their best efforts, the practice of cops in the classrooms in Los Angeles public schools continued. Michael Wright was just one victim in a larger trend of cooperation between the criminal justice system and public education. Indeed, just three years before Michael Wright was forcibly removed from his classroom, public officials at a Sacramento meeting on juvenile delinquency speculated on how schools could better cooperate with the juvenile justice system. James Johnson, the Superintendent of Alcatraz stated “We have a magnificent opportunity in the schools...particularly in California where we are so well organized to reach these children, not when they become serious problems, but by examining every child as a matter of routine.”¹² In agreement with this idea, Judge Scott of Los Angeles County wondered aloud what proper procedure would be if police were to arrest problem youth within the vicinity of a school: “The law should be made clear to law enforcement officers as to what their liability is when they find it necessary to remove a child from a school building.

¹⁰ “Admit error in roundup of children”, in *Daily News* March 17, 1948, in CRC Papers, Box 1, Folder 22.

¹¹ Don Wheeldin, “Negro schoolboy held charge: a nickle [sic] ‘theft’”.

¹² Minutes of Meeting Commission on Juvenile Justice. Masonic Temple, Sacramento. November 17, 1947. In Corrections files—Special Study Commission Records—Juvenile Justice. Collection number F3717:64-75 D2313p2+p3, California State Archives.

Clarification on these particular subjects will create in the officer’s mind a feeling of confidence, in that he will know exactly at all times what he is doing.”¹³ Thus, by the time the Michael Wright was taken into police custody the nature of the relationship between the criminal justice apparatus and the public school system had been established—this was the future direction of school discipline.

In the decades that followed, draconian disciplinary measures to get tough on juvenile delinquency expanded, including the use of suspensions, expulsions, and police involvement. By 1973, major urban school districts had collectively suspended over one million children, which “represented a loss of over four million school days” in just one academic year.¹⁴ California alone led the nation in sheer numbers of school suspensions—142,000 between 1972 and 1973. More specifically, Los Angeles, as the state’s largest city, became the driver of suspensions. In 1975, Los Angeles Unified School District suspended on average one in every 15 students.¹⁵ As the nation’s second-largest school district, this was an enormous number of students. In addition to suspensions and expulsions, police activity on school grounds became a common occurrence, through patrolling, crime-diversion programs, truancy sweeps, and more. By 1985, police became a permanent fixture in campuses as Los Angeles became home to the largest independently run school police department in the nation.

When it comes to strict disciplinary policy and cops on campus, Los Angeles Unified School District became an exemplar and innovator for the nation. In many ways, Los Angeles was the bellwether for the nation, signaling the arrival of the carceral state in the schools. A

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Children’s Defense Fund, *School Suspensions, Are They Helping Children? A Report by the Children’s Defense Fund of the Washington Research Project*. (Washington: Washington Research Project, 1975) 9.

¹⁵ Ibid 11.

phenomenon that would reach nation-wide proportions decades later. How and why Los Angeles got to this point is the subject of this project. In other words, this dissertation will analyze the nature of the relationship between LA city schools, discipline, and law enforcement between 1945 and 1985. More specifically, this dissertation will analyze what this interconnectivity has meant for children of color, their rights on campus, and their communities' relationships to schools. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, this dissertation is interested in tracing the ways in which communities of color responded to and resisted schools' attempts to police their children and deny them educational equity.

The Wright case that this introduction opens with offers some interesting questions that drive the heart of this project: How did police become a part of the disciplinary arm of public schools? More importantly, what were the factors that transformed schools into sites of entrapment, beginning in postwar Los Angeles? How did the experiences of entrapment and enclosure in schools create opportunities for new political alliances across racialized groups in the city?

As Los Angeles's racial demography changed in the postwar period, the schools relied on disciplinary policy, and eventually, law enforcement to manage the fluctuating racial boundaries of the city. Despite the Board's attempts to couch its call for campus safety in racial colorblindness, I argue that at its heart, the quest for school security was a racial project that ultimately contained and controlled the behavior of Black and Brown bodies. Beginning with the 1959 disciplinary policy, the Board of Education attempted to use discipline as a way to regulate student interactions in racial borderlands. What was initially created to foster a sense of fairness and impartiality in schools experiencing integration later became a vehicle to confine and control the agency of Black and Chicano students, especially after the 1965 Watts uprising and later

student rebellions of the late 1960s. When students of color responded with their own vision for LA schools and their own definition of safety, schools doubled down on law and order. In the years that followed the student rebellions of 1968-1969, Los Angeles schools increased security personnel, cooperated with law enforcement truancy sweeps and perimeter patrolling, and installed evermore metal detectors, fencing, and surveillance systems, before finally making the police a permanent fixture in select campuses. Moreover, I argue that LA schools serving Black and Chicano students became a laboratory for the expansion of the carceral state into public education, and by century's end, they became nearly indistinguishable from other carceral institutions. Indeed, schools, jails, and prisons shared the same practices: constant surveillance, detention and punishment. The proliferation of zero-tolerance policies and school resource officers in the 1990s and 2000s was made possible because Los Angeles city schools experimented, refined, and modeled it for the nation between the years of 1945-1985.

To help me tell this story, I scoured through Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education records, a behemoth of an archival collection that spans centuries—from material covering the years of 1875 to 2012 and everything in between. Primarily, I relied on Board of Education meeting minutes, which gave me insight into the rationale of LA's elected education representatives and the way they viewed school issues like juvenile delinquency, student rebellions, security, campus violence, and what they called “the race question.” These records also contain rich correspondence records between Board reps and Angelenos, whose fears, hopes, and dreams of the future were wrapped up in discussions about integration, discipline, community control, and tax bonds and school funding. What emerges in these files is a rich portrait of postwar public schools as contested terrain over race, power, safety, and rights. This research also relied heavily on local mainstream and independent newspapers like the *Los*

Angeles Times, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and *La Raza*. Each of these periodicals reported on the school system in starkly different ways, reflecting the contested nature of Los Angeles schools.

In addition, I consulted the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) archival records belonging to the Southern California branch. These files indicated the courageous and persistent attempts of Angelenos to hold law enforcement to account, through the dream of civilian review boards. The ACLU files also were a valuable repository of youth and student complaints of police overreach on school grounds and the routine invasions of privacy they experienced due in and outside of campus.

This dissertation would have included Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files pertaining to the student rebellions of 1968 and 1969. I filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to view files the FBI held on key schools in South Central and East Los Angeles, and my request was approved. The files were released to me in March 2020, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been unable to view them as the National Archives shut down. The files I requested included intelligences records agents kept on children from Carver Junior High, Roosevelt High, and Garfield High School between 1968 and 1969. Though I have been unable to read these records, the fact that national law enforcement agencies spied on children reveals a great deal about the expansion of surveillance and police presence in schools, in and of itself. The existence of these records suggests that the highest law enforcement agencies of the land penetrated predominantly Black and Brown schools and invaded the privacy of kids who were leading the vision to transform LA City schools.

Historical Context

Although most scholarship identifies the origins of “the school-to-prison-pipeline” in the 1980s and 1990s in Drug War legislation, this dissertation will show that the patterns of policing

and criminalizing youth of color that are central to this pipeline date back to the postwar period. Los Angeles, in particular, serves as an interesting and generative site to study the patterns of policing and punishing youth of color, because the city emerged from World War II as one of the most racially diverse urban centers in the nation—with an acute (real or imagined) problem of juvenile delinquency. Indeed, the nation’s eyes were on Los Angeles and its law enforcement structures to provide models for how to deal with a recalcitrant, and increasingly growing, non-white youth population.

Los Angeles’s postwar years were marked by significant shifts in race relations and urban demography. Seemingly overnight, the city experienced startling demographic shifts that challenged the *de facto* laws of segregation in the city and white racial anxieties, as a result of wartime industrial migration to the Sunbelt. Still grappling with the aftermath of the Zoot Suit Riots, and the return of Japanese American internees, Angelenos were keenly aware of the heightened tension and potential volatility surrounding issues of racial difference. It is no wonder why the nation and the world turned their attention to the city as a barometer, hoping for a “glimpse of where their soon-to-be multiracial nation would head in decades to come.”¹⁶

For some, the increasingly multiracial character of Los Angeles’s neighborhoods inspired hope for racial justice and harmony. Neighborhoods like Watts and Boyle Heights became vibrant multiracial neighborhoods where Mexican Americans, African Americans, Japanese Americans, and Jews shared space. However, for other Angelenos, the fact that Los Angeles was no longer the white bastion in the West its boosters had proclaimed at the beginning of the century was cause for considerable concern. Spatial trends and urban restructuring helped to quell white fears of the demographic revolution occurring before their eyes. The processes of

¹⁶ Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth Century Los Angeles*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 5.

suburbanization, white flight, and urban deindustrialization entrenched segregation in Los Angeles and reinforced a stark color line delineating between “chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs”.¹⁷ However, for a brief moment in time, traditionally white working-and middle-class suburbs, such as South Gate, became racial borderlands as their communities juttred up against the growing racial heterogeneity. Much of this tension was acutely felt in the most polemical of institutions in postwar Los Angeles—housing and schools. Schools, like neighborhoods, were jealously and violently guarded by white parents particularly in the racial borderlands—and these communities pressured the Board of Education to uphold or redraw attendance boundaries to maintain the racial homogeneity of the schools.

But by far, the LAPD, more than any other city institution, became the premier agent in maintaining the racial boundaries of the city. To meet the suburban demands for law and order, and to ensure the continued segregation of the city, the LAPD also underwent significant postwar changes. Los Angeles historian, Edward Escobar, argues that the most important shift in police practices was a trend towards professionalization, because it encompassed changes in philosophy, officer liability, and attitudes towards communities of color. The professional model turned the department from a union-busting strong arm of the Los Angeles business and corporate elite, into a self-governing and increasingly militarized force in the “war on crime.”¹⁸ This linking of race, criminality, and the war on crime by the LAPD, which was reinforced by

¹⁷ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004) 5.

¹⁸ The “war on crime” was a department-wide campaign that was implemented with the appointment of William H. Parker as Chief of Police in 1950. The “war on crime” was a significant project for the department because it not only helped pacify suburban fears of ever-spreading urban crime, but it also became a way for the public to gauge the efficiency of the LAPD. As a result, police officers became more vigilant and aggressive in everyday citations and traffic stops, as well as in their beat patrols. As Edward Escobar writes, with each citation, police officers became more convinced that “the population at large disregarded the law”, and urban communities of color in particular were naturally prone towards criminal activity (161-162).

newspaper reports that constructed Mexican and African American youth as gang members, justified excessive use of force on these communities, enforcement of curfew laws for juveniles, and highly disproportionate arrest and “noncriminal detention” rates (that is, arrests made on the basis of suspicion of criminal activity that were never substantiated or proved). In fact, by the postwar period, “Mexican Americans and African Americans comprised between 77 and 83 percent of the juvenile arrests”.¹⁹

As cultural historians of Los Angeles have shown, the construction of youth of color as uniquely criminal helped justify the violent crackdowns in spaces where young people congregated—like movie theaters, malt shops, beaches, and dancehalls—to ensure that leisure and social activities also remained segregated. Perhaps most infamously, the popular jazz joints along Central Avenue, in the heart of Black Los Angeles, were the favorite targets of the LAPD. Although these musical venues along Central Avenue were associated in public discourse and mainstream press with gambling, drunkenness, violence, and other urban vices, the real danger was the integration that took place on the dance floor. White suburban youth flocked to Central Avenue to consume authentic black music, and in those ventures, often danced, drank, conversed, and shared space with other youth of color.²⁰ Thus, in spite of these efforts to maintain segregation, the postwar period also witnessed general trends towards integration.

Furthermore, the prospect of young people of diverse racial backgrounds mixing and sharing space became increasingly close to reality as public education slowly began the arduous and contested task of integration in the postwar period. Los Angeles was home to the second

¹⁹ Edward J. Escobar *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) 189.

²⁰ For more on this topic, see Luis Alvarez *The Power of the Zoot*; Anthony Macias *Mexican American Mojo*; Douglas Flamming *Bound for Freedom*; R.J. Smith *The Great Black Way*; Josh Sides *L.A. City Limits*

largest, and fastest-growing, school district in the nation. Facing the pressure of tremendous change as a result of the baby boom, which increased school enrollment by two thirds, and changes in racial demography, the LA City School District, like the LAPD, also underwent a series of policy shifts.²¹ In public discourse and in the media, teachers “found themselves...depicted as complicit contributors to rising rates of juvenile crime,” so they collectively pressed the Board of Education to pass one of the first system-wide disciplinary policies in the nation that effectively removed teacher responsibility in disciplining problem children, in 1959.²² These measures opened up the possibility for third party specialists—such as psychologists, social workers, and police officers—to handle behavioral problems, so that teachers could focus on instruction. Already experiencing scrutiny for their role in juvenile delinquency and racial integration, the disciplinary policy was an attempt to appease a skeptical public. Through it, schools could simultaneously display an image of strength and impartiality through a codified system of punishments that was doled out for certain categories of infractions, no matter the student, zip code, or racial background.

The most significant turning point in the story of policing and schools is the 1965 Watts uprising. This moment not only changed the city of Los Angeles, it also fundamentally transformed the nature of policing. At the local and national level, Watts confirmed policymakers’ assumptions about Black youth criminality. As Elizabeth Hinton demonstrated in her work, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, the shock of Watts pushed cities to expand the policing into evermore areas of life, including in schools. In fact, federal policies enacted after the summer of 1965 required that institutions, like public schools, partner with

²¹ Judith Kafka, “Shifting Authority: Teachers’ Role in the Bureaucratization of School Discipline in Postwar Los Angeles.” *History of Education Quarterly* 49 no. 3 (April 2009) 326.

²² *Ibid*, 329.

criminal justice agencies in order to receive funding.²³ As one of the largest and most visible school districts in the nation, Los Angeles Unified School District utilized the aftermath of the Watts uprising as an opportunity to expand its security capabilities in its schools.

Watts also signaled a shift in civil rights organizing at the national and local level. Prior to 1965, Black civil rights organizing focused on integrating housing and schools, among other causes. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) activists staged hunger strikes at the Board of Education offices in the summer and fall of 1964 and placed considerable pressure on LAUSD to address its problem with segregated schools. But the Board persistently denied the existence of segregation and claimed to be powerless to fix natural residential patterns. After the McCone Commission—the state-mandated investigation of the Watts uprising—publicized the reality of racially segregated, inferior, dilapidated schools as an underlying cause of the unrest, LA Schools committed itself to addressing the “racial question,” albeit, with increased security. For community activists, Watts signaled a disillusionment with integration in general and a pivot towards self-determination and community control of schools. It should come as no surprise that just two years after Watts, Black students rose up at Manual Arts High School to demand more from their schools and greater community access. Their example paved the way for later Black and Chicano student rebellions that would consume the county between 1968 and 1969.

In the full scope of this context, it is clear why Los Angeles is a necessary site of study for the history of policing and schools. In addition, it is a generative site of study for any scholar interested in youth and social movements. Youth, as a social category, encapsulate fears and hopes of a society for the future, and as such, are often mobilized in public debates to signify and express feelings about social change. This is why youth are often represented in popular

²³ Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2016)14

discourse as in crisis, in need of saving, or in need of stricter punishment. This is clearly evident in the ways in which Los Angeles viewed the urgency of clamping down on juvenile delinquency in the 1950s and increasing security in schools in the 1960s. On the other hand, Black and Chicano youth also embodied the hopes of communities of color for a racially just future. Despite the daily indignities of racial discrimination, police surveillance, and violent repression, Los Angeles was a place that held possibility and potential to be remade.

Like other urban centers, Los Angeles is a unique site to study the evolution of student activism and educational politics in the late 1960s. One major conflict of the period was the shift from integration and towards community control of schools. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of this occurred in New York in 1967, the city experimented with community-control and decentralization in three neighborhoods, including the Ocean Hill-Brownsville neighborhood of Harlem. Community-control was limited but gave the residents the ability to weigh in on curriculum, select administrators and school policy. After the dismissal of white teachers in 1968, relations between the majority Black and Puerto Rican community and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) fell apart, and white teachers went on strike. Similarly, Los Angeles was also home to major disturbances around the issue of community-controlled schools in 1968—particularly in East Los Angeles and in South Central Los Angeles. What made Los Angeles unique in this history of community-control is that high school students, and at times junior high students, drove these movements and launched historic strikes against their schools.

Moreover, these significant student-led movements were remarkable because they inspired college and university students in the area, and arguably across the state of California. Part of the student demands coming out of East Los Angeles and South Central Los Angeles included a call for Ethnic Studies and culturally relevant curriculum, as well as excessive

discipline and the use of law enforcement on campus. Students from surrounding colleges and universities, from the University of California, Los Angeles, to Cal State Los Angeles, San Fernando College, East Los Angeles College, and Los Angeles City College all launched their own respective strikes for Ethnic Studies, student rights, and community access inspired by the example set for them by high school and junior high students—not the other way around. In Los Angeles, high school aged youth led the charge and were at the forefront of change. Perhaps most importantly, I will argue that their movements offered a diagnosis of the carceral state in public education well before anyone saw it coming.

Literature Review

My research draws on and departs from various bodies of literature. I have categorized the three major topical fields as follows: Children and the State, Postwar Policing and the Carceral State in Los Angeles, Public Education and the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and 1960s Black and Chicano student movements. Below, I will trace the specific interventions my dissertation will make in each body of work. However, before I assess the three major topical fields, I will provide the most significant historiographic and scholarly interventions this project offers. My research uses an emerging framework for understanding how states—local and federal—organize themselves, structure daily life, and manage problem populations: the carceral state. In recent years historians, motivated in part by our contemporary crisis of incarceration, are paying close attention to carceral systems. As will be discussed at greater length below, this framework conceives of the state as obsessed with punishment and confinement. Incarceration is the single greatest priority and objective for the state. My work contributes to this field by demonstrating how the project of incarceration interacted and transformed other public

institutions, primarily public education. Indeed, in this way, my work shows how the carceral state deeply embeds all citizens into its agenda, regardless of age or criminal activity.

Second, by looking at youth in postwar Los Angeles, my work contributes to notable gaps in historical knowledge. Youth, as historical actors, pose particular problems for historians because they leave behind so few documents. Nevertheless, youth have historically been, and continue to be, perennial and important agents of social change. In addition, the postwar period is also one rife with tremendous social, demographic, geographic, political, and economic restructuring in Los Angeles, as well as nationally. Placing youth at the center of this change alters our understanding of these mid-twentieth-century changes as well as pushes scholars to include and consider young people as crucial shapers of history.

Relatedly, this dissertation looks at the social movements that youth organized, in part, as a response to the expansion of security and policing onto their campuses and its environs. This research joins a growing body of work that looks at the wave of Black and Chicano student mobilizations in Los Angeles from a multiracial framework and places it into a larger historiography of Black and Brown organizing and solidarity. This dissertation contributes to this field by pointing to the ways that Black and Chicano student experiences were linked by police harassment in and around schools, and how these shared experiences shaped their demands and visions for educational reform. Black and Chicano students called for a future of schooling that was not only culturally relevant and community-controlled, but also free of cops on campus and harsh discipline. In doing so, this research contributes to the historiography on the Chicano student movement in Los Angeles in novel ways—by merging it with the history of Black Power and Black student activism in Los Angeles, and the rise of the carceral state.

Children and the State

Various scholars have written extensively about children and their unique relationship to the state. This project has considered historiography on the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system. Beginning with juvenile justice, Anthony Platt's *The Child Savers* is a canonical text. Though highly controversial and much debated, this book is largely responsible for inspiring an expansion of critical research on early juvenile justice systems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Platt, like many scholars of his time, sought to provide a revisionist interpretation of the 'child savers', or the section of the Progressive movement that concerned themselves with the plight of urban children. Platt's principal argument is that despite the good intentions of the Progressive child savers, their inherent class and cultural biases contributed to the development and proliferation of delinquency and deviancy as social and juridical categories that ultimately increased the role and presence of the state in the lives of working class and poor urban children.

While the general spirit of Platt's argument has been tremendously influential for all scholars attempting to understand the origins of the juvenile justice system, his work has received much criticism. Although some critique his cynical portrayal of the Progressives, for our purposes, the most significant oversights of Platt's work are its treatment of diversity among juvenile delinquents and its simplified gender analysis.

Mary Odem's monograph, *Delinquent Daughters*, is a gendered intervention in the field of juvenile justice studies. Like Platt, Odem continues the revisionist and critical perspective on the early stages of juvenile justice. However, Odem's research considers the markedly different experiences girls had with the categories of delinquency and their journeys through the juvenile justice system. According to Odem, girls received harsher and more rigid treatment than boys in the juvenile justice system. Girls were less likely to receive leniency from juvenile justice

workers or officials, and much more likely to experience sexually and physically invasive procedures and abuses during their confinement. In addition, girls were more likely to be arrested on charges for sexual deviancy and to be rejected or turned into authorities by family members. Moreover, Odem's work makes another important intervention by focusing on juvenile justice in the West—a severely understudied region in the field of early juvenile justice systems. Still, despite Odem's gendered and regional intervention, the discussion of race and ethnicity remains rather thin.

Miroslava Chavez-Garcia's *States of Delinquency* is an example of the direction juvenile justice scholarship is heading. Chavez-Garcia's focus on California's early juvenile justice system allowed her to substantially engage the race question in juvenile justice. Through her research, Chavez-Garcia illuminated how early twentieth century racial ideologies, like Eugenics and Social Darwinism, influenced how youth of color were received and categorized by juvenile justice authorities. Routinely subjected to intelligence testing and invasive family scrutiny, workers in the system (social workers, doctors, guards, administrators, judges, etc.) used the information they collected on youth of color as evidence of biological inferiority which not only differentially shaped their experiences with punishment, but also helped to solidify the link between race and criminality in both the juvenile justice system and in public imagination. This crucial intervention not only reveals how geography changed the establishment and administration of juvenile justice, but also highlights that in the West, as opposed to the Midwest and urban North, the ideas of criminality, delinquency, punishment and rehabilitation were always connected to racial difference *and* to class status. Thus, if juvenile justice authorities in the West believed that some youths were deeply incorrigible or fundamentally deviant due to racial status, the will and resources to invest in their rehabilitation was hard to muster and justify.

Most recently, Laura Briggs's *Taking Children* has offered a sweeping account of US history that focuses on the various attempts of the state to remove children, particularly low-income children of color, from their homes. Brigg's analysis covers 400 of U.S. history and argues that the state—through various institutions, policies, and methods has snatched children from their parents for political ends. Beginning with the slave auction block to Native American boarding schools, to more recent examples like the modern foster care system, mass incarceration, and family separations at the U.S.-Mexico border, Briggs details the ways in which the removal and confinement of children has been sanctioned by the state. For this dissertation, Briggs's analysis of the foster care and welfare systems are especially useful. Like Chavez-Garcia, Briggs explains the ways that welfare and social workers used social science research that pathologized poverty, particularly poor Black and Latino families to remove children from their homes. Furthermore, Briggs argues that policymakers manipulated the foster care and welfare system to retaliate against the Black freedom movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Building off of this work, my research contributes to this discussion by exploring how schools participated in this nexus of institutions that confined, controlled, and policed children of color.

My work builds on this constellation of literature and the findings and arguments of these authors. Like Platt, Odem, Chavez-Garcia, and Briggs, my research focuses on the ways that the state policed children and punished them for their behavior. I view the juvenile justice, foster care, and welfare systems as mixed bags. Despite its earnest intentions to positively rehabilitate offending youth and transform them into productive members of society, the way in which non-normative youth become entangled in the system indicate that these systems, in practice, were about implementing a system of social control that targeted poor and racialized youth. In other

words, the very basis for child welfare and justice in the United States was to assimilate and socialize, or force, “deviant” youth into the existing gender, class, and racial hierarchies. In particular, I am influenced by Miroslava Chavez-Garcia’s work. In California, the juvenile justice system always operated according to and reproduced racial ideologies that linked youth of color with a biological proclivity toward deviancy and criminality. Without understanding these origins of these systems in California, the persistence of criminalizing youth of color (school-to-prison pipeline) seems like a recent development as opposed to a historically entrenched problem. Moreover, my analysis of the ways that schools contributed to the larger project of controlling non-normative youth adds an important dimension to this body of knowledge.

Postwar Policing and the Carceral State in Los Angeles

One cannot understand youth of color and their entanglement within justice and welfare systems the juvenile justice without understanding the history of the Los Angeles Police Department and its relationship to communities of color. Historian Edward Escobar writes about the experiences of Mexican and Mexican American communities with the LAPD in the first half of the twentieth century. In his work, Escobar argues that the LAPD’s racist and discriminatory police practices on the Mexican community perpetuated the notion that Mexican people and the spaces they inhabited were vice-ridden and uniquely associated with violent crime. In turn, this adversarial relationship with the police was a compelling factor in the development of a Mexican political identity in Los Angeles. Escobar’s work is useful because it provides a detailed account of the history of the LAPD in the first half of the twentieth century from the perspective of a racialized group—indeed one of the most historically significant racialized communities in Los Angeles. Scholarly assessments of LAPD history are few because access to sources is difficult to

obtain. Escobar's book, therefore, is seminal for anyone interested in the LAPD, or community-police relations in Los Angeles history.

Secondly, Escobar's argument that police brutality and repression facilitated the development of a political identity for Mexicans and Mexican Americans is useful for my project, because I am also interested in how state violence, incarceration, and police repression foster political alliances and community strategies of resistance. If violent confrontations with law enforcement created a Mexican American political identity, did police brutality and violence against youth of color become a point of convergence for other racialized groups in the city facing similar experiences? In other words, how do systems of youth policing, surveillance, confinement and punishment create cross-racial political identities and opportunities for solidarity?

Frank Donner's work also emphasizes the way race was linked to criminality but adds that constructing groups of people as "subversive" played a significant role in postwar policing. Like Escobar, Donner writes that the shifts in police practices in the 1950s had origins in the Depression-era red squads. However, what distinguishes the postwar period as a fundamental shift in policing is not only the trend towards professionalization, but municipal police department's partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in spying and cracking down on "subversive activity". In the context of the Cold War, the "subversive" category was expanded to include the "broad spectrum of peaceful dissent".²⁴ Interestingly, however, placing Donner's work in conversation with Escobar, it's clear that subversiveness was not only a political marker, but also social signifier that understood people of color as always, already deviant and criminal.

²⁴ Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) 4.

Moreover, bringing Escobar and Donner’s work together shows that the overrepresentation of police officers in communities of color in the postwar period not only served the objectives of the “war on crime”, but also constituted a critical way of gathering information for the state. Donner argues that during the Cold War, municipal police departments and other law enforcement agencies used intelligence as a political weapon: “Sheer accumulation of entries...each innocuous in itself—leads the intelligence mind to the conclusion that the subject is subversive. Quantity is transformed into quality; the end result is greater than the sum of its parts.”²⁵ Further, historian Margot Canaday writes that the state observes, creates categories, and develops conceptual mastery of social groups through regulation. In other words, the state “‘puzzle[s] before they power.’”²⁶ Therefore, the heavy surveillance and the accumulation of files through each detention, traffic stop, and “noncriminal arrest,” constructed people of color as criminals, subversives, and enemies of the state. Such criminalization made the wholesale denial of rights and dignity of people of color socially acceptable and morally condonable, because, after all, they were belligerents in the war the police departments were waging on urban streets.

More recently, Max Felker-Kantor’s work, *Policing Los Angeles*, has taught us that the punishment of Black and Latinos populations was central to the expansion of police power in the city, especially after 1965.²⁷ Through policing, the LAPD helped manufacture racialized notions of criminality that further justified the over-policing of low-income communities of color. More importantly, the expansion of police power made the LAPD the national model for urban

²⁵ Ibid, 71.

²⁶ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) 3.

²⁷ Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

policing. Felker-Kantor's analysis of police expansion helps inform my own examination of LA schools. *Policing Los Angeles* describes how liberal policies, such as those passed under Tom Bradley's mayoralship, facilitated the spread of policing into social institutions in the city. My research contributes to this point by uncovering how LA schools, in the midst of desegregation, reified the racial boundaries of the city by allocating more resources towards security and allowing law enforcement greater access to campuses—first through increased night watchmen, to full-time security agents, to truancy sweeps, and finally a fully independent POST-certified school police force.

Similarly, Mike Davis writes that Los Angeles in particular is a “fortress city,” in which all facets of life reinforced the notion that the city was engaged in warfare. The press, for example, actively manufactured and perpetuated fear by constantly running stories on African American and Mexican youth gangs, drug trade, and violent crime rates. The “us versus them” mentality that these stories produced helped foster a political climate that not only confirmed the LAPD's mission in the “war on crime”, but also served as a useful fundraising technique. As long as the LAPD could convince the white public that “criminals” posed a legitimate threat to their safety, Police Chief Parker could count on a steady flow of funding. “Accordingly, any diminution of the police budget or questioning of Parker's authority would weaken the dike and release a Black crime deluge on peaceful white neighborhoods.”²⁸

Another significant theme that Davis raises in his work on Los Angeles is the connection of policing practices to the maintenance of urban apartheid. Davis, like Escobar and Felker-Kantor, argues that the LAPD vigilantly conserved urban apartheid by focusing on the mobility of people of color, but especially juveniles and adolescents. Through the installation of curfews

²⁸ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. (London, New York: Verso, 1990) 295.

on Black and Chicano neighborhoods, police squads ensured that young people remained concentrated in certain pockets of the city. When placed in conversation with Frank Donner's and Felker-Kantor's work, it becomes clear that such spatial concentration both facilitated state surveillance of youth of color, and enabled police officers to secure high arrest rates. As this dissertation will show, schools played a crucial function in this containment project. Students who rebelled or resisted schools' efforts to contain them were met by police who simultaneously enforced school discipline and maintained the racial geography of Los Angeles.

Policing is, of course, a mirror that reflects larger changes at the state level. The expansion and funding of urban and local policing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been made possible by the growth of the carceral state. The carceral state is a theorization and conceptualization of a government that invests disproportionately in punishment, confinement, and incapacitation of its citizens. In recent years, scholars have made significant contributions to the study of the carceral state in U.S. history. But in this American story, Los Angeles emerges as a key driver of carceral expansion. Kelly Lytle Hernandez's groundbreaking *City of Inmates* identifies Los Angeles as both the contemporary and historical center of mass incarceration in the nation. *City of Inmates* pushes the field of carceral studies forward by showing how early the roots of incarceration are—reaching far beyond the twentieth century. From its colonial founding in 1781, Los Angeles's carceral history, Lytle Hernandez argues, has been inseparable from the larger dynamics of conquest and colonization. In other words, the history of carceral expansion is also one of settler colonialism. When understood from this framework, it becomes clear the role that education has played in the arch of punishment and conquest. Historically, schools have also facilitated the work of colonization by involuntarily confining Indigenous children in boarding schools. Today, schools serve crucial functions in the carceral state by submitting low-income

and youth of color to routine surveillance and confinement in urban schools and funneling those who rebel into the juvenile justice system through harsh disciplinary policies enforced by school resource officers.

More broadly, scholars like Ruth Wilson Gilmore have focused on California's centrality as a model for the carceral state at work. In her important book, *Golden Gulag*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore stresses the significance of postwar expansions in the defense industry as a template for the budding prison industrial complex. As a major recipient of lucrative Department of Defense contracts, California's political economy, educational system, and industrial production all underwent reformatting to respond to the demands of what Gilmore calls "Military Keynesianism".²⁹ The centrality of warfare to the very livelihood of California's political economy meant that major urban centers, like Los Angeles, had a vested interest in ensuring the continued vitality of the military-industrial complex, even in peacetime.

These postwar shifts had profound social implications for racialized groups, and young people. Already constructed as criminal, deviant, and/or subversive groups, racialized non-white groups like Mexican Americans, African Americans and youth were the targets of state surveillance and low-intensity domestic warfare. This is how the state remained economically viable in official peacetime. Thus, the most significant argument of Gilmore's work is that these political and economic postwar shifts later became the foundation and rationale that helped California execute "a prison-building and -filling plan that government analysts have called 'the biggest...in the history of the world.'"³⁰ The proliferation of prisons, detention centers, and juvenile halls, in other words, helped keep the warfare-dependent state afloat by housing and

²⁹ Military Keynesianism refers to a welfare state that derives its revenue and economic engine from war-making.

³⁰ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2007) 5.

confining the urban combatants from California's domestic wars—the War on Crime and the War on Drugs. In this transformation, the warfare state became the carceral state.

Similarly, Elizabeth Hinton's *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, traces the origins of late twentieth-century mass incarceration to the postwar antipoverty policies passed by liberal administrations. Hinton's expansive study details the links between federal policy and local law enforcement and the ways that fighting poverty became linked with fighting crime. Legislation like the 1965 Law Enforcement Assistance Act and the 1968 Omnibus Safe Streets Act linked social services with anticrime and policing projects at the local level, enabling the expansion of policing into social institutions. In this way, the federal government played a key role in financing the militarization of local law enforcement, and the arrival of the carceral state in public programming. In this way, Hinton not only clarifies the way that federal policies drive local changes in policing and caging, but also how the carceral state pulls all public institutions into its orbit. It is, at its core, a state that reorients all social, political, and economic institutions toward punishment and confinement. As my dissertation will later show, one of the key beneficiaries of anticrime funding were public schools, including, especially, the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Public Education and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Merging the literature and histories of incarceration and public education is interesting because at first glance these two institutions appear to work at cross purposes and play very different roles in society. One is designed to punish and incapacitate, the other is supposed to help individuals grow into productive, moral citizens. However, critical scholarship, particularly in recent years, has been pushing back on the notion that education is a democratizing or equalizing force for marginalized communities.

First and foremost, schools are socializing institutions that are often on the front lines of social problems. The ostensible goal of public education is to teach and prepare children to enter and behave in the world, by socializing them into society's norms and cultural values. Because these institutions also face the range of student diversity, they become prominent sites of Americanization and assimilation projects. It is for these reasons that education historian, Paula Fass, argues that schools are a "strategic instrument of culture formation", that mediate the complex and messy process of cultural conflict and pluralism.³¹ Schools, thus, are the contested terrain in which ideas of citizenship, inclusion, and exclusion are expressed, constrained, and negotiated.

However, schools are also an important tool for social control. The influential education theorist Paulo Freire has argued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that the classroom—particularly those in capitalist societies, or those with oppressive and undemocratic social hierarchies—is a space where the current social structure and power relations are reproduced. Moreover, the very premise of public education is just a welfare measure to veil social control as generosity on the part of the oppressive class. Freire's analysis of the banking model of education crystallizes this point. In the banking model, the teacher deposits information into the minds of students; the students are passive recipients who do not exert or produce any knowledge on their own, the teacher has absolute authority. This model stifles creative thought and discourages critical thinking activity—which ultimately serves the interests of the oppressors because it produces a compliant working class or oppressed population. Children learn that they are ignorant, and the teacher is knowledgeable, and therefore, has authority. They do not learn that they possess and create knowledge as well. It also teaches them that discipline and subjugation are a normal part

³¹ Paula Fass *Outside In: Minorities and the Transformation of American Education* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 8.

of their lives. Freire maintains that unless the banking model of pedagogy is removed from education, the institution itself will perpetuate the same societal power relations that produce poor children and children of color as “outsiders”.

More recently, scholars have continued Freire’s questioning of schools as social institutions by examining their relationship to punishment and the carceral state. Activist groups have attempted to highlight this relationship by calling it a school-to-prison pipeline. However, scholars such as Damien Sojoyner, Erica Meiner, and Sabrina Vaught have pushed back against this framing. In his book, *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*, Sojoyner argues that the school-to-prison pipeline slogan fails to address the “planned malaise” in predominantly non-white schools, or the ways in which the schools themselves become carceral.³² Instead, Sojoyner advances a new framework of enclosure to better convey the role of schools in the prison nexus. According to Sojoyner, enclosure is a multifaceted process that includes the removal and denial of services and programming that stabilize communities and affirm life, and replaces those things with racialized policing, incapacitation and incarceration. The assault on public education in low-income and communities of color—its planned malaise—is key to the process of enclosure. Sojoyner’s concept of enclosure is useful for my analysis of LA city schools because it helps to connect the redirection of public funds from school services and community support and towards security and surveillance. As my dissertation will show, by the late 1960s, schools sought to address the fleeing tax bases and dissatisfied suburban voters by increasing surveillance capacity and security hardware in urban schools. In Los Angeles, enclosure began as fencing and security agents, and within a matter of decades, it manifested into police and Sheriffs substations and zero tolerance policies.

³² Damien Sojoyner. *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2016) xi.

Similarly, in *Compulsory: Education and Dispossession of Youth in a Prison School*, Sabrina Vaught also pushes back against the concept of a school-to-prison pipeline and shows how the boundaries between education and carceral systems are blurred. Vaught argues that the pipeline framework is problematic because it suggests that schools can still be redeemed or fixed—that absent the pipeline schools are still a social good. But schools, Vaught maintains, are not broken. They are functioning precisely as they should and were designed—to socialize marginalized children into the carceral logic of the state. In this sense, public education does not simply mirror, or provide a pathway to prison, it is “ideologically and materially coconstitutive” of prison.³³

Thus, strategies to revolutionize education must also be in dialogue with abolition. To this end, scholar Bettina Love’s *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* advances a pedagogy of abolition to transform education. Love incisively argues that schools are inherently violent to children of color and children with disabilities, and in order to truly achieve educational freedom, schools, teachers, and communities must be grounded in and committed to abolition. Abolitionist teaching, as Love describes it, understands the mechanisms that reproduce inequity in education, but centers the importance of dreaming, imagination, creativity, and joy in order to build structures that serve the most marginal. Love’s work not only helps me envision the necessary future of schooling, but it also pushed me to recognize the abolitionist demands and dreams that marginalized communities have articulated in the past. Abolitionist teaching requires solidarity, visionary thinking, and creativity in order to imagine healing and freedom in and outside of school. When viewed from the lens of abolitionist teaching and organizing, it’s clear that the Black and

³³ Sabrina Vaught. *Compulsory: Education and Dispossession of Youth in a Prison School*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2017) 2.

Chicano student movements of the late 1960s to transform schools in Los Angeles did just that: they provided a vision of schooling that was rooted in community power, affirmed community knowledge and expressed solidarity across racial lines. It also imagined a school system that served all students, free of enclosures, harsh disciplinary policies, and police presence.

The work of Freire, Sojoyner, Vaught, and Love shape the way I interpret the history of schooling in Los Angeles. Their collective scholarship has pushed me to significance of Board policy decisions in new ways and understand the evolving nature of school-police relationships in Los Angeles as one that is neither accidental nor an unintended consequence—it is intentional, by design, and consistent with the historical track record of racialized schooling. My dissertation contributes to this body of work by providing localized examination of the particular Board policies that paved the way for enclosure, onsite police, and mundane surveillance.

Black and Chicano Activism

Finally, another significant body of scholarship this dissertation is shaped by is the history of Black and Chicano activism, especially in the 1960s. The historiography on civil rights struggles of Chicano and African Americans has tended to treat these movements as separate and parallel struggles. For example, the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts have traditionally been analyzed and presented in scholarship, documentaries, and popular culture as a singularly Chicano affair. Doing so ignores the fact that predominantly Black high schools across the city were simultaneously walking out alongside their eastside counterparts. This dissertation pushes back against this interpretation of Black and Brown freedom struggles by highlighting the interconnected nature of activism in Los Angeles during this period—including during the school walkouts in the spring of 1968.

My analysis of the Black and Brown student rebellions of 1968 draws from recent scholarship that has tremendously contributed to this topic. In particular, I am influenced by Jeanne Theoharis, Gaye Theresa Johnson, Mike Davis and Jon Wiener. Theoharis's article "'W-A-L-K-O-U-T!': High School Studies and the Development of Black Power in Los Angeles," makes two important arguments. First, that high school students drove LA activism. High school and junior high students are an understudied part of activism in the 1960s and 1970s and are usually overlooked in favor of studying college and university students. By centering their importance to social movements, Theoharis provides a valuable corrective to the historiography.

Theoharis also argues that the walkouts at Black high schools were connected to the walkouts in Chicano high schools in 1968. These were not "secondary or sympathy strikes" they were protests bounded together by shared struggle.³⁴ This argument calls for a dramatic reimagining of how the history of Black LA, or Chicano LA is told. As Theoharis writes, "it disrupts the idea that the Black Power story," or the Chicano power story, "can be told apart from other histories of people of color in the city."³⁵

More recently, Davis and Wiener have reinforced Theoharis's interpretation of Black and Brown student activism in Los Angeles. In their monograph, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties*, Davis and Wiener argue that what makes LA's history of 1960s activism unique is the fact that it was led primarily by youth and the movements were multiracial. While colleges and universities were loci of activism across the country, in Los Angeles, "it was the junior and

³⁴ Jeanne Theoharis, "'W-A-L-K-O-U-T!': High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A." in Peniel Joseph, ed, *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 110.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 111.

senior high schools that were the principal battlefields and the majority of protestors were Black and brown.”³⁶

My analysis contributes to the work of Theoharis and Davis and Wiener by focusing on student demands in addition to their activism. Student demands equally reflected the multiracial milieu and orientation of the movements themselves and shows how activists sought to change a school system to benefit all in LAUSD, rather than the schools experiencing walkouts.

Moreover, we should not understand the Black and Brown student movements as unexpected or novel. According to Gaye Theresa Johnson, Los Angeles has a long history of solidarity and coalition building among Black and Mexican communities. Those solidarities have been formed by shared experiences of confinement, eviction, racialized policing and dispossession. But more importantly, Johnson argues that these shared struggles have also resulted in and inspired new collectivities and creative visions of the future—a process Johnson calls spatial entitlement. The student rebellions of 1968 are an example of spatial entitlement at work: shared grievances around schooling and enclosure pushed Black and Chicano students to organize around a politics of refusal and dreams of life-affirming, community-controlled education.

The work of these scholars helped me understand the 1968 student rebellions from a framework of solidarity and coalition. But this dissertation also advances the historiography in new and important ways. As mentioned previously, my analysis of the 1968 walkouts puts emphasis on the student demands that activists dreamed, compiled, and presented to the Board of Education. By analyzing the content of those student demands, this dissertation offers new avenues through which to view the appreciate the interconnected nature of student movements

³⁶ Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties*. (New York: Verso Books, 2020) 3.

during this period. It also helps to underscore the creativity and imagination of these young activists to imagine a type of schooling and practices that did not yet exist.

Furthermore, this dissertation contributes by merging this scholarship with carceral frameworks discussed earlier in this literature review. Doing so uncovers new points of analysis. For example, by examining the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts from the lens of enclosure, it uncovers the ways in which the Chicana educational experience has always been touched by confinement. The Blowouts, I argue, were more than a movement for educational reform and community control, it was a movement against enclosure. In addition to calling for culturally relevant curriculum, diverse faculty and staff, and community control, students were calling for an end to enclosure. By drawing attention to corporal punishment, confinement, fencing, and campus use of police, students were alerting the world to the blurring of boundaries between carceral and education systems. These demands have not received sufficient scholarly attention in the past. But by merging the literature of student activism with the literature of policing and carceral studies, it is clear that the students warned and foretold of enclosure in urban schools. Indeed, the significance of the demand for community control takes on new meaning when viewed from the lens of enclosure. My assessment of this seminal moment in Chicana history helps bring Chicana Studies into closer conversation with carceral studies, which moves the field in needed direction.

Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter explores demographic change in the postwar period and the impact these changes had on the public education system in Los Angeles. More specifically, this chapter explores how demographic change led to moral panics over juvenile delinquency and integration of schools, placing teachers and administrators

under increasing public scrutiny. This scrutiny pushed the Board of Education to pass the first district-wide comprehensive disciplinary policy, in the hopes of both demonstrating its commitment to cracking down on juvenile delinquency and providing a neutral set of rules for dealing with kids of various racial backgrounds. The disciplinary policy, I argue, was put in place, in part, to address existing and future racial tensions wrought by integrated campuses in a uniform and neutral fashion. However, it also signaled a new focus on issues of youth crime, campus order and safety, which would continue to be top concerns for LA schools in the years to come.

Chapter two examines the focus on safety and security in the wake of the Watts Rebellion in the summer of 1965. Prior to the uprising, LAUSD experienced heightened pressure and activism to address the problem of segregation in its schools. That pressure exposed the complicity of the Board of Education in perpetuating segregation through gerrymandered district lines and uneven allocation of funding. The crisis of the Watts uprising allowed LAUSD the opportunity to redirect public attention away from segregation, and towards building up campus security.

Chapter three re-examines the East Los Angeles Blowouts as part of a larger multiracial student rebellion in LA city schools. In this chapter, I situate this seminal moment in Chicano history within a larger context of Black and Chicano solidarity and coalition building that was occurring in both freedom movements. In addition, this chapter analyzes how shared experiences with educational enclosures—locked gates and restrooms, increased security, police patrols, and denial of adequate schooling—linked Black and Chicano educational experiences in Los Angeles and became the basis of a shared rebellion in the spring of 1968.

Similarly, chapter four examines how the shared nature of Black and Chicano student struggles informed student demands that activists presented to school administrators and the Board of Education. Previous analyses of the East Los Angeles Blowouts have focused on how student demands reflected Chicano student needs—such as bilingual education. This chapter explores how the student demands were truly universal in nature and stood to benefit all students in LAUSD by targeting the manifestations of enclosure on campuses. In doing so, the 1968 student demands were abolitionist and envisioned a better educational system that worked synergistically with the communities they served. The student demands argued that true safety was found in unity and rooted in community. Until schools met student demands, they would be unsafe places for students of color.

Finally, chapter 5 focuses on the response of schools in the aftermath of the student rebellions. In particular, this chapter analyzes the acceleration of enclosure through the expansion of security hardware, surveillance systems, and the expansion of police presence on school grounds. Through the use of truancy sweeps, undercover police programs, and eventually, the creation of a fully independent school police department, schools sacrificed students' rights to privacy in the name of safety and security. Moreover, schools became carceral institutions that education students in the logics of the carceral state through routine and mandatory surveillance.

Chapter 1

“The Price of Freedom is Discipline”³⁷: Anti-delinquency and Disciplinary Policy in LAUSD, 1945-1959

During the postwar years, Los Angeles’s public discourse was consumed with the issue of juvenile delinquency and misbehaving kids. The city’s youth were being seduced by crime and getting into trouble more than ever before, it seemed. Newspaper headlines captured the city’s fixation and quest for a solution. Some believed the rise in youth crime lay squarely on the shoulders of absentee and permissive parents. Others blamed comic books. Still others suspected public housing projects as the roots of deviant behavior—something police tacitly confirmed with the release of a report that stated that 40% of total juvenile investigation time for the Los Angeles Police Department occurred within public housing.³⁸

While a general consensus on the roots of youth crime and delinquency was next to impossible, many critics argued that schools were not doing enough to curb unwholesome behavior in kids. Highlighting the prevalence of this sentiment, the *Los Angeles Times* reported the results of a Gallup poll, which found that “[n]early two out of every three adults (65%)...said that they feel that discipline in most schools throughout the country today is not enough.”³⁹ Worse still, schools themselves *contributed* to the proliferation of youth crime by failing to properly discipline children who stepped out of line, or by overcrowding their classrooms—thereby fostering a culture of wanton permissiveness: “experts in youth problems believe the schools have a great opportunity to help combat the upsurge in juvenile delinquency. On the

³⁷ Robert E. G. Harris, “Schools to Stress Basic Training in Citizenship” *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1950. “The Price of Freedom Is Discipline” was the chosen theme for the 1950-1951 school year. This theme stressed cultivation of citizenship to “help young folks from kindergarten through junior college to understand freedom under authority.”

³⁸ Jack Howard, “Public Housing Projects and Juvenile Delinquency” *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1952.

³⁹ “Stricter Control in School Favored”, *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1954.

other hand, some observers point out that schools can cause delinquency by virtue of having become so overcrowded.”⁴⁰

The public’s fixation with school as a contributor to youth crime and delinquency influenced LAUSD to pass a comprehensive, district-wide disciplinary policy—the first of its kind nationwide. Codified on April 27, 1959 by LAUSD’s Laws and Rules Committee, the disciplinary code established a set of rules that would apply to all campuses and employees working in the sprawling 816.87 square miles covered by the district. By establishing this policy, the Board of Education aimed to accomplish several things: first, to create uniformity across disparate ends of the county dealing with unprecedented growth in student populations and crowded classrooms; second, to placate teacher concerns about workplace conditions, unruly students, and classroom safety; and third, to present a tough-on-crime image to a public concerned about juvenile delinquency and skeptical about the role of schools in this fight.

On the surface, LAUSD’s decision to produce a district-wide disciplinary code may seem mundane, part and parcel of ordinary operations of a major urban school district. However, between the lists of appropriate student conduct, standards of appearance, and beneath the language of behavioral management, lies the hidden discourse that produced this document. Embedded in this disciplinary code is a fraught negotiation between school administration, teachers, public agencies, and Angelenos over responsibility, crime prevention, and disciplinary philosophy. While the Board had fielded complaints from the public over youth crime for quite some time, the codification of a district-wide policy was the first substantive public effort undertaken by administration to address the problem. Until then, discussions over maladjusted youth, programming, and behavior control had largely been contained in memoranda through the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

district, communications between Board members and teacher union representatives, and conversations among teachers and their school administrators. Thus, much of the motivation to create a disciplinary code was rooted in a desire to prove to the public and teachers that Los Angeles Schools took the matter seriously and were doing their part in the city's effort to reduce juvenile delinquency and police wayward youth.

Furthermore, this policy represents more than a concerted effort to systematize discipline in Los Angeles schools. It is emblematic of its times. LAUSD's disciplinary policy and the years leading up to its drafting reflect the district's fraught management of racial politics and changing racial boundaries of the city. Schools in South LA and on the Eastside, areas that were hotspots of changing racial demography, became more and more diverse. As Los Angeles's Black and Mexican American populations increased, schools became the primary metaphor and battleground on which struggles over race and space were waged. The 1959 disciplinary policy, then, was LAUSD's strategy for navigating its role as the city's frontlines for changing racial politics and a growing moral panic around juvenile delinquency. At its core, the disciplinary code was an attempt to solve racial tensions in LA schools—particularly those campuses in racial borderlands—in a race neutral way. But as long as the public imagination projected deviancy on to Black and Brown bodies, the outcome of the disciplinary policy would never be neutral. In particular, the passage of the disciplinary policy is significant because it codified three key practices that would come to define the school experience for many students of color in the decades that followed: corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion, and the use of law enforcement in disciplinary matters.

Moreover, LAUSD's disciplinary policy signifies the formal entry of the schools into the city's War on Crime. As this chapter will show, the development of a disciplinary policy

paralleled and intersected with long standing efforts made by administrators to establish a working and cooperative relationship with law enforcement. The set of regulations released on April 27, 1959 permitted third party, specialist intervention in select disciplinary matters, which gave law enforcement an avenue into L.A. Schools; an avenue that would be exploited across campuses in South LA and the Eastside after the Watts uprising in August of 1965, and again in the student rebellions of 1967-1969. In so doing, the policy established by Los Angeles City Schools was symbolic of a larger phenomenon that was occurring nationally—the merger of public services and crime control. As Elizabeth Hinton detailed extensively in her book, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*, by the early 1960s, local, state, and federal policymakers steeped in theories of cultural pathology, increasingly viewed crime control as the cornerstone of social service work.

Consequently, policymakers created and funded urban programming which embraced punitive methods of social control and mandated closer working and collaborative relationships with law enforcement. This new strategy “forg[ed] a network of social service and surveillance programs...[which] provided a foundation for the rise of the carceral state.”⁴¹ Therefore, LAUSD’s disciplinary code dovetailed with federal efforts to combine the War on Poverty with the War on Crime, and, as a result, increased the level of surveillance and presence of law enforcement in the daily lives of children, particularly African American and Mexican American youth.

At the close of World War II, Los Angeles emerged as one of the premier cities to watch on the national radar. As a recipient of unparalleled federal and state spending in the form of Department of Defense contracts, FHA and HOLC housing loans, suburban real estate

⁴¹ Elizabeth Hinton *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. (Harvard University Press, 2016) 61.

development, and freeway construction funds, Los Angeles at mid-twentieth century could be summed up in one word: growth. This flood of federal and state investment sparked a demographic change so significant it would forever alter the racial composition of Los Angeles, giving lie to the notion of the city as a “white spot”—if it ever was one. But it was not for a lack of effort. Through residential segregation, employment discrimination, and police violence, Los Angeles maintained its *de facto* segregation into the postwar period, even in light of seemingly progressive reforms—such as *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which overturned racial housing covenants and school segregation respectively. Political, social, and economic efforts to achieve what scholars such as Alexander Saxton and Daniel Martinez HoSang have called a “genteel apartheid,” were aided by spatial restructuring that dispossessed, evicted, and redrew racial boundaries around the city—in the form of urban renewal projects, suburbanization, freeway construction, and the placement of Dodger Stadium on top of a vibrant Chavez Ravine.⁴²

Nevertheless, such containment strategies could not totally fence off the remarkable speed with which nonwhite populations grew. Los Angeles’s Mexican American population had rebounded from the brief decline it had experienced during the repatriation campaigns of the Great Depression, in which the city lost one third of its Mexican and Mexican American residents. But perhaps the most stunning transformation of all was the growth of Black Los Angeles. The African American population nearly tripled, from 63,774 in 1940 to 171,209 in 1950. Los Angeles’ demographic change was also coupled with a massive baby boom. Between

⁴² Daniel Martinez HoSang *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (University of California Press, 2010) 5. HoSang describes “genteel apartheid” as a set of informal and unspoken discriminatory practices that reinforce, naturalize, and reproduce racial hierarchies, and enable them to exist even as the legal edicts of apartheid are being dismantled. According to HoSang, “genteel apartheid” is more than just “open declarations of white supremacy” but rather an ideology and mode of “political reasoning and discourse that naturalized and reified specific ideas about race, subordination, and power” and infiltrated the political culture of California (7).

the years of 1940 and 1950, the city's population climbed from 1.5 million to 1.9 million. By 1960, that figure had reached 2.5 million. Still grappling with the aftermath of the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, and a renewed concern with juvenile delinquency, Los Angeles gave the rest of the country much to consider with ample examples of how to manage social problems such as racial tension and wayward youth.

A Relationship Long Desired: Demographic Change and the Path Towards a Disciplinary Code, 1945-1959

In many ways, the Los Angeles public school system mirrored the city's efforts to manage burgeoning diversity and minimize racial conflict. During the war years, Los Angeles City Schools experienced unprecedented enrollment figures. In response to rising student populations, LAUSD experienced teacher shortages and overcrowding. According to an educational survey conducted by the Board of Education in March of 1948, district teachers and staff felt the need for swift action on the part of administrators to accommodate for these dramatic changes: "due to the tremendous increase in population in Los Angeles, there is an unprecedented demand for education, and according to statistical information, the school enrollment will double in the next decade, and to provide for this phenomenal expansion in population, subsequent building, and expenditure of the taxpayers' money, we will need planning over a long period of time."⁴³ Fifteen years later, the school system increased to 762,423 enrolled, and the Board was estimating a rate of growth of 25,000 pupils per year⁴⁴. The Board wasted no time in relieving *some* of the overburdened facilities, and quickly began

⁴³ Emergency Communication to the Personnel and Schools Committee, March 22, 1948. In Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records (Collection 1923) UCLA Library of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, Box 232 (hereafter as Board of Education Records)

⁴⁴ "The One Who Doesn't Fit: The 'A' Pupil, A Survey of the Problems And Conditions Surrounding Him" Division of Secondary Education, Los Angeles City Schools, Spring 1965. Box 1335, Folder 1

acquiring real estate for new plant constructions, especially in the San Fernando Valley. Indeed, much like the larger processes of white flight and suburbanization occurring throughout the county, school construction projects followed white families and property values out of the city center and took their taxpayer, federal, and state funds with them.

Of course, these postwar trends in the school district did not bode well for the students left behind in areas such as South and East Los Angeles. While Board members were planning expansions and new developments in the Valley, classrooms in predominantly Black and Mexican American schools remained overcrowded, decrepit, and under-taught. For example, over a six period between 1945 and 1951, representatives and community members from Jefferson High school petitioned the Board of Education on at least five separate occasions for district investment of resources and overcrowding relief. Communications to the Board during this period include the following: requests for the construction of an indoor swimming pool to combat rising juvenile delinquency, opening the campus on Saturdays for school year continuation classes to “relieve the crowded condition in the regular day classes.”⁴⁵

The Board was reminded again, 7 years later, that despite the addition of a few bungalows, “the situation at Jefferson High School...is still one of overcrowded classrooms...we have not kept up with enrollment increase.”⁴⁶ That the issue of overcrowded conditions at Jefferson High School, a predominantly Black campus, persisted well into the next two decades, suggests that the Board’s funds for real estate expansion and plant development were not spent evenly across the geography of the county, or according to need.

⁴⁵ Communication to the Board from South Central Coordinating Council, May 8, 1947. In Board of Education Records, Box 225, Folder 5; Communication to the Board, “Opening of Saturday Compulsory Continuation Classes at Jefferson High School”, October 18, 1945. In Board of Education Records, Box 214, Folder 4.

⁴⁶ Communication to the Personnel and Schools Committee from the Division of Secondary Education, September 13, 1951. In Board of Education Records, Box 260.

In addition, it appears that the district viewed students in the urban core of the city as a particularly difficult population to manage. For example, in a 1948 survey, schools located in the East District and Central District, such as Garfield and Jefferson High School reported overwhelmed classrooms with “a large group of slow learners or low index pupils” and staff that needed “extra help to bring educational program up to desired standard.”⁴⁷ Being that Garfield and Jefferson were predominately nonwhite high schools, these comments reveal some of the attitudes of the Board staff that authored the report. The language and word choice that the Board used to categorize the students at these schools conveys an understanding of low-income Mexicans and African Americans as woefully deficient and poor-performing students.

This rationale dovetailed with emergent psychological and sociological theories regarding the poor and racialized groups at the time. Seeking to uncover the causal forces of crime, inequality, and endemic poverty, social scientists and policymakers looked towards culture as the wellspring for pathology and dysfunction—since biological and hereditary-based explanations had fallen into disrepute. Known as “social pathology”, this body of work posited that social and economic inequality was shaped by cultural deficiencies in a person’s community, environment, and home life, not by structural socioeconomic and political forces. Moreover, according to this framework, crime and delinquency were not only expressions of a person’s cultural deficiency—but also their psychological maladjustment. Some notable proponents of social pathology include FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and sociology-turned-presidential advisor Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Hoover viewed youth crime and delinquency through the lens of the postwar rise in broken homes. Similarly, Moynihan argued in his book, *The Negro Family*, that Black matriarchal homes with absentee fathers was the root of a self-perpetuating cycle of

⁴⁷ Board of Education Records, Box 232

dysfunction, a “tangle of pathology,” that kept Black families in poverty, and drove delinquency. According to Elizabeth Hinton, social pathology became the primary explanation for crime and poverty in communities of color, and shaped postwar policies at the local, state, and federal level. Social pathology “emerged as an intellectual framework through which policymakers launched major national urban intervention.”⁴⁸

Social pathology shaped the assessment of impoverished children and children of color in LAUSD. School staff assumed that parental neglect and cultural dysfunction produced antisocial behavior and emotional disturbances, especially in children, making them prone to truancy, aggressive behavior, and overall delinquency. Thus, the “slow learners” identified at schools like Garfield and Jefferson posed significant problems in terms of learning outcomes, behavior management, and disciplinary issues for the Board of Education. Explaining the unique burden of “A” pupils, or students with emotional, psychological, or learning challenges, the Board determined that:

“The majority of them are less apt academically. None of them are highly motivated to learn what the public school is teaching. Many are immature and emotionally disturbed. Only a few have high academic ability... ‘A’ pupils are the ones whose conduct makes them unfit for attendance in a regular school. They learn little. They keep others from learning. They consume a disproportionate amount of teachers’ and administrators’ time and energy. Therefore, in a regular school, their cost is high.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hinton, 31.

⁴⁹ “The One Who Doesn’t Fit: The ‘A’ Pupil, A Survey of the Problems And Conditions Surrounding Him” Board of Education Records, Box 232

For the Board, the preponderance of “low index pupils,” emotionally disturbed, or troubled youth was a direct result of Los Angeles’s demographic transformation in the war years. In other words, the increase of nonwhite student enrollment in Eastside and South Central schools also meant an increase in potential juvenile delinquency. Interestingly however, the Board avoided using racial categories in their writings and meetings on juvenile delinquents. In keeping with the postwar times, in which scientific racism and public displays of racism were no longer acceptable practice, the Board made an effort to deny that youth crime and maladjusted youth were specific to nonwhite populations: “We repeat—our lawlessness is not limited to ethnic groups, to countries, or economic status. It does seem to be allied with urbanized congestion and transiency.”⁵⁰ Instead, the Board used euphemisms such as urbanization and civil disobedience (no doubt a reference to the growing civil rights organizing of the postwar period) to explain the causes of juvenile delinquency, hinting at its nonwhite origins. These trends, the Board reasoned, had an adverse effect on impressionable youth and their relationship to authority,

“This report is interested in which changes affect the ‘A’ pupil. There seem to be at least two. Increased urbanization: This results in people being unknown and unidentified...Urbanization tends to lessen identity. It also adds to congestion and juvenile gregariousness. ‘Crowd’ conduct is dangerous, explosive, and unpredictable. Apparent civil disobedience and defiance: Among our social changes in recent years there have been actions which evidence disregard for certain laws and authority. The necessity or virtue of this is not being debated.

⁵⁰ Ibid

Young people, however, have less experience in judging necessity and virtue, and observing this, may tend to doubt all authority.”⁵¹

Thus, African American and Mexican American youth posed dilemmas for instruction, containment, and disciplinary matters. Board representatives, school officials, and teachers collectively viewed these students from a deficit framework: They were demanding to teach because of their low index aptitudes and problems with authority, and their phenomenal population growth strained district resources. This deficit-mindedness infiltrated the way that Board members handled students and enacted policy. By the time that LAUSD began drafting disciplinary rules and procedures, its authors viewed the “‘A’ pupil” through an implicit racialized lens, even if the official language was colorblind.

Nevertheless, growing numbers of nonwhite students on campuses in neighborhoods experiencing demographic shifts did provoke conflicts that required disciplinary action. According to historian Becky Nicolaides, white working-class neighborhoods, like South Gate, that were adjacent to racially mixed communities began tenaciously fighting the integration of their schools. Schools, like housing, are crucial institutions to a community’s character and identity. In the postwar white working-class suburbs, schools acted as a touchstone that “defined residents and their town, [and] they became objects of fierce protectionism.”⁵² Particularly for white residents in racial borderlands that could not flee from the growth of nonwhite populations in urban schools for the San Fernando Valley, schools became a contested terrain where racial politics was waged.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2002) 286.

Newspaper articles of the period suggest that tensions between white students and nonwhite students were a frequent occurrence, particularly in schools in racial borderlands. An article in the *Sentinel*, for example, described tensions between white, Jewish, and Mexican American children in Hollenbeck: “under these conditions this school suffers from an apparently insurmountable disciplinary problem. Fighting is common on the school grounds, in the halls, and even in the classrooms and the school is rated by Los Angeles school authorities as one of four major tinderboxes in the city school system.”⁵³ This article was one voice in a larger choir of public discourse concerned about schools, juvenile delinquency and lack of consistent discipline that painted LAUSD campuses as lawless environments. The solution to social disruption caused by racial integration had to be strict discipline.

Unrest erupted at Fremont High School a few months later. Located in South Los Angeles, Fremont High School was a school experiencing demographic transition. Though it had long been a predominantly white school serving Watts and South Gate, the community was becoming much more African American, and the school’s enrollment was beginning to reflect that. In the spring semester of 1947, six African American students enrolled at Fremont High—an unremarkable event, given that the students were residents of the district that Fremont served, and they were certainly not the first Black students on record. Principal H.S. Wood noted that while the population had always been small, Black students had “been in attendance at Fremont for years.”⁵⁴ What set the unrest off was an act of discipline. On March 16, 1947 two African American girls had been disciplined for “using improper language,”⁵⁵ and “disturbing the school

⁵³ “Opportunity Open to Schools to Ease Tension.” *Los Angeles Sentinel* January 16, 1947.

⁵⁴ “Fremont High Students Suspended for Picketing” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 18, 1947.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

and for unruly conduct.”⁵⁶ The next day, 300 white students picketed the school demanding that all Black students be expelled from Fremont High. The following morning, in an act of intimidation, an anonymous person prepared and hung an effigy on the school grounds. Eventually, the school officials summoned the police and the picketing gradually declined.

President Elliott of the Board of Education was quick to respond to the frenzy the incident had generated by reaffirming the city of the district’s liberal sensibilities, denouncing the effigy and stating that “this Board of Education has not tolerated and will not tolerate racial discrimination or segregation of students or citizens because of race, creed, or color.”⁵⁷ This defense obviously ignored recent history. The Board had persistently denied the existence of segregation in LAUSD, which contradicted the sentiment prevalent among African American and Mexican American community members. Many parents felt that schools played a direct role in stoking racial animosity by giving into white pressure. For example, the *Sentinel* noted that schools upheld “open polic[ies] of segregation” from the grade school to the junior college level, especially and most acutely in neighborhoods in racial borderlands. White resident pressure in Compton resulted in “the exclusion of graduates of the Watts school from Compton Junior College. In this way, the high school has been an instrument for increasing social distance...and exacerbating tensions.”⁵⁸

The unrest at Fremont only confirmed, on a very public level, what Black and Brown parents in LAUSD already knew; that schools helped to perpetuate genteel apartheid in the city. Though Principal Wood seemed surprised at the white student response to six Black children at

⁵⁶ Board of Education Records, Box 224, Folder 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ “Opportunity Open to Schools to Ease Tension.” *Los Angeles Sentinel* January 16, 1947.

Fremont, Eugenia Gamble and Nannie Carter, the two disciplined girls at the heart of the unrest, were certainly not and they blamed the school authorities for inertia. Gamble told the *Sentinel*: ““They waited so long to do anything about the situation in Fremont that they conditions became extreme.””⁵⁹ The mundane hostility that Black students faced at the school was a “well known fact.”⁶⁰ In the weeks following the episode of white rage at Fremont, other Black parents chimed in claiming that for years their children had been actively encouraged to transfer to Jefferson High School, a predominantly African American school nearby, where ““They would be happier.””⁶¹ These stories collectively rendered Board President Elliott’s statement empty and untrue. Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Fremont district specifically, tolerated discrimination and segregation of students and “had a hand in the business too.”⁶²

President Elliott’s statement was less of a warning to white racist antagonists than it was a defensive measure against racial liberals and radicals who had used this incident to launch critiques of the racial politics in LAUSD. In particular, the Board criticized “Communists” who accused the district of cultivating “Jim Crow” in the schools in a radio broadcast on KLAC. This is not surprising, given that communist organizations and fellow travelers had been quite active in civil rights struggles in Los Angeles during the postwar period; and the fact that LAUSD already had a fraught history with anticommunism, blacklisting teachers who were progressive or left leaning. In an effort to distract attention away from the LAUSD’s complicity in school segregation, the Board directed blame onto Communists for riling up community outrage. In addition, the Board also suggested that LA’s growing Black population was partly to blame for

⁵⁹ “Fremont Girls Tell Story on Sentinel Hour.” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 27, 1947.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “Fruit of Racist Tree” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 27, 1947

⁶² Ibid.

social conflicts in the schools. In the Board's response to public outrage over racists acts at Fremont High, they indicated that the influx of African Americans during the war years had contributed to the climate of racial tension:

“We have had a great many of the Negro people from the south who have come here during the war, who are not accustomed to the freedom and the privileges granted in this community. We likewise have had many white families come from areas in this country where there is racial discrimination practiced and where there are ‘Jim Crow’ laws. So long as these falsehoods charging racial discrimination in our schools are thus made, it is to be expected that some young people who have come recently to Los Angeles from these areas probably believe what they hear on the radio and what they read in pamphlets.”⁶³

However, the Board also backpedaled in an effort to remain neutral, noting that both white and Black transplants in Los Angeles were to blame for heightened racial tension at Fremont. Yet the comments linger on the accusations made on the radio—connecting the outrage and protest in response to the effigy to easily mislead youth, presumably African Americans, by “Communists.”

In the days following the Fremont incident, the Board considered statements from various representatives—the NAACP and teachers unions—for how best to proceed. The NAACP did not offer recommendations, but simply commended the Board for the way they addressed the situation. Harold Orr, President of the Los Angeles Federation of Teachers, Local 430 suggested that the Board develop a program on racial tolerance and intercultural relations and have it sent around to parents of students at Fremont High. While this suggestion might have promoted a

⁶³ Board of Education Records, Box 224, Folder 5

spirit of cooperation and kindness in the wake of racial conflict, it did not address the issue of student conduct and appropriate disciplinary procedures going forward. Namely, what was to be done regarding the 300 students who picketed the school grounds. Second, it did not acknowledge that the effigy hung in response to the protest was an act of school vandalism that had been carried out on the premises outside of school hours. It was in this context, that Edith M. Cook, recording secretary of the Los Angeles Federation of Teachers, Local 430 urged the Board to implement a plan for night watchmen to protect school grounds.⁶⁴ Therefore, the most effective and most neutral way to move forward, it would seem, was to tighten surveillance and develop disciplinary practices in the schools.

Strengthening discipline in schools was a measure that some Black parents supported. In the aftermath that of the Fremont unrest, Principal Wood suspended 300 white students who picketed and required individual conferences with students and their parents before they could be permitted to return to school. This was a measure that Black parents in the Fremont district approved of, and they commended school authorities for their “firmness.”⁶⁵ Challenging the prevalent tendency to link delinquency with nonwhite youth, Black parents’ call for firmness in school targeted the lack of discipline in white homes. Eugenia Gamble, for example, told the *Sentinel* that the actions of white students demonstrated “the failure of parents to teach democracy at home.”⁶⁶ Another article claimed that white students were only mimicking the racist bad behavior modeled by their parents: “kids who have been hearing that kind of talk at home for months were impressed by it.”⁶⁷ In doing so, Black parents argued that the ones who

⁶⁴ Board of Education Records, Box 224, Folder 6.

⁶⁵ “Fruit of Racist Tree” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 27, 1947

⁶⁶ “Fremont Girls Tell Story on Sentinel Hour.” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 27, 1947.

⁶⁷ “Fruit of Racist Tree”

needed disciplining were white students, and only a strict policy implemented in the schools could make up for failures in the home.

For LA schools, already the target of public scrutiny for their role in managing juvenile delinquency, the added pressure of integration and easing social tensions caused by growing diversity, drafting a system wide disciplinary policy seemed like the lodestar through the tempest. The Board had already begun developing a program that would accomplish this aim, and the first step was reaching out to other youth-serving public agencies such as the Los Angeles County Probation Department and Juvenile Court system. In April of 1945 the Board of Education met to approve a program that might help them establish a working relationship with these criminal justice entities. The Board drafted a proposal for a Youth Service Program, whose purpose was “to render a greater social and welfare service to the youth of our community.”⁶⁸ The program would consist of two components, remedial and preventive. The expressed focus of the remedial section was dedicated to school attendance issues. According to Board reports, a hallmark of juvenile delinquency was absenteeism, and the district had recorded a more than 50% increase in daily absenteeism. By April, the daily average absence of pupils was 20,937 for the 1944-1945 academic year. According to the Board, an effective approach towards tackling and controlling the high absentee average would require decentralizing the Attendance Services division of the district, by establishing six different geographic areas of need, and assigning Assistant Supervisors of Attendance to each of the identified areas. Assistant Supervisors of Attendance were expected to work closely with truant children to improve any remedial problems, promoting the “social readjustment of youths,” while at the same time closely scrutinizing the children to study the “factors responsible for children’s behavior problems,”

⁶⁸ Board of Education Records, Box 209 Folder 3.

thereby resolving the driving issues behind misbehavior “promptly and effectively at the source of their origin.”⁶⁹

In addition to working directly with children experiencing attendance problems, Assistant Supervisors of Attendance were tasked with collaborating and establishing working relationships with child welfare agencies and organizations, as well as with the Juvenile Court and Probation Department. The Board proposed that the Youth Service Program would enable “the building of a closer coordination of school services with those rendered by the police department, juvenile court, and other such welfare agencies” and make it “possible to bring about a relationship with the juvenile court and probation department long desired, but heretofore impossible.”⁷⁰ They envisioned the Assistant Supervisors of Attendance as “associate probation officers” in which they would initiate and monitor cases of children they referred to the juvenile court: “This means that the assistant supervisors of attendance now have complete control, jointly with the regular probation officers, of the action of young people placed on probation to them and consequently obtain immediate court action on those probation cases remanded to them.”⁷¹ This program had been conceived and planned for several months before the Board had met in April of 1945 to formalize it. As early as October 1944, the Board had begun hiring assistant supervisors of attendance. By the time they inaugurated the Youth Service Program, the Board employed a total of fifty-nine assistant supervisors.

It should be noted, however, that the Board intended to work closely with law enforcement with the aim of reducing the number of referrals to the Juvenile Court. Yet, despite

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid

its intentions, the Youth Service Program was just the first brick in a larger foundation that increased the presence of police on school grounds that would develop in the coming decades. Like later delinquency diversion efforts of the postwar period, the Youth Service Program began a system that routinized the information sharing between law enforcement and schools, and heightened surveillance of at-risk youth that ultimately increased the presence of the criminal justice system in their daily lives, rather than decreasing it. In doing so, LAUSD predated, and arguably modeled, a trend that would become the cornerstone of antidelinquency legislation and programs to come, such as The Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act of 1961, and President Johnson's War On Poverty legislation, that built in crime control as a core component of antipoverty⁷². These collaborative relationships established by the Youth Service Program were received warmly by public agencies and law enforcement alike, and the Board received numerous statements "from members of the Juvenile Court and Probation Office and from various other sources indicating appreciation of the improved services rendered by the Attendance Section."⁷³

Board members understood the urgency and necessity that changing demography placed on the development of a Youth Service Program. While the Youth Service Program and other antidelinquency measures attempted to solve racial conflict wrought by integration in a race neutral way, it was steeped in social science frameworks that pathologized students of color and their communities. In the formal proposal for the program, the Board highlighted the need to expand the program based on the arrival of new populations. In typical postwar fashion, the

⁷² For more on this topic, see Elizabeth Hinton *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*; and Alyosha Goldstein *Poverty in Common*

⁷³ Board of Education Records, Box 209, Folder 3.

Board avoided using specific racial categories—though it was very thinly veiled, and quite obvious which populations members had in mind:

“Another problem that cast itself upon the schools in certain areas of the city with suddenness and alarm was that of the influx of an out-of-state population bringing with it varying standards of living and educational attitudes. In numerous instances, this unprepared for impact has generated a racial strain and fermentation of major significance within certain schools and communities and a resultant increase of the demands upon the Attendance Section. There is no indication that this problem will be alleviated in the near future, and any decrease in the present staff of the Attendance Section is certain to handicap school administrators’ efforts to cope with the situation.”⁷⁴

This brief discussion regarding the pressures nonwhite youth placed on the Youth Service raises questions regarding the design of the program. Were delinquent youth of color this program’s reason for being, or did their population growth happen to coincide with the program’s conception? The answer to this question is unclear but based off of the prevailing assumptions of the day that linked criminality with poverty and cultural deficiency, the Board arguably already saw Black and Brown youth as maladjusted, and thus, the would-be primary participants in this program. The Youth Services Program helped to further reify the linkages between race and delinquency by establishing these cooperative networks with the criminal justice system. Therefore, what might have begun as an effort to be “colorblind” resulted in disciplinary practices that were anything but.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Following the trend established by the implementation of the Youth Service Program, the Board slowly continued to expand its arsenal of antidelinquency measures. In 1947, the Board began assigning assistant supervisors of attendance to the Truancy Detail of the Child Welfare and Attendance Branch. In a communication to the Board, the members of the Truancy Detail requested special badges to better reflect and communicate their empowered positions of authority to truant children. In their request, the attendance officers reported that they found it “difficult to quickly identify themselves to minors apprehended on the streets” and wanted to be able to “identify themselves as law enforcing agents.”⁷⁵ The Board granted their request and instructed the attendance officers to obtain their special badges from the Los Angeles Police Department, and adopted it as a resolution after the Los Angeles City Attorney ruled that members of the truancy detail were empowered to enforce compulsory education standards and entitled to carry badges under Section 52.32 of the Municipal Code of Los Angeles.

Despite these efforts, juvenile delinquency continued to preoccupy the public imagination in Los Angeles well into the 1950s. As the years rolled by, Angelenos voiced their dissatisfaction with Los Angeles City Schools to local newspapers, arguing that schools were not doing enough in the War on (Youth) Crime, and perhaps they might be contributing to the problem. For example, a 1949 article in the *Los Angeles Times* painted a portrait of a public school system in crisis. Schools, overwhelmed with steadily increasing enrollments could not keep up with demand, as they experienced teacher shortages and severely inadequate school housing. Clearly, the school system needed more money. However, the article continued, “the fact of the increased mass of students is used to explain away too many educational sins of omission...The

⁷⁵ Communication to the Board, January 30, 1947. In Board of Education Records, Box 224, Folder 1.

schools have surrendered to the students.”⁷⁶ Outnumbering teachers and staff, students had taken over schools, and the liberal values of “progressive teaching” created soft teachers incapable of managing a classroom. The educational sin, simply put, were modern teachers: “The disciplines of old-fashioned education have almost disappeared, and the teachers instead of ruling their students, seek to amuse them. They are ‘far more concerned with coddling the young minds committed to their charge than they were with strengthening and maturing those minds.’”⁷⁷

The ultra-progressive trend in teaching neglected the valuable task of character-building so crucial to a good education, critics maintained. Even worse, it helped to cultivate the spread of nefarious gang culture, intensifying youth violence and juvenile delinquency. Herbert Brooks wrote a letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times* imploring teachers to toughen up: “gang psychology and juvenile delinquency indicate a lack of self-determination...I appeal to the teachers to accept a larger share of the disciplinary burden in order to head off a worse ‘disillusioned generation.’”⁷⁸ Echoing this sentiment, a parent of an LAUSD child reported violence in her school and asserted that teachers and principals “should be allowed to use their fists. They should do so for their own dignity and safety of persons, for the salvage of public education, and for the sake of disciplined children.”⁷⁹ As a taxpayer, this parent resented that her child had to attend a school “ruled by wisecracking, malicious mischief-makers” maintained on her dime, and argued that schools were profiting by forcing recalcitrant students to be in class: “I’m sick and tired of helping foot the bill for these expensive schools—louvered-window

⁷⁶ “This is Public Schools Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1949.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Bamm McNutty, “Debate on Schools—Continued” *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 1950.

⁷⁹ “Gangs Running Some Schools, Mother Says” *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 1956.

playpens. Some parents know children are being kept in school to be counted as registered heads in order to get more State and Federal building funds. You can't expel an incorrigible student. It's as simple and heartbreaking as that."⁸⁰

As mentioned previously, it wasn't only white parents who were concerned about discipline in the schools. Black parents also felt that schools were not doing enough to maintain order and protect Black children, particularly those attending racially mixed campuses. Inasmuch as parents of misbehaving children were to blame, a casual survey conducted by the *Sentinel* found that many community members believed that "teachers should be equally responsible" for student conduct and discipline.⁸¹ While many were quick to preface that parents bore the primary responsibility for the actions of their children, schools and teachers could either reinforce or undermine student behavior with their commitment to discipline or lack thereof.

The critiques to ultra-progressive education and lack of discipline also come from prominent public officials. Municipal judge Roger A. Pfaff criticized schools' adherence to compulsory education laws that mandated attendance up to 18 years of age or graduation. At a luncheon in the Biltmore Hotel, Judge Pfaff railed against this law, arguing that "enforced education in many cases results in poor scholastic records, truancy, and delinquency."⁸² Rather than forcing delinquent students to stay in school, administrators should simply allow to drop out. Moreover, Judge Pfaff recommended that schools be granted greater authority to "properly discipline students," and adopt a program of punishment that would make some form of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Inquiring Reporter Column" *Los Angeles Sentinel* October 21, 1954.

⁸² "Judge Pfaff Maps Delinquency Fight" *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1955.

discipline “sure and certain.”⁸³ Simply put, schools needed to do more in disciplinary matters, and they should be empowered to do more.

On the other hand, teachers did not let indictments of their pedagogy go unchallenged. Some teachers defended the values of a progressive education and placed the blame on parents. One teacher felt compelled to write to the *LA Times* in protest, “having taught in the Los Angeles City Schools under both the regime of the three R’s and progressive education...I know whereof I speak...true obedience, respect for law and order must be in the training from the cradle. When father and mother make the home responsible and an example of good behavior...you won’t have to worry about education and you wont[sic] have to hound the teachers and the Board of Education.”⁸⁴

However, teachers were not a united front in this matter—some felt that the Board did not support them enough. One high school teacher wrote the editor of the *Times* in support of Judge Pfaff’s ideas. Delinquency and antisocial pupils had become a demoralizing problem for teachers who felt hamstrung by compulsory education laws and lack of disciplinary support that kept them from adequately managing their classrooms. He wrote that teachers “feel incapable of dealing firmly and intelligently with this situation largely because of the antagonistic attitudes of the parents and because of the compulsory attendance laws...I am urging Judge Pfaff to do everything in his power to secure the adoption of these proposals. I feel sure he has the support of a large percent of the Los Angeles teachers and administrators.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid; “Move on Parents Urged in Juvenile Crime Cases”, *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1956.

⁸⁴ “A Teacher Points to the Parents” *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1950.

⁸⁵ “Pfaff Program” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1955.

Ultimately, the debate about the role of schools in managing juvenile delinquency placed considerable burden and public spotlight on teachers to solve social problems they felt ill-equipped to manage. The phenomenal demographic change in LA schools—increased racial and ethnic diversity and the overall population growth driven by the baby boom—simply overwhelmed teachers. Public discourse, fueled by the moral panic over youth crime, demanded that teachers get tough. However, rather than shoulder the burden in managing disciplinary issues, teachers pushed the Board of Education to systematize discipline in a way that would relinquish teacher discretion and relieve some of the pressure. The policy that followed continued in the direction of the Youth Services Program and formalized practices that would come to be used disproportionately on students of color in the following decades.

Discipline in the Los Angeles City Schools, 1959-1965

On May 16, 1957, Robert Haley, President of the Los Angeles Elementary Teachers Club came before the Board of Education and presented Ruth Copeland, Chairwoman of the Elementary Needs Committee. Copeland addressed the Board and outlined a study conducted by elementary and secondary school teachers for the past several months on the issue of discipline in LA schools. This study was an outgrowth of a demand by teachers that the Board make a thorough review of the subject of school discipline on November 8, 1956. The Board responded by requesting that associate superintendents organize a research committee of teachers and administrators to study the problem. The research group determined that across the district, teachers needed a specific policy and procedure to follow regarding student conduct and discipline. Upon this recommendation, the Superintendent of Schools appointed a Joint Discipline Committee to discuss how to revise sections of the Administrative Guide and incorporate teacher needs and community concerns.

With the exception of the Youth Service Program implemented twelve years prior, the Board had been largely unresponsive on the issue of juvenile delinquency and discipline. Given that teachers were experiencing targeted vitriol in the press and shouldering much of the blame regarding youth crime and discipline, it was time the Board take action and claim a degree of responsibility in the matter. That the Board was appointing committees dedicated to revising and amending the Administrative Guide signaled an important shift in LAUSD.

On April 27, 1959, the Board revealed a district-wide disciplinary policy, the first of its kind in the nation. The policy was the result of a year's worth of meetings between the Laws and Rules Committee of the Superintendent's office, staff members of the Board, and the Disciplinary Study Committee that had organized Copeland's presentation. It was collaborative three-fold effort. Paul Burke, of the Laws and Rules Committee hailed the disciplinary code as "possibly the most important reform in public school administration that has occurred in the United States in the last twenty years."⁸⁶ More importantly, the disciplinary policy formalized three specific practices that, overtime, were disproportionately used to punish students of color, such as corporal punishment, suspensions and expulsions, and use of law enforcement on campus.

The 1959 disciplinary policy was in dialogue with and reflected community concerns regarding discipline in the schools. For example, the first item the disciplinary code established were the appropriate rules surrounding corporal punishment. Heeding public concerns that extreme matters called for harsher measures, the code allowed the administering of corporal punishment "to recalcitrant students who are not amenable to other milder forms of discipline." Of course, this stipulation should be exercised with restraint, as "shaking a child, striking him on

⁸⁶ Board of Education Records, Box 328.

the head, slapping his face, boxing his ears, and similar means of inflicting physical pain, are strictly prohibited.”⁸⁷ While this provision restricted any kind of corporal punishment that might irrevocably injure the “physical well-being” of a child, it seemed to allow practices such as spanking.

As the disciplinary code suggests, corporal punishment was instituted as a last resort measure, to be used on a pupil only if other tactics had failed. However, evidence suggests that corporal punishment was not uniformly used across LAUSD in the same way, and that students of color experienced corporal punishment on a much more routine basis, for minor offenses, than other students in whiter and wealthier districts. For example, by the mid-to-late 1960s Mexican American students in Eastside schools complained of excessive corporal punishment for something so small as speaking Spanish on campus. Recalling his time as an instructor at Lincoln High School in the early 1960s, Sal Castro remembered that corporal punishment was selectively used against Mexican students in particular: “The vice principal swatted the boys—and hard. He used a paddle with holes in it so that it wasn’t air resistant and he could swing better and harder. I used to hear the whacks all the way down the hall. But the administration discriminated in handing out such punishment. I never heard of a white or Asian kid being swatted, only the Mexicans.”⁸⁸ The policy of corporal punishment might have been racially neutral in its inception. However, in practice, as Castro’s memory shows us, the policy was inextricably bound with ideas of deviancy imbued with racism. The use of corporal punishment to discipline nonwhite students was so ubiquitous that Black and Brown students collectively called for its abolition just 9 years after the release of the disciplinary code.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro. *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 125.

In addition, the disciplinary code formalized the practice of student removal through suspensions and expulsions. Like corporal punishment, suspensions and expulsions were practices that schools used well before 1959 to deal with problem students, the 1959 policy simply attached rules and procedures on a county-wide basis. Suspension and expulsion policies in the disciplinary code was rooted in the desire to address teacher and community demands to get tough on youth. First, it expanded the grounds for suspensions and expulsions. According to the code, suspensions could include continued willful disobedience, persistent defiance of the authority of the teacher, profanity, smoking or possessing tobacco, use, sale, or possession of narcotics, vandalism, stealing, possession or sale of alcohol, membership in a fraternity/sorority or club prohibited by the Board, hazing, habitual truancy, and “relieving tensions in the student body.”⁸⁹ Suspensions were not to exceed two weeks’ time. Relatedly, the disciplinary code allowed a student to be expelled for any of the same infractions that were grounds for suspension, listed above. However, expulsions could not be performed without submitting the case to the Board of Education for review.

Perhaps more than any other disciplinary measure, the use of school suspensions became the most commonly used regulation in the disciplinary code within the last 40 years. The “willful disobedience” clause of the suspension/expulsion policy has been the most frequently used justification for suspending or expelling a student, precisely because the infraction was so broad, subjective, and undefined. As chapter 4 discusses, schools serving Black and Mexican American students were notorious for using suspensions arbitrarily and without explanation. Students were summarily sent home without notifying parents of the reasons, nor evidence for the grounds of suspension, nor a date for returning to campus. When Black and Brown students rebelled in

⁸⁹ Board of Education Records, Box 328.

1968, one of their key demands to the Board of Education was a re-evaluation and revision of suspension rules with community input and agreement. Students also mandated that all suspensions be documented and explained in full, in more than one language, and provided to students' parents and guardians.

Despite their efforts, suspension and expulsions remained the cornerstone of school discipline after 1968. Across the state of California, "willful disobedience" has been grounds for 54% of all suspensions and 25% of all expulsions.⁹⁰ In particular, this subjective infraction has been overused to disproportionately punish Black children, who make up 19% of all "willful disobedience" suspensions, but only 6.5% of the state's students.⁹¹ In 2013, the Los Angeles Board of Education voted 5-2 to ban suspensions on the basis of "willful disobedience" in response to activist calls for a dismantling of zero-tolerance disciplinary policy.

Another important impact the disciplinary code had was on the issue of attendance. The disciplinary code acknowledged long standing critiques launched by Angelenos and relaxed the compulsory attendance laws. In effect, this allowed students as young as sixteen years of age to drop out if they could "no longer profit from instruction or...be made to profit from it."⁹² This relaxation of compulsory attendance laws marked the beginning of a trend towards pushing unwanted and difficult students, particularly students of color out of public education. In education studies today, the term "pushout" is used to describe the ways in which schools, as institutions, work to convince marginalized and underrepresented students they have no place in education and structurally encourage them to drop out. In a 2011 qualitative study conducted by

⁹⁰ Susan Frey "LAUSD will no longer suspend students for 'willful defiance'" *EdSource*, May 15, 2013.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Board of Education Records, Box 328.

scholar Eve Tuck, students reported their interactions with schools as a series of humiliating and experiences that deny them dignity, that “(1) some schools implicitly teach students they are not cut out for school; (2) students struggle to sustain their spaces where no one seems to want to be; (3) poor students, students of color, and undocumented students are especially unwelcome in some schools.”⁹³ Relaxing the compulsory attendance law to 16 years of age facilitated the pushout of thousands of vulnerable students. Just a few years after the 1959 policy was passed, predominantly Black and Mexican American schools in East Los Angeles and South Central Los Angeles led the county in dropout rates, with schools like Garfield High School where nearly 60% of students did not graduate.⁹⁴

Furthermore, LAUSD’s disciplinary code also established a practice of cooperation with law enforcement. For example, Administrative Regulation 2265-2 enabled a deviance documentation program intended to, among other things, facilitate the sharing of student information with public agencies and law enforcement, as well as provide evidentiary support that would aid in the suspension and expulsion process. Similarly, Administrative Regulation 2265-4 opened up LA City Schools for third party intervention in extreme disciplinary matters. Though the language of the regulation is broad, it allowed “classified personnel” to “assume responsibility and authority for proper and adequate control of pupils only in those instances and areas specifically assigned by the principal.”⁹⁵ The category “classified personnel” allowed administrators discretion to determine which entity reach out to depending on the situation at hand, and could accommodate a range of figures—from social workers, psychologists, probation officers, or juvenile court

⁹³ Eve Tuck, “Humiliating Ironies and Dangerous Dignities: The Dialectic of School Pushout” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (24) 7, 817-827, December 2011, 819.

⁹⁴ Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro. *Blowout!*, 119.

⁹⁵ Board of Education Records, Box 328.

representatives, or law enforcement. This regulation made it more likely that students of color who were deemed maladjusted or delinquent by their schools would encounter law enforcement as part of their disciplinary experience.

In 1959, Los Angeles codified these practices into the disciplinary policy in the hopes of managing the changing racial boundaries of Los Angeles and the concurrent moral panic on juvenile delinquency. By relying on an ostensibly race neutral policy, the Board hoped to distance itself from accusations that it cultivated an informal system of segregation in the schools. In the end, the disciplinary code reinforced what students of color must have already known—school officials, the criminal justice system, and the greater public viewed them as “slow learners,” “maladjusted,” and violent, who took up valuable instructional time and taxpayer funds.

In a 1963 revision to the disciplinary code, the district sharpened its punitive stance and added new sections to the policy. For example, the 1963 revision added an “Additional Ways and Means of Assisting Divergent Youth” section that outlined what teachers and administrators could do to handle “those children who, because of adjustment problems, do not perform satisfactorily in a comprehensive school program.”⁹⁶ Of particular interest was the inclusion of a “Special Services” procedure for teachers and administrators to consult, and offered them several options. First, school staff could file a petition or request for legal action in the Juvenile Court on behalf of any minor who was “habitually truant” or “habitually insubordinate or disorderly.” Second, teachers and administrators could consider action against parents or legal guardians of divergent children, which would be referred to the City Attorney. Finally, the section offered a “Central Juvenile Index (CJI)” which archived files of delinquent or “near-delinquent behavior”

⁹⁶ Board of Education Records, Box 1335, Folder 1.

of minors in a centralized location. The CJI housed reports made not only by school personnel but also law enforcement agencies that apprehended youth and could be made accessible to both entities.

Conclusion

In 1950, Superintendent of Schools Alexander J. Stoddard addressed the 10th District Congress of Parents and Teachers, requesting more money to aid the fight against juvenile delinquency. In order for education to do an effective job, schools needed funds to reduce teacher load. Nevertheless, teachers and parents should remain assured that schools were making every effort to incorporate the values of discipline into instruction: “schools are trying to teach students that freedom does not and never did have any other price than discipline.”⁹⁷

While LAUSD had been making steps toward building a closer relationship to law enforcement and criminal justice institutions since 1945, the establishment of the 1959 disciplinary code marked the full, district-wide, entry of the schools into the city’s War on Crime. By avoiding the use of specific racial categories, the Board attempted to make the disciplinary code a race neutral document that would promote uniformity and consistency across the sprawling boundaries of the district. In doing so, perhaps the Board genuinely believed they were not only doing their part in cracking down on delinquency and placating vociferous critics, but also ensuring the creation of an efficient and colorblind system that would eventually ease racial tensions and promote safety in LA City Schools. Nevertheless, longstanding connections between criminality, race, and poverty contoured school personnel assumptions about who was a delinquent, and which kinds of students posed a threat to safety. In the final analysis, the structures and practices codified by the Board in 1959 paved the way for the processes of

⁹⁷ Norma Goodhue, “Teacher Load Reduction Urged for Effective Job of Education”, *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1950.

enclosure in public schools following the Watts uprising, that would result in outcomes that were anything but race neutral. In fact, as the next chapter will show, the Watts uprising pushed the issue of juvenile delinquency to take on an intensified, and much more profound social meaning.

Chapter 2

Progress and Security: Integration, Urban Rebellions, and Campus Safety, 1962-1967

“Before our trouble, I thought our school was ideal as far as race relations were concerned. But when our time came—it really came,” John McGrew reflected candidly at the California Secondary School Administrators annual conference in downtown Los Angeles’s Statler Hilton hotel. John F. McGrew had been principal of Duarte High School in Northeast Los Angeles County, when the school erupted in brawls between black and white students in April of 1966. According to McGrew, the violence began with a textbook being hurled in a cafeteria and resulted in at least four separate fights on school grounds. Principal McGrew had closed the school down, and required the assistance of seventeen Sheriff’s units, six California Highway Patrol officers, and seven local police units to break up the melee and restore order to the campus.⁹⁸

Speaking one year later at the downtown conference, McGrew—who had since left his position as Principal of Duarte High School and was now director of instructional services for the Glendora High School district—had some advice for his fellow school administrators in attendance: prepare for disorder. “It sounds terrible,” McGrew admitted, “but a school must have a riot policy.”⁹⁹ John A Venable, Principal of John Muir High School in Pasadena echoed McGrew’s warning. Venable stressed that in addition to preparing for racial tensions, schools needed to have established protocols and lines of communication with law enforcement, noting

⁹⁸ *Los Angeles Times* “Schools Warned to Prepare for Racial Strife”; “Police Quell Fighting that Closed Duarte High School”

⁹⁹ “Schools Warned to Prepare for Racial Strife”

that he had “trained his instructors in ‘student demonstration control’ and established ‘assistance procedures’ with Pasadena police.”¹⁰⁰

The fact that Principal McGrew had dashed hopes for racial harmony at his school and was commiserating with fellow administrators lamenting campus disorder and the need for a riot policy is quite telling. Duarte High School, nestled in the suburban foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, was a predominantly white campus at the time of its disturbance. Of 1,300 students enrolled, only 140 were black, 50 were Mexican American.¹⁰¹ Twenty-nine miles away in Watts, predominantly nonwhite schools, such as Jordan High School, nearly 99% black, could make no mistake of the reality of race relations before them because it was painfully clear. Just one mile from Jordan High School, and a world of funding away, was South Gate High School, approximately 97% white and jealously guarded by students and parents that fought integration by any means necessary.

The longstanding effects of L.A.’s peculiar brand of segregation had produced separate and highly unequal schools that were accompanied by denials that intentional and deliberate segregation existed. According to Board of Education members, the city’s racially imbalanced schools were the result of natural and inevitable—and thus, incurable—residential patterns and urban sprawl. It was out of the district’s hands. Although the city’s massive size certainly created a unique geography of segregation, the claims of naturalness were not singular. Such arguments were typical of a state-wide political and racial ideology that upheld racial hierarchies in quotidian life while seeming to denounce them legislatively. In this arrangement, Californians could reify white supremacy and racial domination through race-neutral policies, and still claim

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ “Police Quell Fighting”

racial innocence—as seen in Californian’s overwhelming support for Proposition 14 which overturned the 1963 Rumsfeld Fair Housing Act. Influenced by the work of historian Alexander Saxton, scholar Daniel Martinez HoSang has called this phenomenon “genteel apartheid.”¹⁰² This under-the-surface, implicit, and genteel apartheid naturalized racial disparities and racial isolation which allowed figures like Principal McGrew to employ racial innocence and make tone-deaf comments about an ephemeral attempt at racial harmony in the suburbs, without acknowledging the legal, political, and social acrimony that integration efforts had previously produced.

More importantly, California’s genteel apartheid cultivated a political culture that allowed for progress and racism to not only coexist but also mutually reinforce one another. As Daniel Martinez HoSang explains in *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*, racism is “a dynamic and evolving force” that can be nourished by progress, rather than eliminated by it. Which is why, even as Los Angeles Unified School District acknowledged the moral and legal right of nonwhite children to attend racially integrated equitable schools, it denied having the power to undo “natural,” district-wide residential segregation.¹⁰³

Furthermore, Los Angeles’s history of segregation and racial isolation created perceptions of nonwhite students as an especially difficult population in need of extra district resources at best, and stricter disciplinary control at worst. As discussed in the previous chapter, the juvenile delinquency fear of the 1950s had linked Black and Mexican American youth to criminality, laziness, and emotional maladjustment. In response to unprecedented demographic

¹⁰² Daniel HoSang Martinez *Racial Propositions*, 2.

¹⁰³ Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 2.

change in LA City Schools, discussions about delinquency, youth crime, and emotionally disturbed children became racially coded dog whistles that motivated parents, media, and teachers to pressure the Board to pass a district-wide disciplinary policy in 1959. In keeping with California's brand of genteel apartheid, the imagery and rhetoric of the delinquent narrowly avoided specific racial categories but the assumptions were always already racialized. The disciplinary policy not only systematized disciplinary procedure across the district but empowered third party agencies and specialists to get involved in disciplinary matters and relaxed the compulsory attendance age requirement to facilitate the push out of "unmotivated" students. The disciplinary policy helped lay the foundation for a shift in culture in the district that increasingly embraced punishment, just as non-white students were reaching critical numbers in the student population. The disciplinary policy reminded students that the price of freedom is discipline.

1965, however marked a significant turning point for Los Angeles City Schools. The Watts rebellion in August, and the investigative report that followed, crystallized Los Angeles's segregated educational crisis for the world to see: underfunded schools, overcrowded classrooms, decrepit infrastructure, overwhelmed teachers, poor student retention. In between bouts of self-congratulatory praise on the district's response to the Watts rebellion, superintendent Jack P. Crowther told the McCone Commission that one of the primary challenges facing predominantly black schools was not segregation, but discipline. "On the part of our staff, where they feel that they are being subjected to unreasonable pressures on the part of youngsters. And it may be, as I say, the heat. It could be a lot of other things. But, this is one of

our real great concerns right now... The discipline is more difficult within the schools. We are finding that more of our teachers are being subjected to even bodily pressures.”¹⁰⁴

As this testimony makes clear, the issue of discipline was highly specific—despite earlier claims by the Board of Education that troublemakers, delinquency, and youth crime were universal, and not linked to any racial group. The Watts uprising of 1965 confirmed the dog whistle of the previous decade and seemingly validated white Angeleno fears of unruly, violent Black and Brown children. The uprising and its aftermath accelerated the trajectory towards law and order in the schools that had begun in 1959.

At the end of the decade, LA schools were more segregated than they had ever been and experiencing a security crisis. A combination of civil rights organizing, movements for desegregation, and urban rebellions pushed the Board of Education to prioritize safety and security. In the process, this contestation over rights and access had recast the meaning of public schools as sites of containment. By examining how school administrators sought to manage social upheaval and political turmoil, it is evident that school administrators were willing to endorse the spirit of progress inherent in postwar liberalism through platitudes of equal access, rights, and opportunity, so long as these ideals did not interfere with order or security. Studying the evolution security and discipline in LAUSD in the 1960s makes clear that the 1965 Watts uprising marks a clear before and after point in the larger history of policing in public schools. The 1959 disciplinary policy attempted to solve delinquency and social tensions through a uniform set of rules. Post-1965, it became clear to Board members, school officials, and teachers alike that the issue of campus safety, student conduct and discipline was much more narrow issue that fell along the county’s racial fault lines. More importantly, by increasing security agents,

¹⁰⁴ Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965 Vol. VI, 39.

surveillance, and adopting the post-Watts language of safety and security, schools became sites that not only policed the behavior of children, but also assisted in the criminalization of entire communities and neighborhoods. One of the most significant outcomes of these changes in discipline and security in schools was that Black and Brown communities became further dispossessed of their neighborhood schools.

Accidental Segregation: Racial Innocence and the Myth of De Facto Segregation

California's genteel apartheid in public schooling has a complex and long history, as old as the state itself. In 1874, twenty-two years before *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Justice C.J. Wallace of the California Supreme Court ruled in *Ward v. Flood* that the state could not legally deny African American children access to education, but it could support separate schools for them "where separate schools are actually maintained."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Wallace clarified, where separate schools were not maintained, or in communities with less than 10 black children, African Americans had the legal right to attend white schools. The next year, the Wallace decision was challenged, and the practice of separate schools for blacks was abolished by school boards in San Francisco, Vallejo, Sacramento, and Oakland. Despite this blow to *de jure* segregation for African Americans, many were ambivalent about the motivations for amending the education code. As Charles Wollenberg argues, the decision to by school boards to close African American schools probably had more to do with financial reasons than a desire for racial justice: "The 1870's were a time of economic depression and high unemployment, and many voters objected to paying taxes for separate 'colored schools' when there were plenty of vacant desks in...regular institutions."¹⁰⁶ By 1880, all mention of separate schools for African

¹⁰⁵ Charles Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed*, 23.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 26.

Americans were wiped from the education code, but the doctrine of separate but equal survived, as the 1880 statute was amended to include separate schools for Native American children, and children of Japanese, Chinese, or Mongolian parentage, through sections 8003 and 8004 of the education code. Though Mexican American children were not explicitly named, they were sometimes grouped into the Native American category or segregated on the basis of language. While several legal challenges to the education code would continue to arise, separate but equal remained on the books for indigenous peoples and Asian Americans for the next 67 years. In 1947, the *Mendez v. Westminster* case, which was decided in the California federal court, was leveraged to persuade Governor Earl Warren to repeal sections 8003 and 8004, striking the fatal blow to *de jure* segregation in California.

Though the *Mendez* decision was a remarkable achievement, many critics believed the case did not go far enough. The legal team representing the Mendez family maintained that the Westminster School District had violated the state's educational code when it segregated Gonzalo Mendez's children on two fronts: first, because Mexicans were never specifically targeted by sections 8003 and 8004; and second, because persons of Mexican origin were racially white. In fact, both sides of the case agreed "at the outset of the trial that 'race discrimination was not at issue."¹⁰⁷ Thus, the *Mendez* case left *Plessy* and the question of California's *de jure* segregation intact. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the decision to eventually repeal the separate but equal sections of the education code was influenced by foreign policy concerns, such as the Good Neighbor Policy with Latin America, rather than a

¹⁰⁷ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed* 79.

commitment to social justice and educational equity.¹⁰⁸ On the heels of the case, Senator Herbert Slater of the senate Committee on Education worried that continued segregation would be harmful to American influence abroad: “I personally do not see how we can carry out the spirit of the United Nations if we deny fundamental rights to our Latin American neighbors.”¹⁰⁹

For our purposes, this longer history in the struggle against *de jure* segregation is instructive for several reasons. First, it underscores the willingness of the state to seriously consider integration of public schools particularly when it was politically or economically expedient. Second, it demonstrates the cohesiveness of progress and racism in California’s genteel apartheid. Even as the state dismantled its legal architecture for school segregation, cities like Los Angeles used tactics such as gerrymandered school attendance zones, skewed funding schemas, neighborhood patterns and residential segregation to naturalize and maintain highly segregated schools, and then claim racial innocence because formal segregation had been outlawed. By 1970, 90 percent of African American students in Los Angeles attended a predominantly black school, and two-thirds of Mexican American students attended a predominantly Mexican school. Statewide, more Mexican American children attended segregated schools than they had before the *Mendez* decision in 1947.¹¹⁰

The fact that Los Angeles schools were becoming increasingly segregated after the decline of *de jure* segregation was not lost on the city’s nonwhite populations. But, for a time in the early 1960s, civil rights organizing for integration had energy and momentum, and there were reasons to be optimistic. In 1962, the California State Board of Education adopted a series of

¹⁰⁸ For more on the topic of Cold War foreign politics and domestic civil rights, see Mark Brilliant “Segregation as Applied to Mexican Americans” in *The Color of America Has Changed* and Mary L. Dudziak “Brown as a Cold War Case” *Journal of American History*, Vol 91, Issue 1, June 1, 2004 (32-42).

¹⁰⁹ Brilliant, 83.

¹¹⁰ Wollenberg, 134.

administrative directives urging school districts to eliminate racial imbalances wherever they existed. In June of 1963, the California Supreme Court ruled that the Pasadena school district had gerrymandered attendance boundaries “for the purposes of instituting, maintaining, and intensifying racial segregation.”¹¹¹ In the process, the court condemned *de facto* segregation, stating “residential segregation is itself an evil...The right to equal opportunity for education and the harmful consequences of segregation require that school boards take steps, insofar as reasonably feasible, to alleviate racial imbalance in schools regardless of its cause.”¹¹²

That same month, Black and Mexican American activists in Los Angeles applied pressure on the school board to do something about the inferior conditions in the city’s nonwhite segregated schools. Marnesba Tackett, head of the Education Committee of the United Civil Rights Council recalls “The first step we took was to relieve the overcrowded conditions in our schools. We had Manchester [Elementary] Avenue school, which had double sessions from first grade through the sixth grade...[children] would never have a full day of education”, yet she counted as many as 400 schools across West Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley with empty classrooms.¹¹³ Tackett’s demands also included a revision of attendance zones, more nonwhite teaching staff, and, perhaps the most controversial of all, a busing plan to transport minority students to under-enrolled white schools. Tackett’s efforts were part of a larger chorus of voices pressuring the Los Angeles Board to desegregate, which included organizations such as the ACLU, NAACP, and CORE. In one major demonstration, approximately 1,000 protestors

¹¹¹ Ibid 142.

¹¹² *Jackson v. Pasadena* in Wollenberg, 142.

¹¹³ Marnesba Tackett, Interview Tape #IV Side 1, March 26, 1984. UCLA Center for Oral History.

marched downtown to the LAUSD headquarters and filled a Board meeting where they were met with halfhearted promises that the matter would be studied by an ad-hoc committee.

Yet repeated mobilizations, petitions, correspondence, and formal addresses to the Board demanding integration of city schools went largely unheeded. According to John Caughey, a UCLA professor and activist in the desegregation movement, the Board's "knee-jerk reaction to the charge of segregation" was largely one of racial innocence: "If minority teachers and pupils were not distributed evenly throughout the district schools, the reasons...were beneath and beyond the school district policy makers," and the board would certainly not pursue a costly busing program.¹¹⁴

However, these claims of racial innocence flew in the face of policies implemented by the Board that nourished and sustained segregated attendance zones and unequal schools. For example, the funding schemas for campus maintenance favored school plants with higher square footage, ensuring that newer and more spacious schools in the San Fernando Valley received more money than campuses in the urban core.¹¹⁵ Such policies systematically ensured the reproduction of inequality across the district. Moreover, a simple redrawing of attendance zones could have cost less money than a citywide busing plan and gone much further towards addressing the demands outlined by Tackett and other civil rights organizers at the time: "I can recall in the Wilshire-Olympic corridor where if the line had simply been drawn east and west instead of north and south, they would have integrated the schools in that area automatically. In the southern area, there were places down toward Carson where if they simply had drawn the

¹¹⁴ John Caughey and LaRee Caughey, *To Kill A Child's Spirit: The Tragedy of School Segregation in Los Angeles*, 16.

¹¹⁵ Martinez HoSang, 95.

lines a little differently, we would have integrated those schools. There was so much resistance there...”¹¹⁶ Perhaps the most famous and egregious case of gerrymandered attendance zones was that which separated Jordan High School in Watts and South Gate High School, less than a mile apart, one markedly better kept and better funded than the other. This particular boundary rose to national spotlight when the ACLU filed its desegregation lawsuit against LAUSD, *Crawford v. Board of Education* in August of 1963—a case that would take nearly two decades to resolve.

Of course, in gerrymandering school boundaries and allocating uneven resources, the school board was not acting alone. As scholars such as Becky Nicolaides have demonstrated, white suburban parents, homeowners, and realtors played a crucial role in persuading and lobbying school districts to remain racially exclusive. In South Gate, for example, Floyd Wakefield organized a countermovement known as the South Gate Education Committee to protect the rights of suburban white children, from so-called “forced integration”¹¹⁷. Still, LAUSD continued to tout its colorblind policies, denying involvement in the creation of racial imbalances in the schools—to which, Tackett retorted: “you are accidentally spending over a million dollars to accidentally rebuild Jordan in its same location. Hence it will accidentally remain a segregated school. You have accidentally bought two new school sites in areas that are rapidly becoming solidly Negro. In accidental anticipation of this ethnic change you are have accidentally named one of these proposed schools after a noted Negro author.”¹¹⁸ Taken together, redrawing school boundaries and implementing skewed funding schemas led many, like Marnesba Tackett, to draw the same conclusion as the California Supreme Court did in

¹¹⁶ Tackett, Interview Tape #V, Side One, 4/4/1984, UCLA Center for Oral History.

¹¹⁷ Becky Nicolaides *My Blue Heaven*, 294-295.

¹¹⁸ Marnesba Tackett in Martinez HoSang, 94.

Jackson v. Pasadena, that the difference between *de facto* and *de jure* segregation was ultimately immaterial because both are sanctioned by local governments.

Though the Board never made concessions to protestors or acknowledged the existence of segregation in the district, their reactions were often quite defensive. In addition to vehement denial of segregation, the Board relied on law enforcement and surveillance to manage crowds and make note of rabble-rousing activists. Police broke up demonstrations and forcibly removed protestors from buildings as images 3 and 4 indicate. In addition, the picket signs of the protestors depicted in image 1 suggests that the issues of school segregation and police brutality were connected, if not intertwined. When Marnesba Tackett reflected on the struggle for integration and educational equity, she remembered the surveillance she endured by law enforcement. Though she remembers the police as largely unthreatening (which she credits to the practice of nonviolence by the protestors) they were omnipresent “The police were always there, watching and taking pictures...At the board of education my picture was taken so many times...So much so that one of the ladies that was usually with me said, ‘Is there no more privacy in the United States?’”¹¹⁹ However, the presence of law enforcement in her life did not end there. As a result of her involvement in civil rights organizing, Tackett also received periodic visits from the FBI, recalling “the police called you often, and at this time I started having visits from the FBI...About every six weeks I would hear from them.”¹²⁰

Though this pattern of law enforcement surveillance on civil rights activists is not surprising nor unique for its time, it suggests a connectedness between public schools and policing systems. Los Angeles historians, such as Edward J. Escobar, have asserted that the

¹¹⁹ Tackett, Tape IV, Side 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

city's unique patterns of urban segregation relied on local law enforcement and municipal curfew laws to police, maintain, and protect the city's multiple colorlines. In his book, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*, Escobar argues that police "often enforce racial restrictions as part of their normal mandate to maintain order."¹²¹ Since "order" corresponded with the city's entrenched segregation patterns, any deviance from this norm would necessitate police response as a threat to order. It seems likely that school administrators and the Board of Education relied on law enforcement to restore order to meetings that were overwhelmed by activists seeking answers, lest they disturb the pattern of genteel apartheid in the schools.

The defensiveness of the Board on the topic of segregation is perceptible in the archival record through its notable silences. The LAUSD's archival records do not address the issues of activism and police presence at Board meetings. However, newspaper articles, oral histories, and photos reveal that Board meetings in the early 1960s were overwhelmed by impassioned activists, community members, and frustrated parents, who shouted, cheered, and booed at Board members from the audience. Undeniably, these meetings were active sites of contestation and confrontation, but the archived meeting minutes simply summarize, paraphrase, or reduce the statements made by speakers, if not omit them. Their words, their picket signs, their hunger strikes, and their exchanges with law enforcement—indeed, the very texture of the Board meetings themselves—are stripped from the archival record.

¹²¹ Edward Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945*. (University of California Press, 1999) 12.



Image 1. In the summer of 1963, civil rights activists and organizations such as Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) intensified their demonstrations against school segregation in LA's public schools. Image taken from Herald Examiner Collection, in the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL).



Image 2. In the fall of 1963, CORE conducted hunger strikes in the Board of Education downtown offices to demand integration. Image from the Los Angeles Herald Collection, LAPL.

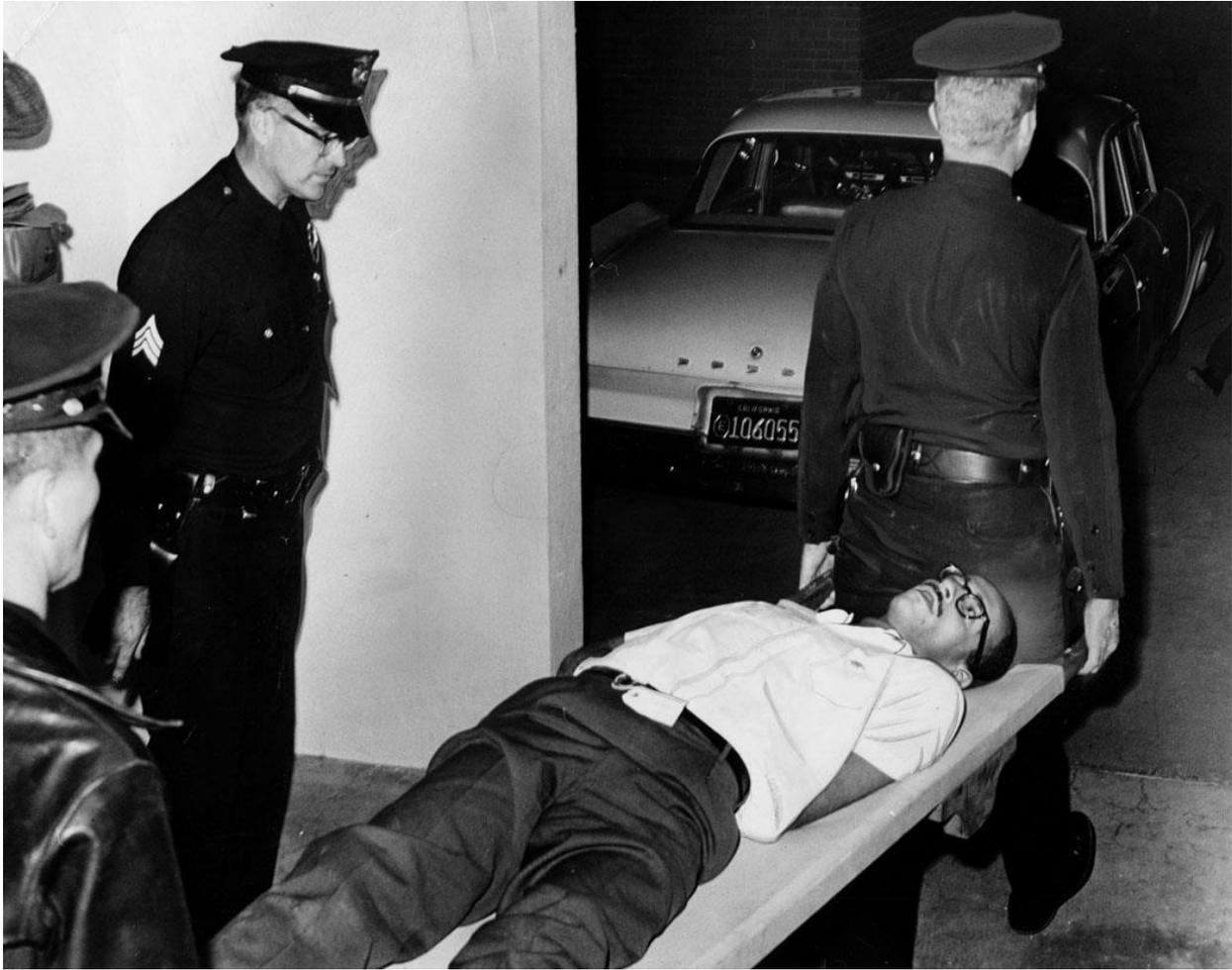


Image 3. Law enforcement officers removed hunger strikers from the Board of Education offices. From the Herald Examiner Collection, LAPL

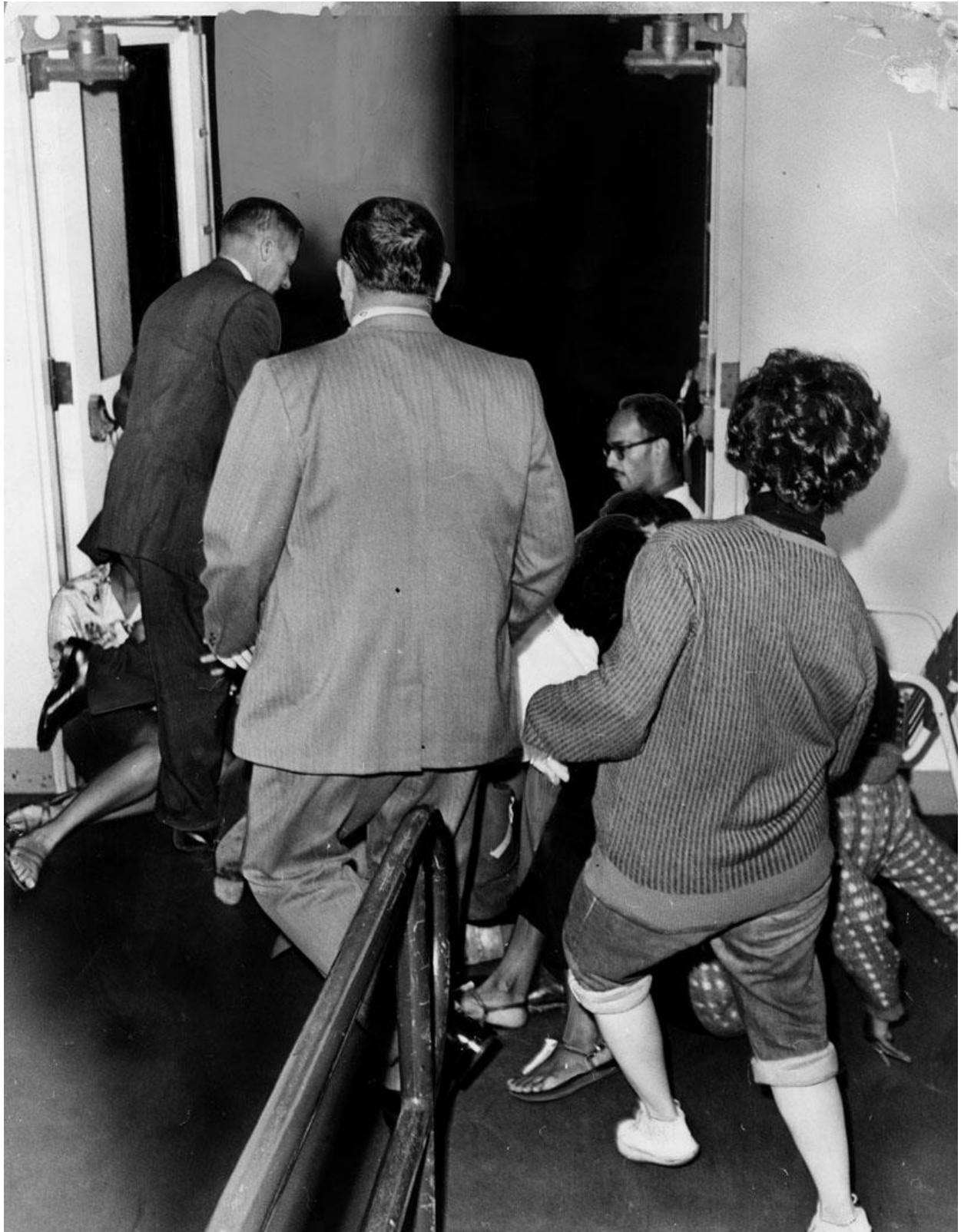


Image 4. Confrontation between law enforcement and CORE hunger strikers at Board of Education offices. November 1963. Image from the Herald Examiner Collection, LAPL.

Law and Order in the Schools

“Progress will be slow at best...But, we have no choice; solutions must be found, and you must help furnish thoughtful, patient leadership if our society is to emerge from this trial-by-fire stronger and more truly responsive to the needs of all of its citizens, without regard for race, religion, national origin, or skin pigmentation.’ Now, I am impressed with this, because I think he has put in just a few words pretty much the story of the Los Angeles school system at the present time”—Dorman Commons, State Board of Education, statement to the McCone Commission. September 11, 1965.¹²²

On August 11, 1965, 21-year-old Marquette Frye was pulled over by a California Highway Patrol officer while driving his mother’s Buick, for allegedly driving recklessly and under the influence. However, as Frye’s brother and mother confronted law enforcement, the attempted arrests became violent, drawing crowds of Watts residents objecting to and resisting the actions of law enforcement. The crowd continued to grow, and for the next six days, the community of Watts was transformed into a veritable combat zone as residents rebelled against the longstanding effects of chronic racism, endemic poverty, and police brutality. By the end of the uprising, 34 people had died, 1,000 or more were injured, 4,000 were arrested, and upwards of \$200 million in property damage had been sustained¹²³.

The Watts uprising marked a pivotal moment in Los Angeles history for many reasons. First, its explosion altered the political stakes of civil rights organizing both in the city and nationally. By highlighting the depths of anger and frustration wrought by lack of change and persistent injustice, the Watts uprising gave the movement for racial equity a new sense of urgency. Moreover, it also exposed political fissures in the broader movement for civil rights, signaling a turn towards radical politics that favored mass demonstration over court-based solutions, and black nationalism that prioritized community control and self-determination over integration.

¹²² Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965 Vol. VI, 6.

¹²³ Gerald Horne *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, 3.

The Watts uprising also dramatically changed policing in Los Angeles and across the country. During those hot six days in August, approximately 16,000 National Guard, LAPD, Highway Patrol, and Sheriffs blockaded, surveilled, and occupied Watts. In fact, according to historian Gerald Horne, more law enforcement personnel occupied the 46.5 square miles of Watts than “were used by the United States that same year to subdue Santo Domingo.”¹²⁴ However, it wasn’t just the size, intensity, brutality, nor duration of law enforcement response that is historically significant. It was the methods that were employed, pioneered, and inspired by Watts that altered the nature of policing. For example, the police’s use of helicopters transformed this technology from traffic control to community and riot control. In addition, the LAPD’s experience in Watts served as the inspiration for Daryl Gates’s brainchild, the Special Weapons and Tactics unit (SWAT). This highly militarized police unit revolutionized domestic policing and served as a model for a nation facing an urban crisis. In other words, the Watts uprising, and the city of Los Angeles invented militarized policing.¹²⁵

Undoubtedly, these political and policing transformations in the aftermath of Watts also had significant implications for public schools and the struggle for racial equity. The McCone Commission, which was tasked with investigating the origins of the urban rebellion, uncovered an educational reality that few African Americans in the city were surprised by: highly segregated, under-staffed and underfunded schools that were grossly overcrowded and falling apart. In keeping with their pattern of racial innocence, the Los Angeles Unified Board of Education rested on their colorblind laurels and defended themselves from critics. Speaking before the McCone Commission, Jack P. Crowther suggested that the schools were receiving too

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ For more on this topic, see Max Felker-Kantor *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

much blame for the underlying causes of the rebellion: “One of the questions asked was in what ways the schools may aid in alleviating or eliminating conditions which might have contributed to the riots. I do think there are many unfounded charges being made, some by well-meaning people who are uninformed, and some by informed but no so well-meaning people that make the provisional educator’s life difficult. And it does create some unhappiness on the part of some of our dedicated folk.”¹²⁶

This statement before the Governor’s Commission reveals a great deal about how some members of the Board sought to use the Watts rebellion to recast the image of the school district in the eyes of the public. The findings of the McCone report were as opportune a time as any for the Board to make a substantive effort towards a meaningful desegregation plan to alleviate racial imbalance and isolation. Instead, Crowther shifted the focus of the Commission to the issue of campus safety. He was asked to clarify:

“Mr. Call: By that, what do you mean?”

The Witness: By students

Mr. Call: Assault, you mean?

The Witness: Yes, sir.

Chairman McCone: In the classrooms?

Witness: In the class and in the halls. This is right. And this is one we are working on right now.

Mr. Call: Are you talking about the curfew area?

The Witness: Yes

Mr. Call: In other places, also?

¹²⁶ Governor’s Commission, 38.

Beyond this point the conversation goes off record. This statement reflects how the Board manipulated the crisis to flip the narrative of victimhood and victimization. In Crowther's assessment, it was school staff and teachers in Watts who were the real victims, not the children. In doing so, the Board crafted a post-Watts image that built off of its pattern of racial innocence to champion itself as the progressive institution tasked with "patient leadership" to lead the city, and its potentially dangerous nonwhite populations, through this "trial-by-fire." This shift marks an important turning point in LAUSD's relationship to security and discipline. As covered in the previous chapters, the initial hiring of security agents, night watchmen, and creation of a system-wide disciplinary policy was done, at first, in response to the actions of white children, particularly those in racial borderlands. White students antagonized nonwhite students as their campus demographics changed by getting into fights or even staging protests like the kind that occurred at Fremont High School in 1947. The 1959 disciplinary policy was an attempt at racial neutrality and reduction of social tensions on campus. The Watts rebellion of 1965 changed LAUSD's stance on the issue of campus safety and student conduct by framing nonwhite students, and their communities, as potential antagonists and school property and staff as victims.

One of the first steps in crisis control that the Board took in late August after the rebellion was to appease its teachers working in the "curfew area" and stem the tide of transfer requests. The Board approved emergency pay for the 5,000 teachers working in the region, blocked requests for transfers, and listened to teacher proposals that they should receive "combat pay" for

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Asa V. Call, a member of the Governor's Commission.

working in Watts.¹²⁹ In addition, the Elementary Division of the district approved \$300,000 for classroom norm reduction and recruited approximately 200 teachers to work in “selected areas” to relieve teacher shortages.¹³⁰ For their part, committed teachers vowed to return to their schools, and to stress the importance of law and order. Harry Koshi, a fourth and fifth grade teacher at Graham Elementary School told the *Los Angeles Times* that children needed to learn respect for authority and that this was possibly a conversation they might not have received at home: ““Children anywhere are influenced by the parents and their environment. The conflicts which arise in children’s minds over what has happened are matters that we must try to explain... We have to talk about the good and the bad. We must help them understand the background for this. They must realize for themselves the need and respect for law and order.”¹³¹

Next, the Board sought out federal antipoverty funds and requested additional funding from the state of California. LAUSD established an Office of Urban Affairs, petitioned the state for additional funds from special aid legislation, and applied for federal grants from the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offense Control Act, the Manpower Development and Training Act and the Economic Opportunity Act.¹³² The Regional Office for the Economic Opportunity Act programming in San Francisco recommended an increase in 3.5 million dollars that Los Angeles Unified School district was already receiving for its antipoverty programming prior to the Watts

¹²⁹ Dick Turpin, “Better Job Promised by Teachers” *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1965.

¹³⁰ Los Angeles Unified School District Board Reports, Box 385, August 26, 1965.

¹³¹ Turpin, “Better Job Promised by Teachers”

¹³² Los Angeles Board of Education files, Box 1335, folder 2, “Juvenile Delinquency”, August 26, 1965.

rebellion.¹³³ An additional \$16 million worth of federal funds from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was also promised to the district for its underserved communities¹³⁴.

While this funding was desperately needed in Watts and other “disadvantaged” areas throughout the district, two months following the uprising, schools were still struggling to meet the basic needs of its students. For example, in a letter to the Board, Minnie Gibson wrote: “I would appreciate if you could find out why we don’t have enrichment programs in our schools of the Watts area and get some for us...If money is the problem, how do schools like Wilshire Crest and Airport Jr. Hi have these and there aren’t any funds for Compton Ave and Markham Jr. High School?”¹³⁵ In addition, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that at least 13 elementary schools in South Los Angeles did not have functioning cafeterias. “Cafeterias in the city school system operate at cost,” the article revealed, “and are closed down wherever students cannot support them,” particularly in the areas where “the need is most desperate.”¹³⁶ Lacking cafeterias was no small matter for it had significant consequences for student’s ability to learn and simply be at school. Arnand Duvernay, a 25-year-old graduate student told the reporter that closed down cafeterias dovetailed with a general lack concern for student wellbeing that was typical of segregated schools: “Counseling is atrocious. There is no attempt at some of these schools to find out why kids misbehave. Hunger has a lot to do with it.”¹³⁷

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Los Angeles Board of Education files, Box 386, September 23, 1965.

¹³⁵ Los Angeles Board of Education files, Box 387, October 18, 1965.

¹³⁶ Jack Jones, “Many Schools Lack Cafeterias” *Los Angeles Times*, October 4, 1965.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

If federal and state funds for antipoverty programming were the proverbial carrot (though fleeting it may have been) for “disadvantaged” schools in the post-Watts period, campus discipline and security was the stick. In the first official Board meeting following the Watts rebellion, increasing campus security was a priority before the beginning of the next school year. A board member stated: “I expect to bring you a proposal to increase our pool of security officers for area and campus assignments. We have had excellent reports from the schools where last semester’s pilot project was in operation.”¹³⁸ The pilot project referenced in this statement was launched on March 1, 1965 in response to “increasing incidents of aggressive action by persons by persons loitering on and around school grounds during day hours and after school was dismissed.”¹³⁹ The program began with six security agent positions, four who were assigned day hours at “selected secondary schools”, and two who joined a patrol unit that traveled “in an area of the District where repeated troublesome incidents had occurred.” These agents had frequent contact with administrators, who evaluated their work, as well as with the police department—with whom cooperation had been “excellent.”¹⁴⁰

The following week, at the September 2 meeting, Superintendent Crowther presented Communication No.1 prepared by the Office of the Deputy Superintendent, which recommended the hiring of six additional security agent positions to the Security Section of the Administrative Services Branch. As the members of the Board deliberated on this presentation, Georgiana Hardy moved an amendment motion to revise the proposal, adding “plain clothes.” It was revised to read: “It is recommended that effective upon adoption, six security agent positions (plain clothes)

¹³⁸ Los Angeles Board of Education files, Box 1335, folder 2, “Juvenile Delinquency”, August 26, 1965.

¹³⁹ Los Angeles Board of Education, Board Reports, Box 386, September 2, 1965.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

be authorized in the Security Section, Administrative Services Branch.”¹⁴¹ Based on the pilot program’s work, “agents working in plain clothes have been the most effective” at reducing automobile pilfering and other “threatening activities” on campuses.¹⁴² The motion resulted in a near-unanimous vote, with member Chambers offering the sole dissent. While Chambers was in favor of increasing security personnel in the schools, he felt the question of uniforms or plain clothes “should be an administrative decision.” The motion was carried, and the Board reserved \$163,586 for this authorization.

Though Crowther’s testimony before the McCone Commission implied that the problem of safety came primarily from students, Board policy, and teachers’ comments seem to suggest that the problem was also the communities in which nonwhite schools were located. Campuses were much too fluid and open to the community, and this openness threatened the physical safety of school employees. In addition, the community access to schools was potentially dangerous because the ideas of the community tainted the minds of children, giving them chips on their shoulder and problems with authority. This shift is perhaps one of the most significant changes that occurred in campus-community relationships after the Watts uprising.

In the segregated racial geography of the city, schools were an important center of community life. They housed community events, football games, political organizing and protest—they were thoroughly enmeshed in the fabric of daily life in places like Watts, South Central, and East Los Angeles. In short, schools functioned as a significant nonwhite public space and community property, that was often leveraged to make political demands on the city. Closing off schools from their communities, therefore, was an important move by a Board of

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Education that was dismissive of its Black and Brown critics. It was a strategy that could be couched in the spirit of progress as well as the language of safety and security in a time of crisis. In doing so, schools could then effectively control the access communities had to their schools, which further isolated urban schools from their community base. But the battle over control of community schools would be a long and protracted struggle that was only just beginning in 1965.

In the next two years, LAUSD witnessed two flashpoints of mass protest and unrest near its campuses. These flashpoints highlighted the issue of community access to schools. More importantly, the unrest that these flashpoints produced was exploited by the Board of Education to leverage the need for safety and security, and “protect” schools from the very communities they served. The first incident began in March of 1966, when unrest exploded near Jordan High School and continued for two days resulting in 55 arrests, 26 injuries, 9 burned businesses, 6 burned homes, and a total of 1,232 school absences. Occurring just 7 months after the uprising in August, the *Los Angeles Times* dubbed this event the “New Watts Riot.”¹⁴³ The origins of this unrest are nebulous. Local media was quick to attribute the riot to interracial violence, arguing that Black and Brown tensions were at the heart of the explosion. The night before the first day of unrest, two young black men, Dwayne Graves, 16, and George Sanders, 21, were in a heated argument at a liquor store near Jordan High School with 3 Mexican Americans, which quickly escalated into a knife fight. According to reports, the Mexican American men left the scene, but returned shortly firing four gunshots from their vehicle at Graves and Sanders. Both were wounded; Graves in the arm and leg, and Sanders in the hand and chest (superficially).

The following day, at high noon, the police received a tip of an impending rumble between African Americans and Mexican Americans at Jordan High School. The rumble never

¹⁴³ “Two Slain in New Watts Riot,” *Los Angeles Times* March 16, 1966.

materialized. However, police remained on the scene until school let out at 3 pm. According to officers at Jordan High School, the crowd of youth began hurling rocks and bottles at passing vehicles, and the situation spiraled “into a small-scale riot, vaguely reminiscent of last August’s southside holocaust.”¹⁴⁴ But the Black and Brown tension at the center of this version of events did not sit well with students. Mexican Americans, as a small number of the student body, approximately 5%, and had no history of feuding with black students. Principal William J. Settle was surprised by this story, as was William Armstead, Student Body President at Jordan High School. He told the *Times*, “there has never been any open hostility...I’ve had contact with the Mexican kids through sports and we kid around a lot...I don’t see any reason for what happened. We haven’t had a gang around here for a long time.”¹⁴⁵

With so few Mexicans in the student body, it seems unlikely that Black and Brown tension explains these two days of unrest. What began as a crowd outside of Jordan High School became a riot *after* police arrived. Reports suggest that law enforcement response played a role in intensifying anger and frustration in the crowd, and this should be unsurprising given the recent history of police occupation in Watts. 21-year-old Thomas Galloway, for example, was accused to inciting the riot by “battling police and shouting ‘police brutality’ after they tried to arrest him for throwing a rock at a car.”¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, it is clear that law enforcement wasted no time in mobilizing a swift and thorough response to subdue the community around Jordan High School. In this effort, the campus became a primary point of surveillance. At first evidence of a growing crowd, police

¹⁴⁴ Paul Houston, Art Berman, “Gunfight Blamed for Rioting: Shooting Incident Blamed by Police Official for New Riot” *Los Angeles Times*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ “Police Close Watts Riot Control Post: Troubled Area Returns to Normal” *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1966.

marshaled more than 100 officers who responded to the call “Code 77,” and “invoked a new riot plan.”¹⁴⁷ This new strategy called for immediate containment and force to disperse the crowd, “unlike the last time when police pulled back in the hope rioting would subside.”¹⁴⁸ With the blessing of Mayor Yorty, who directed law enforcement to “put the ‘maximum force’ of police officers into the troubled area,” and “take whatever measures are necessary” to quell the disturbance, the police immediately set about erecting blockades and a command post in the area surrounding Jordan High School and placed deputy sheriffs, California Highway Patrol, and the National Guard on high alert. By nightfall, the streets were deserted and 140 police in patrol cars prowled the streets. The next day, the few students who did go to school were greeted by “helmeted police” who monitored the students going in and out of campus¹⁴⁹. Though this event made headlines, the Board of Education remained silent. About two weeks after the unrest at Jordan High School, a 16-year-old boy was shot by a patrolling security agent after hours at the school. The agent alleged that the boy and 3 of his friends were caught attempting to steal two tape recorders from the school. When they were discovered, they ran and the security agent shot at them, striking one of the youths in the groin.¹⁵⁰ Luckily the boy recovered and was reportedly in “satisfactory condition,” when the *Sentinel* covered this story. But the minor incident reveals that Jordan High School was becoming a site of containment, to be closed off from community access.

Another significant campus disturbance the following year, however, forced school administrators to react, and revisit the issue of security and community access. On October 18,

¹⁴⁷ “Gunfight blamed for rioting”

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ “Two Killed, Two Wounded in Weekend Crime Spree.” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 31, 1966.

1967, just outside of Manual Arts High School, police engaged in a violent confrontation with picketers and youth. The result was yet another conflict that lasted for two days and ended with 34 arrested (14 adults, 20 juveniles), another police occupation, and \$15,000 worth of damage to an administrative office building at John Muir Junior High.

Using last year's riot plan, 100 police officers moved to disperse the crowd outside of Manual Arts High School, conducting mass sweeps along Vermont Avenue and arresting those who failed to move (image 5). According to reports, these highly mobile police units swept and surveilled Manual Arts for two days straight: "beefed-up police patrols combed a two-mile-square area surrounding the school along Vermont Avenue, the so-called flying squads of police whipped in and out of the area going in for brief forays to break up clusters and pulling out quickly."¹⁵¹ A 350-man force set up a command post and staging area at the nearby Coliseum.

The origins of the Manual Arts unrest can be traced to a community effort to oust Principal Robert F. Denahy on the grounds that he was racist and kept the campus in terrible conditions. Superintendent Jack Crowther, in a meeting with Celes King III, the president of the central branch of the NAACP, had reportedly promised Denahy's transfer, and never kept his word. Meanwhile, Margaret Wright, leader of the grassroots United Parents Council, had been steadfastly picketing for the removal of Denahy nearly every day since September 1st. But complaints against the school go back to at least 1966 when Jean Gregg of the Crenshaw integrationist group Area Program for Enrichment Exchange addressed the Board of Education charging that the school was crowded and unkempt, but also unofficially run by the girl's vice principal who ruled "in an authoritarian and punitive manner."¹⁵² This punitive philosophy must

¹⁵¹ Terry Sattoria, "Police Quell L.A. Racial Outbreaks" *Long Beach Independent Press*, October 21, 1967.

¹⁵² Jack Jones and Ray Rogers, "Roots of Trouble Are Deeply Embedded in Community: Manual Arts High Typifies Problems in Negro Schools," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1967.

have translated into the physical space of the school, because several complaints also raised the fact that children were locked out of all bathrooms on campus.

Community groups, it seems, tried to work with campus administration on the issue of campus security in order to alleviate harsh discipline, or at least be a watchful presence on the school grounds. The Santa Barbara, Manchester, Western Avenue, Broadway (SMWB) Community Action Group even offered to patrol school grounds for the campus administration “to help dispel the security problem” and to restore the use of open bathrooms, but “Denahy turned down the offer because of insurance complications.”¹⁵³ Campus security and how to manage it became the pivotal issue behind the rebellion at Manual Arts. It sparked the protests that led to the police crackdown and occupation, it contoured the claims teachers made on the Board during the crisis, and it shaped the Board’s response to student and community unrest at the legal and policy-level.

For instance, the event that set off the crowds at Manual Arts began with an intervention in an instance of campus discipline. Margaret Wright had long been a thorn in the side of Manual Arts faculty and administrators for her relentless picketing and protests of conditions at the high school, both across from campus and at the Board of Education offices downtown. That Wednesday, October 18, Wright allegedly disrupted a private conference between the vice principal and a mother of a student who was facing discipline for throwing a can at a white security officer. Wright was promptly arrested, but eventually released on \$276 bail. Authorities maintained that her arrest “triggered the violence” and picketing that began on Thursday.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Sattoria, “Police Quell L.A. Racial Outbreaks”

Assistant Vice Principal Tim Finney echoed this, complaining “Mrs. Wright started the whole thing...she was haranguing the kids.”¹⁵⁵

Though Margaret Wright was singled out by Manual Arts staff, she was not alone in pushing for better school leadership, improved campus infrastructure, and humane discipline. Wright’s activism was part of a larger push to remake and reclaim Manual Arts as black public space. In addition to the United Parents Council, members of the US Organization, and the Black Panther Party were present at the Thursday demonstrations near the school. The Black Congress organized a rally at nearby Exposition Park in which speakers addressed a crowd of about 200, “criticizing the police and the school board.”¹⁵⁶ Principal Denahy accused black militancy for manipulating young people and using Manual Arts as a way to advance radical politics, dismissing their critiques as simply “all part of the big move for Black Power.”¹⁵⁷

In addition, the crisis at Manual Arts was used by faculty to make their own workplace demands and push for increased security and campus safety. By Thursday, the second day of the disturbance, faculty demanded that the Board close the campus “until...intimidation of faculty by students and outside agitators [could] be stopped.”¹⁵⁸ Teachers also used the opportunity to make further demands about community access to schools, demanding that Parent Teacher Associations be barred from campus “until they prove they are here to help us.”¹⁵⁹ So great was faculty fear, some were fearful to cross campus freely. Ferguson Rhemm, assistant vice principal

¹⁵⁵ Ray Rogers and Dick Main, “Youths Go on Rampage at Manual Arts High” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1967.

¹⁵⁶ John Kendall, “33 Arrested on Second Day of Manual Arts Disturbance”, *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1967.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ John Dreyfuss, “Plea by Faculty to Close School Denied by Board” *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1967.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

said, “to go into that hall in the business office, to go into that restroom, that’s taking your life in your hands.”¹⁶⁰ And they were not alone in this matter. Letters of support for Principal Denahy and the faculty at Manual Arts poured in from all over the county. A look at the Los Angeles Unified School District’s archival record reveals the extent to which the plight of Manual Arts faculty resonated with other schools. Letters appear from Pacoima, Gardena, Hawthorne, West Adams, Arlington Heights, San Fernando, Reseda, Chatsworth, and so on. In a telegram from Bell, faculty urged the Board to do something about campus security: “We disapprove of submitting to pressure groups and feel that teachers should be able to teach without fear for their personal safety.”¹⁶¹

Undoubtedly, the issue of campus safety became a bread-and-butter issue for teachers concerned about workplace conditions. Joseph Brooks, Executive Secretary of the Los Angeles Teachers Association threatened a citywide strike in support of Manual Arts faculty: “If you can’t teach at Manual, we may be in a position that no teacher can teach in any school in Los Angeles.”¹⁶² Their collective pressure must have been effective because Isaac McClelland, assistant superintendent of schools promised Manual Arts faculty an increase in “armed security guards,” and that a policy would be established to prohibit unauthorized personnel on campus, and permit a search of student lockers.¹⁶³

Concessions did not end there. Los Angeles Unified School District’s legal team successfully received a Superior Court injunction that temporarily prohibited Margaret Wright, and 50 other “John Does” from entering school grounds or “engaging in demonstrations, meetings, gatherings,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Los Angeles Unified School Board, Board Reports, October 25, 1967.

¹⁶² John Dreyfuss, “School Board Will Seek Court Order for Manual Arts,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1967.

¹⁶³ Dreyfuss, “Plea by Faculty to Close School Denied by Board”

or assemblies at the school or adjacent streets.”¹⁶⁴ The “John Doe” opened the possibility of arrest, because it could apply to anyone thought to be in violation of the injunction. Nevertheless, the suit named and singled out Wright specifically because of her history of persistent activism near campus. Her presence and her tactics constituted a threat to campus safety: Mrs. Wright, ““has interfered with the discipline, order, and conduct of activities at the school’...The woman has been a direct cause of the fact that ‘students have formed together as mobs and engaged in acts of violence towards school personnel and property.’”¹⁶⁵ In essence, Judge Ralph H. Nutter of the Superior Court criminalized community access to their own schools. Two months later, the Board, as promised, increased funds for additional security agents, setting aside \$50,000. They also introduced funding to strengthen Juvenile Court relations, \$9,097, and Attendance Supervisor positions tasked with monitoring student behavior and social adjustment, \$119,403.¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

Though Judge Nutter’s injunction was temporary, it held important symbolic meaning for the ongoing struggle for urban schools in Los Angeles. First, it showed a shift in the logic of racial innocence and genteel apartheid. The language of personal safety and campus security shifted the public discourse about legitimate victims and dispossession. By refashioning school staff and administrators as powerless victims, it could deny, delay, or invalidate nonwhite communities demands for justice, even as the district claimed to be making progress on urban affairs. In doing so, they participated in the entrenchment of segregation and racial isolation in Los Angeles

¹⁶⁴ Jack McCurdy, “Court Order Bans Interference at Manual Arts,” October 24, 1967.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ Los Angeles Unified School District, Board Reports, Box 1335, December 28, 1967.

schools. What's more, it legitimized an emergent trend of dispossessing Black and Brown neighborhoods from their public space and community property. But the fight for Los Angeles schools was far from over. In the next chapter, we will analyze the how Black and Brown power swept the district in unprecedented numbers of student-led mobilizations in 1968.



Los Angeles Police Begin Eight-Block Sweep of Agitators at Vermont Avenue and 42nd Street

(Image 5) Police sweep a crowd outside of Manual Arts High School after the second day of protesting ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ *Long Beach Independent Press Telegram*, October 21, 1967

Chapter 3

Climbing Fences: The Los Angeles School Boycotts, 1968

“More than ever, we know ourselves by how the police and courts treat us.”—Ian Haney Lopez¹⁶⁸

“I learned from the Black Power movement...I’ve been taught that five loose fingers by themselves are nothing. Bring them together and you have a fist.”—Corky Gonzales

“The L.A. school system is so Bankrupt educationally and morally that kids were willing to challenge the locked doors, the armed security guards, intimidation by the teachers and administrators.”¹⁶⁹

It was a cold day, by Los Angeles’s standards, in February of 1968—in the mid-50’s Fahrenheit—when Reies Lopez Tijerina, the inimitable and fiery organizer from New Mexico, stopped by La Piranya Coffee House.¹⁷⁰ In his LA tour, Tijerina spoke at East Los Angeles College, and other campuses at the invitation of the United Mexican American Students (UMAS), and emphasized the importance of Black and Brown organizing. He implored the crowd, “The brown and black are here to fight the same enemy... The black, brown, and *Indios* have been selected by the forces of nature to march together, fight together, and even die together.”¹⁷¹

That Tijerina was speaking to Chicano youth about Black and Brown unity is no coincidence. Tijerina had been moving increasingly towards horizontal, cross-racial activism with his organization, La Alianza. What prompted Tijerina’s visit to Los Angeles was the opportunity to speak at a Free Huey Newton rally held at the Sports Arena, put on by the Black

¹⁶⁸ Ian Haney Lopez, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003);

¹⁶⁹ *La Raza*, March 31, 1968, Vol 1. No 11. La Raza Publication Records, CSRC-1001. Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

¹⁷⁰ Historical weather data from *Farmer’s Almanac*.

¹⁷¹ Quote taken from George Mariscal, *Brown Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 196.

Congress. Speaking to a crowd of somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000, Tijerina preached about the shared struggles and connections between Black and Chicano communities and the need for coalitional work. The desire was mutual. The Sports Arena rally was well attended by several Black Power groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party (BPP), and activists such as Angela Davis and former director of the Los Angeles Communist Party, Dorothy Healey. Healey observed that the rally “marked the first Black effort to ‘bring in Chicanos.’”¹⁷² When Tijerina’s captive Chicano student audiences at East LA College and La Piranya listened to him, they learned that cross-racial solidarity through direct action was the future of the movement.

By the time Reies Lopez Tijerina spoke at La Piranya Coffee House it was only a few months old and already had its share of radical visitors. In late 1967, the Young Chicanos for Community Action, later known as the Brown Berets, worked with Father John Luce of the Church of the Epiphany Episcopalian Church, and Sal Castro, teacher at Lincoln High School, to transform an abandoned warehouse into a thriving community space where students, activists, and community organizers frequented. Though La Piranya did not actually sell coffee, it was abundant in things one might expect to see in a coffee house: such as lively conversation, youth hangouts, music, and political discourse. The Coffee House advertised itself as a youth-centered space: “The Piranya Coffee House comes from the efforts of young people and that is who it is for. The Piranya will be the place where it’s happening in East Los Angeles.”¹⁷³ Nestled at the intersection of Olympic and Goodrich Boulevards, the coffee house sat at the southern edge of East Los Angeles and kitty-corner to a California Highway Patrol Substation. Before long, La

¹⁷² Quoted in Mike Davis and Jon Weiner. *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties*. (London, New York: Verso Books, 2020) 292.

¹⁷³ *La Raza*, Vol 1, Number 0, September 4, 1967.

Piranya became a crossroads for leftists in Los Angeles, and conversely, police harassment and surveillance.¹⁷⁴

La Piranya attracted many famous speakers in addition to Tijerina, such as Cesar Chavez, Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzalez, H. Rap Brown, and Stokely Carmichael. However, La Piranya is most commonly remembered as the regular meeting place of young Chicano/a students involved in planning the East Los Angeles Blowouts. On this night, in the coffee house that did not sell coffee, La Piranya visitors listened to and learned from Tijerina’s message of cross-racial organizing.

One month after Tijerina’s LA visit, Chicano students in high schools across East Los Angeles took to the streets and walked out of their classes *en masse*. These student-led protests became the largest movement for educational reform in U.S. history, and is now referred to as “The Blowouts.” The Blowouts are remembered for being a seminal moment in Chicana/o movement history; a moment of struggle in which students and their community held their schools accountable and won. They won important improvements such as an increase in Mexican American teachers and staff and some curriculum reform.

The driving force of the Blowouts, its moral fuel, came from people power. Indeed, the reason why the Blowouts were so successful is due to its profound community support and involvement in maintaining pressure on the educational system. But community pressure and grassroots organizing for school reform were not confined to the geographic limits of East Los Angeles. In fact, the Blowouts were part of a larger trend of student resistance that was both Brown *and* Black. In the same week that predominantly Mexican high schools Wilson, Garfield,

¹⁷⁴ “Sheriffs Harass” *La Raza*, January 15, 1968, Vol 1, No 8. La Raza Publication Records, CSRC-1001. Chicano Studies Research Center Library.

Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Belmont were walking out, African American students at Jefferson High School were also staging their own school boycott that rippled across predominantly black schools in South Central Los Angeles. Yet, most historical treatments of the Blowouts assume that protests were exclusively Chicano or only occurred in East LA. On the other hand, if Manual Arts High, Jefferson High, Fremont High, Edison Junior High, or Washington Carver Junior High (all of which are predominately Black schools) are mentioned, it is usually in passing or a brief acknowledgement—not as an integral part of the story. This work contends that the Blowouts were a multiracial movement and understanding it as such not only deepens our understanding of organizing in Los Angeles, but also show us the ways in which power responds to aggrieved communities with shared struggles.

Recent historical treatments of the Los Angeles high school rebellions have centered the connections between Black and Chicano student activism. Jeanne Theoharis’s chapter, “‘W-A-L-K-O-U-T!’: High School Students and the Development of Black Power in LA,” details the ways in which Black students and their parents kicked off the year of school rebellions in 1968 on their own—a move that later inspired and spread to Chicano student activists. Similarly, Mike Davis and Jon Wiener’s study of Los Angeles in the sixties, *Set the Night on Fire*, explores the parallel rebellions together and argues that this is what made L.A.’s social movements truly unique: that they were launched by minors who were both Black and Brown.

In agreement with these works, this chapter argues that Black and Brown youth—as well as their parents—modeled for the world what a cross-racial movement for racial and educational justice could look like. In addition, the threat of a Black and Brown revolution in the schools pushed the Board of Education to respond swiftly by framing the educational urban crisis as a safety issue. In other words, the very thing that made these student movements so powerful—the

radical potential of Black and Brown unity—was what the school leadership used to justify increasing campus security and surveillance.

Scholars have pointed to the ideological intersections and connections between Black Power and Chicano Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s. For example, George Mariscal’s *Brown Eyed Children of the Sun* urges us to remember that far from being narrowly nationalist, a large part of the *movimiento* was radically internationalist and drew inspiration from the Third World anticolonial movements. Part of this third worldism included collaborative work at home and “grassroots contacts between Brown and Black activists.”¹⁷⁵ However, these movements not only shared ideas—they shared struggles; and the history of student activism in LA schools from 1968 to 1970 teaches us this lesson. The fact that Black and Brown students *both* walked out of their schools in March of 1968 is not a surprise, nor an anomaly. As Gaye Theresa Johnson argues in *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity*, Black and Chicano communities have a long history of shared struggle that is centuries’ old. Though economic and racial divisions have pitted Black and Chicano communities against one another, centering the historic and “collective memories of interracial solidarity” dispels the narrow and myopic assumption that conflict is all there is in Black and Brown relations¹⁷⁶. In line with Johnson, this work asserts that there is more to say here, and a rich repository of Black and Brown coalitional history to uncover.

Activists were not alone in noticing their connected struggles. From the perspective of power—Board of Education members, principals, vice principals, and law enforcement—Black and Chicano student movements were not separate problems to be dealt with in isolation. They

¹⁷⁵ Ibid 177.

¹⁷⁶ Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013): *xix*

lumped students of color together and used a prescriptive approach to suppress unrest as community pressure crossed freeways and stitched together Black and Brown student movements. This prescriptive *racial script* is a tactic used by power to define, limit, and discipline different racialized groups. According to Natalia Molina, “racialized groups are linked across time and space: once attitudes, practices, customs, policies, and laws are directed at one group, they are more readily available and hence easily applied to other groups.”¹⁷⁷ Using Molina’s concept of racial scripts here exposes the connections between Black and Chicano student movements. It also shows how external forces, like law enforcement, board members, or angry white suburban voters, linked them as manifestations of the same threat: nonwhite urban rebellion. Moreover, racial scripts help explain why the administrators in LAUSD responded in ways that they did: they made concessions on curriculum changes, and promised to diversify school staff, but also worked to guard campuses from future grassroots organizing and stymie efforts to achieve community-controlled schools. In the end, the racial scripts applied to Los Angeles’s Black and Brown schools resulted in campuses that looked totally different from the vision student protestors were fighting for.

But that student-and community-centered vision is important and worth remembering in its totality. The Blowouts signaled a multiracial organizing future that deeply frightened white administrators, suburban white families, and law enforcement tasked with maintaining the boundaries of urban apartheid. For the first few weeks in March of 1968, high schoolers and their supportive communities articulated a different standard, praxis, and model for schooling and forced their city to listen.

¹⁷⁷ Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2014) 7.

And what was that model? The vision of education put forth by students and their communities was rooted in what scholar Bettina Love calls “abolitionist teaching.” Abolitionist teaching is “the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools.”¹⁷⁸ As Love urges us to remember, abolitionist paradigms and pedagogies are more than just tearing down old structures—it also about imagination and creative possibility to construct something new. This chapter argues that the 1968-1970 student rebellions not only built off a specific model of collectivist action, it inspired something new in the process: a pathway for cross-racial student organizing that would continue in the afterlives of the Blowouts. Their efforts brought the nation’s second-largest school district to a near standstill and taught all who watched what it means to refuse.

Towards Coalition: Origins of the Chicano Student Movement in East L.A.

As discussed in the previous chapters, protests for better schools in Black and Brown communities had occurred in flashpoints well before the spring of 1968. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had staged hunger strikes in LAUSD District Offices demanding an end to school segregation and inferior schools four years prior. In addition, Margaret Wright was organizing youth in Manual Arts High School months before La Piranya opened and began hosting the Blowout Planning Committee sessions. In other words, when Blowout organizers began considering a mobilization of some sort, they were drawing on a recent history of Black community activism and direct-action that applied pressure on school administration.

¹⁷⁸ Bettina L. Love, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019) 8.

This is not to say that Mexican American struggles for school reform were not a part of the conversation. In the 1930s, organizations like the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) had fought for school improvement and an end to Mexican schools. Two decades before the Blowouts, Mexican American activists, especially those active in the Community Service Organization (CSO) had been battling school segregation in Orange County in *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947). The *Mendez* decision eventually persuaded California Governor Earl Warren to repeal state-wide segregation two months later, which extended the *Mendez* victory to other racialized groups left behind in the legal arguments—particularly Asian Americans and Native Americans.

In addition, Mexican Americans in Los Angeles attempted to work cooperatively with the Board of Education in seeking school improvements. As a result of concerted discussions with the Board, community leaders were able to create an Urban Affairs committee for the school district in 1961. The Urban Affairs committee acted as a liaison between the Mexican American and African American communities and the Board. However, the Urban Affairs committee was little more than a buffer or filter, limiting the procedure and access of urban community groups to air grievances and concerns.¹⁷⁹

Moreover, it should be acknowledged that local Mexican American efforts at school reform worked at cross purposes against coalitional work with African Americans, especially when it came to desegregation. Middle class Mexican American political activists narrowly understood their interests as separate from African Americans. Viewing civil rights gains as a zero-sum game of winners and losers, many Mexican American leaders considered Black

¹⁷⁹ Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro. *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 105.

victories a detraction to Mexican American causes. For these reasons, many Mexican American leaders refused to join the ACLU and NAACP integration lawsuit against the board, *Crawford v. Board of Education*, when it was filed in 1963. Of the many organizations fighting for Mexican American educational access, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) was the only Eastside organization to support the United Civil Rights Committee's (UCRC) integration campaign.¹⁸⁰ While Mexican American leaders dragged their feet on coalitional work, educational segregation and inequity persisted. However, as this chapter will show, part of what made the Blowouts of 1968 remarkable was that high schoolers eschewed the models set by Mexican American businessmen and community leaders. Instead, Chicano high school students chose a strategy that placed Black and Brown unity and direct action at its center.

The sense of urgency was also driven by the post-Watts rebellion context. The uprising in August 1965 underscored the effectiveness of dramatic action in forcing public officials to commit to policy change, which left an impression on Mexican American activists and students. Sal Castro, a teacher at Lincoln High School, and key figure in the story of the Blowouts, remembers that the Chicano students were reminded of their own conditions as they watched the Watts rebellion and the police repression that followed: "I think that our students who witnessed Watts and who went to Lincoln after the riots, it impressed on them that any action they might take about school conditions might unleash the police and military on them. These concerns and even fears hung over us as tensions increased at Lincoln."¹⁸¹ As Castro suggests, Chicano students at Lincoln were impacted by Watts because they knew intimately what it means to

¹⁸⁰ Mike Davis and Jon Weiner. *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties*. (London, New York: Verso Books, 2020) 99.

¹⁸¹ Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 132.

experience police violence and excessive force. They knew that their own organizing could potentially be met with repression. But it did not stop them.

By the time the Blowout Planning Committee began sketching out plans to boycott schools, Chicano students were no longer interested in pursuing change through the court system or through institutional cooperation. Only community-based action applied directly to the schools, and later the Board of Education, seemed to be the most effective way of gaining public attention for their cause. Simply put, for the emergent Chicano student movement, coalitional politics and direct action.

The shift began slowly. Unsatisfied with the Board of Education and the Urban Affairs committee, Mexican American education activists approached the County Board of Supervisors in 1963 to see what they could do to address the lack of opportunities for Mexican American youth. In response, the Board of Supervisors pushed the Mexican American education activists towards relatively new L.A. County Commission on Human Relations. The Commission on Human Relations was designed to improve race relations and promote better working relationships between institutions, such as law enforcement and schools, and the communities they serve. Originating out of the “human relations crisis” of the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots, the Committee became an official agency in 1958.¹⁸² The Commission on Human Relations proposed organizing an annual youth leadership conference, which invited Mexican American youth from East Los Angeles to convene at Camp Hess Kramer in the Malibu Mountains. In 1964, the annual conference was renamed the Mexican American Youth Leadership Conference.

¹⁸² “History,” Human Relations Commission, Workforce Development Aging and Community Services (WDACS). <<https://wdacs.lacounty.gov/commissions/hrc/>>

Sal Castro jumped at the opportunity to volunteer. Castro was qualified to serve as a counselor, based on his professional experience in both instruction and counseling. But more so, he was motivated to inspire and empower Mexican American youth because he came from a similar background and experience—he knew firsthand the psychic violence of inadequate and segregated schools. Castro was born and raised in East Los Angeles in a single-parent household. His father had been repatriated to Mexico during the 1930s. Though Castro attended segregated “Mexican schools,” he did not fall into the same patterns of disillusionment and withdrawal like other Mexican youth around him. Having spent time in Mazatlán, Mexico with his father, Castro developed a solid foundation of knowledge of Mexican history, and as a result, a strong sense of identity and self-worth: “The key for me,” he recalled, “unlike some of the other Mexican kids, was that I had already developed this pride inside of me. I knew I was a worthwhile person.”¹⁸³

Even still, Castro then, much like the youth he was teaching in 1968, did not receive preparation for college and instead went into the military after graduation—a similar fate that awaited his students. After his service, Castro began his college education at LA City College, thanks to the GI Bill, which carried him through his undergraduate degree and teaching credential. Interestingly, Castro describes himself as having been *tapado*, or politically naïve, during this period. It was witnessing enclosure and eviction of Mexicans through the processes of urban renewal that politicized him, specifically the construction of freeways of in East Los Angeles and the construction of Dodger Stadium on top of thriving Mexican American communities.

From that point forward, Castro was motivated to become more politically active, and as he began teaching, he understood how schools were complicit in the disenfranchisement of

¹⁸³ Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 34

Mexican American communities. Far from being neutral institutions, schools played critical roles by failing their Mexican students and pushing them into a life of poverty, eviction, and dispossession. In his time at Lincoln High School, Castro noted that “The Mexican schools aimed to socialize and equip these students with just enough skills to enter the low-skilled labor market as replacements for their working-class parents. For years, the public school system, including the L.A. school district, tracked Mexican students to a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure.”¹⁸⁴ Castro recognized that teaching could be a political activity and an area where he could make the most contribution. In short, he became what Bettina Love would describe as an abolitionist teacher; someone who understood that teaching must be subversive in order to dismantle injustice within and outside of schools. Castro brought this to Camp Hess Kramer as part of the first group of staff at the inaugural Mexican American Youth Leadership Conference.

The conference became an influential space for political consciousness-raising and identity formation, which would later materialize in the radical grassroots organizing of the Chicano movement in Los Angeles. At the conference, nascent Chicano youth were given space to discuss conditions in their schools and larger communities, as well as their own opinions of themselves and feelings self-worth. They considered root problems, and what was needed to change things. In the safety of Camp Hess Kramer, students opened up about their experiences, and noticed they shared similar complaints: “about their school counselors not paying attention to them, about the disrespect of a lot of teachers toward Mexican American students, about their teachers’ lack of knowledge about them and their culture, and about the lack of encouragement to go to college.”¹⁸⁵ Looking back at this, Sal Castro joked that the cradle of Chicano student

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 110

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 108

movement in L.A. might well be the wealthy and exclusive Malibu Mountains, made possible on L.A. County's dime.¹⁸⁶

Out of the leadership conferences in Camp Hess Kramer came the Young Citizens for Community Action (YCCA). Founded in 1966 by David Sanchez, YCCA initially pursued change through reformist channels: namely, working with city government and the school board. In 1967, Sanchez served on Mayor Yorty's Advisory Commission on Youth, aiming to ease tense relations between Mexican American youth and law enforcement. In addition, YCCA got involved in Julian Nava's election campaign for the Los Angeles Unified School District's Board of Education. They canvassed neighborhoods to raise community support for Los Angeles's first Mexican American school board member.

At the same time, YCCA members Sanchez and Esparza began training at the Social Action Training Center led by Father John Luce at the Church of the Epiphany in Lincoln Heights. Through the Social Action Training Center, YCCA became introduced to and involved with the Community Service Organization (CSO). Reflecting a shift in political consciousness, no doubt a result of their social action training, the organization changed its name to Young Chicanos for Community Action. According to Brown Berets founding member, Carlos Montes, he was initially attracted to Young Chicanos for Community Action precisely because of their "more active and direct action approach."¹⁸⁷ By 1968, YCCA underwent yet another name change. This time, they became the Brown Berets. Inspired by the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets donned military-style clothing and based their mission in community protection and defense. The Brown Beret's demonstrate the cross-pollination in political ideology and

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 109.

¹⁸⁷ Montes interview with *Fight Back! News*, February 1, 2003. "Brown Berets: Young Chicano Revolutionaries."

consciousness occurring between Black and Brown movements in this period. Importantly, this transformation was also catalyzed by unrelenting police abuse. Montes remembers that the East Los Angeles sheriffs “were notorious for their brutality, especially against Chicano youth,” and this pushed the YCCA/Brown Berets to picket the local Sheriff’s station in late November of 1967.¹⁸⁸¹⁸⁹

Though the history of the Hess Kramer youth leadership conferences and the Young Chicanos for Community Action are well-known origin stories for the East Los Angeles Blowouts, another important fountain of inspiration for Chicano youth lay in the multiracial organizing modeled by activists such as Eliezer Risco and Father John Luce at the Church of the Epiphany, mentioned earlier. Located at 2807 Altura in Lincoln Heights, the Church of the Epiphany has deep roots in Los Angeles history. Founded in 1887, the Church of the Epiphany is the longest continuously operated Episcopalian Diocesan Church in the city and the church walls have witnessed the long fetch of Los Angeles history. By the 1960s, the Church saw demographic change remake Lincoln Heights, as white flight transformed the area into a predominantly Mexican American, Roman Catholic, working class neighborhood.

The Church of the Epiphany transformed in the mid-1960s when Father John Luce, a 34-year-old rector from a Spanish-speaking congregation in Harlem, arrived in Lincoln Heights. Working together with Roger Wood and Oliver Garver, the clergymen strove to make the church much more responsive to their community and its culture. Virginia Cueto Ham, the church’s program director, served as the bridge to the Mexican American community. The congregation

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ See also Ian Haney Lopez *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Edward J. Escobar “The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol 79, No. 4 (March 1993) pp 1483-1514.

implemented Mexican cultural aesthetics into the liturgy and church décor, such as displaying the Mexican flag, an altar to the Virgen de Guadalupe, and including liberation theology popularized by Mexican priests in church services.¹⁹⁰

The Church of the Epiphany's embrace of multiculturalism stood in stark contrast to the Catholic Archdiocese in Los Angeles. Under the leadership of Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, the Catholic Church grew in power, but also grew out of touch with the politics and shifting values of its Black and Brown parishioners. Between 1948 and 1969, Cardinal McIntyre took advantage of the postwar affluence in building and real estate to dedicate 192 churches and open 180 Catholic schools across the county.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, the "McIntyre Regime"¹⁹² was also defined by its strict conservatism. Cardinal McIntyre was an ardent supporter of Proposition 13, the ballot measure that nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Act, the John Birch Society, and enjoyed a close relationship with Los Angeles Police Chief Parker. He opposed Vatican II reforms and banned discussion of civil rights by priests and nuns—even waging a very public war against the Immaculate Heart nuns, Catholics United for Racial Equality (CURE), seminary students, and Father William H. DuBay, all of whom challenged McIntyre on his political stances.¹⁹³ In public, McIntyre denied that racism existed in Southern California. In private, the Cardinal was known for making racial slurs, associating racialized groups with criminality, and defending the "many valid reasons for segregation and declar[ing] that 'after all, white parents

¹⁹⁰ "Epiphany's Clergy and Liturgy in the Mid-1960s." Epiphany Conservation Trust. <http://epiphanyconservationtrust.org>

¹⁹¹ John Dart, "Biographer Details a Cardinal's 'Regime'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1997.

¹⁹² Ibid

¹⁹³ See Mike Davis and Jon Weiner. *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties*

have a right to protect their daughters.’”¹⁹⁴ Parishioners responded with their feet. Black and Mexican American Catholics joined marches and sit-ins to protest Cardinal McIntyre; including daily pickets led by Albert the Great parishioners, a predominantly Black and Brown congregation.¹⁹⁵

Father John Luce could not have been more different. Luce had been involved in Freedom Summer civil rights organizing in Selma and Mississippi and brought these experiences with him to Lincoln Heights. The church programming reflected Luce’s values of direct action and civil disobedience. In addition to providing children with lessons on Mexican history and culture through the Barrio Union Scholastic for Community Action (BUSCA), youth learned about grassroots organizing and civil liberties at the Social Action Training Center. Using state funds made possible by the Community Development Corporation, the Social Action Training Center exposed East Los Angeles youth to Mexican American activists such as Cesar Chavez and Bert Corona.¹⁹⁶ More importantly, Luce intervened when Chicano youth encountered law enforcement outside church doors. An intelligence report given to the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education described Luce as an anti-police threat. The report claimed, “he has frequently interfered with police officers, conducting field interviews, advising those being interviewed not to answer questions, interposing himself between the officer and the interviewee, etc.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ “Priest Asks Pope to Oust Cardinal; Asserts McIntyre ‘Abuses’ Tenets on Racial Equality” *New York Times*, June 12, 1964.

¹⁹⁵ Davis and Weiner. *Set the Night on Fire*, 115.

¹⁹⁶ “Youth Leadership and Development in the 1960s” Epiphany Conservation Trust.

¹⁹⁷ “Code 11, November 15, 1967” in Board of Education Records, Box 1898 “Student Unrest, Materials Presented 3/28/1968,” Folder 2.

Father Luce's interference with police activity around the church grounds was a thorn in the side of law enforcement. However, perhaps more concerning was the "anti-police" education that the Church of the Epiphany provided to youth and community members. According to the intelligence report on Father Luce, the Social Action Training Center published the East Los Angeles Gram newsletter, which "advise[d] its readers of the latest incidents of 'police harassment' of Mexican-[Americans] and advise[d] procedure for filing police malpractice complaints, etc."¹⁹⁸ The report goes on to cast doubt on all youth programming and services that Luce was involved in, including the establishment of La Piranya Coffeehouse. La Piranya's connection to Church of the Epiphany and YCCA rendered it a recruitment center for foot soldiers in Luce's "Mexican-American Project...and battle with the police and Chief Tom Reddin."¹⁹⁹

In addition to the *East Los Angeles Gram*, the Church of the Epiphany also housed and printed a seminal periodical of the emerging Chicano movement—*La Raza*. The newspaper was edited by Eliezer Risco, a Cuban-born activist and Stanford University graduate student. Under his supervision, *La Raza* would go on to be the mouthpiece of the movement and report on its most important stories, such as the Blowouts, the case against the East L.A. 13 (Risco, being one of the 13 arrested), and the Chicano Moratorium. In Northern California, Risco became active in the Bay Area Free Speech Movement, as well as the antiwar movement. According to the intelligence report on Father Luce, Risco was a person of interest because he was suspected to

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid

have “trained under Che Guevara” and was now seeking to continue his rabble-rousing work with Father Luce, Chicano youth, and the Social Action Training Center.²⁰⁰

Like other student-led and social justice movements of the day, the Chicano youth that frequented La Piranya were subjected to the same counterinsurgent arguments to discredit their efforts. As this intelligence report suggests, law enforcement agents believed Chicano youth were incapable of thinking for themselves or developing a political analysis of law enforcement on their own, they must have been indoctrinated by a subversive anti-police figure: in this case, Father Luce. These Chicano youth, whose politicization would blossom into the Blowouts just months later, were indeed provoked by outside agitation. However, that outside agitation came not from the Church of the Epiphany, but rather from law enforcement themselves.

The Sheriff’s Department, in particular, routinely harassed Chicano youth in and around La Piranya, stopping and searching them at random, and arresting minors for curfew violations. Law enforcement even infiltrated meetings held at the coffeehouse with informants who not only collected intelligence but caused disruption by provoking the group and waging “psychological warfare.”²⁰¹ As Edward Escobar explains in his seminal article, “The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971,” police surveillance and violence against Chicanos was used to silence law enforcement enemies but had the opposite effect. Police repression further politicized Chicano youth and “propelled that activism to a new level—a level that created a greater problem than had originally existed.”²⁰² So while Father Luce might have supported the politicization of Chicano youth through the Social

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Edward J. Escobar, “The Dialectics of Repression,” 1493.

²⁰² Ibid, 1485-86.

Action Training Center and provided space for youth of color to question law enforcement activity in their communities, it was the routine encounters with law enforcement that ultimately lit the flames of protest. Father Luce only helped provide Chicano youth with tools to turn their organic political grievances into direct action.

Perhaps most importantly, the Social Action Training Center taught Chicano youth that direct action went hand in hand with cross-racial solidarity and shared struggle. Through the Center, young Chicanos were introduced to Black Power activists and given opportunities to learn directly from them and their movements. Father Luce and Eliezer Risco organized meetings and field trips for the Social Action Training Center, sending carloads to Delano to meet with the United Farm Workers, and El Paso to “heckle LBJ.”²⁰³ In October in 1967, the Church of the Epiphany chartered a Greyhound bus to Albuquerque, New Mexico to attend the Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres Convention, organized by Reies Lopez Tijerina. This convention reflected Tijerina’s growing interest in the urgency of coalitions and cultivating Black and Brown unity. In alignment with Tijerina’s goals, the Church of the Epiphany’s Greyhound carried Eliezer Risco, David Sanchez of the YCCA/Brown Berets, and members from the Los Angeles chapter of the “Black Panthers, Black Congress, Black Youth Congress, Black Student Union, CORE, SLANT, Black Anti-Draft Unit, and US.”²⁰⁴ According to *La Raza*, the convention was a powerful lesson in the value of Black and Chicano coalitions: “With no exception, those who went to Albuquerque felt that the Alianza can teach us lessons, maybe, just by being there.”²⁰⁵ In the spirit of solidarity, activists at the convention signed a treaty of

²⁰³ “Code 11, November 15, 1967” in Board of Education Records, Box 1898 “Student Unrest, Materials Presented 3/28/1968,” Folder 2.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ *La Raza*, Vol 1, No 4, October 29, 1967.

peace, harmony and mutual assistance, which proclaimed that the “myth of coalition for mutual self-interest is exploded and we move into the area of mutual respect.”²⁰⁶ Unsurprisingly, the prospect of Black and Brown unity raised alarms among law enforcement and the Albuquerque meetings were subjected to police surveillance. Historian George Mariscal writes that all meetings at the convention were illegally recorded, and federal marshals detained and searched buses returning to Los Angeles from Albuquerque.²⁰⁷

By early March 1968, the foundation for a Black and Brown, student-led and community-based movement for educational justice was firmly laid. Anyone paying close attention would have recognized that schools in East Los Angeles and South Central Los Angeles were on the verge of a breaking point. As early as 1967 law enforcement agents were infiltrating and spying on student organizations, studying their movements, harassing them at every opportunity, and witnessing student frustration and resistance. In addition, the eruption of community-based protest, led by Margaret Wright at Manual Arts High School in the fall of 1967 similarly should have primed school officials to expect further disturbances that school year. In fact, *La Raza* issued a call for Chicano students to organize a protest similar to what had occurred in Manual Arts: “It is NOW time that the ELA Chicanos arise, organize, protest and demand action—even if it is first necessary that Garfield become our ‘Manual Arts.’ School officials: Beware! Wake up! The Chicano is on the march.”²⁰⁸ But the Board of Education continued business as usual—expanding school districts in the San Fernando Valley, neglecting urban overcrowding, denying the reality of racial segregation—as winter gradually gave way to a rebellious spring.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Mariscal, *Brown Eyed Children of the Sun*, 194-5.

²⁰⁸ *La Raza*, Vol 1, No 4, October 29, 1967.

The Student Spring

No one expected Wilson High School students to go on strike. The Blowout Planning Committee originally hoped to avoid walking out all together and bring the Board of Education to the proverbial negotiating table without campus disturbances. Walking out was a last resort plan, and something that would be a coordinated effort with select East Los Angeles Schools, should the Board prove unresponsive. But Wilson High's spontaneous strike kickstarted a rebellion that outpaced the planning committee's vision and rattled the Board's aloofness. With locked gates, police blockades, paddy wagons, plain clothes officers, and threatened expulsions, school officials tried to contain this fast-moving rebellion. But students climbed fences, dodged billy clubs, and fueled a movement that crisscrossed freeways popping up in new campuses like a growing brushfire.

Students at Wilson High walked out on a Friday March 1, 1968. Students spontaneously protested after the conservative Principal, Donald Skinner, cancelled the spring play, "Barefoot in the Park," in the final dress rehearsal, which students had been working towards all semester. Many of the students who decided to walk out never participated in the Wilson contingent of students on the Blowout Planning Committee, but it is likely that they were aware of the plans underway to organize a massive student mobilization. When their play was canceled, they surprised everyone by igniting a walkout. As the students' protest grew, Principal Skinner immediately moved to block the demonstration by enclosing students inside the campus, locking the gates, and calling the police—a strategy that would later be replicated as other campuses began walking out. The following Tuesday, March 5, approximately 2,700 students at Roosevelt and Jefferson High across town, walked out. The rebellion had expanded. By Wednesday, March

6, Lincoln High School joined, and the next day, Belmont High School, Venice High School, and Carver Junior High walked out.

Walking out was no easy feat. At every turn, students were blocked by containment strategies deployed by a united front of school administrators, law enforcement, and some teachers. On Tuesday, March 5, 20-30 sheriffs forced students back on to campus and into the administration building at Garfield High School (see image 4). Student protestor John Ortiz claimed to have witnessed snipers on top of school buildings and “at least 40 units of deputy sheriffs assembled on the football field.”²⁰⁹ As mentioned previously, run-ins with law enforcement was likely an anticipated outcome of walking out. Law enforcement surveillance of student organizers at La Piranya was routine, and the military-like occupation of Watts in the aftermath of the 1965 rebellion was not far from mind. Sal Castro echoed this dreaded anticipation: “In the back of my mind was the Watts Riots and how the police and military came down on blacks with unneeded force that killed and wounded a large number. The last thing I wanted was a similar reaction to the walkouts.”²¹⁰

Unfortunately, Castro’s fear became reality. The most violent confrontation between students and law enforcement occurred at Roosevelt High School the following Wednesday. Principal Dyer called authorities prior to the start of the school day and arranged for police presence to prevent students from walking out, and the LAPD called a tactical alert. Dyer then locked the school gates and called a morning assembly to confine the student body in one location, as law enforcement from Hollenbeck and Lincoln Heights stations enclosed on the schooled. The students, committed to their cause, climbed and jumped over locked fences only to

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 151

²¹⁰ Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 147.

encounter police in riot gear swinging batons in their direction, threatening them with arrest (see images 1, 2, and 3). In the face of clear and present danger, students continued to climb the locked fences. Vicki Castro, a student at Roosevelt, tied a chain from the locked gate to her car and forced it down, freeing her classmates into the streets. Once on the street, students were chased, cornered, beaten, and arrested by police. Similarly, at Belmont High School, Principal Naumann locked gates to prevent students from walking out. Naumann also involved his teaching staff in blockading students, by instructing them to lock students in their classrooms. The students who were able to escape enclosure, much like their Roosevelt counterparts, were assaulted by law enforcement as their teachers looked on from classroom windows.²¹¹

The confinement strategy was also used by school administrators at Jefferson High School and Washington Junior High in South Los Angeles. At these schools, campus staff were ordered to lock fences and gates at night, well before students arrived the next morning. When he learned of this, Sal Castro drove to South Los Angeles in the early morning hours, between 2 and 3 AM, to unlock the gates with the master key that remained in his possession from his time as a playground monitor in the early 1960s. Administrators soon had the locks changed. As student protests reached a critical mass, the Board of Education was slow to extend acknowledgement to students that their grievances had been registered, or even heard. Community members arrived at the regular meetings that week and not permitted to speak before the Board. Instead, the initial actions of the Board mirrored that of the school principals: reach out to law enforcement. On the standard Thursday meeting on March 7, President Georgiana Hardy and Superintendent Crowther gave time to Police Chief Thomas Reddin to counsel the Board. Chief Reddin expressed the trite belief that the students had not organized this massive

²¹¹ Ibid, 169.

movement on their own, but instead were being led astray by outside agitators. Reddin told the members that the escalating problem at “various schools in the City of Los Angeles” were part of an “organized plan to disrupt a major portion of the school system...involving persons who did not have a child in attendance at that particular school.”²¹²

After Reddin spoke, the Board discussed next steps and let recent history be their guide. At Manual Arts High the previous fall, school officials had used court injunctions to target activist Margaret Wright, prevent her from coming near campus, and further stymie student protests. Dr. Willett moved that the Board of Education should “go on record as encouraging the Superintendent to take advantage of the law and seek injunctive relief” in response to this latest student rebellion.²¹³

Defending the Board of Education, the *LA Times* echoed the belief that Black and Chicano students were the instigators of violence in the student rebellions. A March 8th article accused students of inciting violence against police, committing arson and stoning police cars. After Chief Reddin spoke, approximately 200 Black and Chicano students demanded the Board’s attention, prompting President Georgiana Hardy to immediately adjourn the meeting. According to the *LA Times*, the intimidation of militant students “sent most Board members fleeing out a rear door.”²¹⁴

²¹² Meeting Minutes, March 7, 1968, in Board of Education Records, Box 415.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ “Education Board Put to Flight in Climax to School Disorders,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1968.



Image 1. Students at Roosevelt High watching from behind locked gates. As soon as students at Wilson High School began walking out, other campuses in East Los Angeles began locking gates to prevent students from doing the same. This was part of a typical confinement strategy used by Principals and school staff, which included calling law enforcement, in some cases preemptively, to thwart the Blowouts and intimidate students. Image from “Remembering the 1968 East Los Angeles high school blowouts” Miguel Roura, *People’s World*, May 11, 2018



Image 2. Defying attempts to lock them in, students climbed fences and torn them down. Locked gates and fencing became a symbol of the feelings of enclosure students experienced in Eastside schools. Here, students at Roosevelt High School are climbing locked fences to leave campus on Wednesday, March 6, 1968. Image from “The Walkout—How a Student Movement in 1968 Changed Schools Forever” *United Way Greater Los Angeles*. February 26, 2018



Image 3. Art Velarde locking gates at Roosevelt High School. Velarde was a Roosevelt alum and East LA baseball star, playing for Roosevelt High School, East Los Angeles College, UCLA, and the Carmelita Chorizeros in the 1950s. He remained connected to the Roosevelt High School baseball team. Image from “The Walkout—How a Student Movement in 1968 Changed Schools Forever” *United Way Greater Los Angeles*. February 26, 2018



Image 4. Police were called in immediately after the students began protesting at Wilson on Friday, March 1. When protests grew beyond Wilson, nearly every other campus demonstration was met by police presence. At Roosevelt High School, Principal Dyer called law enforcement in preemptively before the school day began, and the LAPD declared a tactical alert. In this image, law enforcement pictured surrounding Garfield High School. Image from *Los Angeles Times* Photographs Collection



Image 4. Police were even called out to confront predominantly white campuses which walked out. Here the LAPD are pictured confronting student protestors outside Venice High School. Image from *Los Angeles Times* Photographs Collection.



Image 6. The presence of law enforcement was a feature of the school experience for Black and Chicano students. Police would regularly patrol the perimeter of school grounds after hours and students began describing their schools as prison-like. In 1967, *La Raza* newspaper reported that Garfield High School operated in a state of martial law (see next chapter). The student rebellion in South Central and Eastside schools dramatized the issue of cops on campus, and their removal became a key demand. In this image, student protestors picketed outside of Roosevelt High School, a site that experienced remarkable excessive police use of force during the Blowouts. Image from “Remembering the 1968 East Los Angeles high school blowouts” Miguel Roura, *People’s World*, May 11, 2018

Portrayals such as this increased public perception, especially among “taxpaying” residents on the Westside or in the San Fernando Valley, that the only reform needed in schools in “disadvantaged areas” was enhanced security and disciplinarian leadership. One angry former teacher wrote in complaining: “I don’t want any more student control of the schools or textbooks, or dress. They are to learn to obey.”²¹⁵ Another angry parent blamed Black and Chicano parents for “rioting” youth: “Where were the parents???...Why didn’t the children complain through...their own parents? Please, stress through them the importance of proper discipline in their homes.”²¹⁶ To student activists, on the other hand, the March 7th meeting was confirmation that the Chief of Police and Superintendent of Schools had “joined forces to demonstrate...a Police State.”²¹⁷

The following morning, on Friday, March 8, students in East Los Angeles marched through the rain to Hazard Park where they were met by Board member Ralph Richardson, Julian Nava, the lone Mexican American serving on the Board, and Councilman Ed Roybal. Richardson admitted to the crowd of students that the walkouts had effectively captured his attention of Eastside school issues. But the students were unsatisfied—they demanded a meeting with the full Board of Education and accused the Board of running away from Chicano students. Roybal and Nava commended the students for calling attention to educational issues in East Los Angeles and promised the community a meeting with the Board. Then, Roybal admonished the police as they arrived at Hazard Park and encouraged them to go. According to Castro’s recollection, Roybal told them police ““We don’t need the police here... We can take care of

²¹⁵ Correspondence in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 5.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ *La Raza*, Vol 1, No 11, March 31, 1968.

business ourselves.’ The students shouted in support.”²¹⁸ Meanwhile, students across town at Jefferson High conducted a sit-in, and middle schoolers at Carver defied their Principal’s attempts to stymie the boycott. The courage of Black and Brown students even inspired sympathy strikes at predominantly white campuses like University High School on the Westside and North Hollywood High in the San Fernando Valley.

In addition, the community in Eastside and South Central Los Angeles had come out in support of students. Parents, university students, community activists, and church leaders joined the boycotts, sit-ins, and walkouts happening across the county. At the Monday Board of Education meeting on March 11, 1968 the community flooded the downtown office. The sheer volume of Black and Chicano parents, students, and activists overwhelmed the downtown office’s capacity. Firefighters directed overflow to the entrance patio, and the proceedings were broadcast outside to crowd. Student and faculty representatives from Garfield, Lincoln, Wilson, Belmont, Roosevelt, Jefferson, Hamilton and Marshall High Schools each made 15-minute presentations before board members.²¹⁹

The Board increased police presence at the meeting, but this was clearly not enough to make some Board members feel safe. Robert Chambers, one of the more conservative members of the Board, and a consistent opponent to “urban affairs,” pulled a gun out of his briefcase before the assembly, demonstrating it to the community audience. Though it may be tempting to view Chambers’s response as reactionary, it was actually quite symbolic of, and consistent with, how the school administrators, principals, and teachers handled the student rebellion and the reality of Black and Brown organizing. According to Sal Castro, Chambers’s spectacle “showed

²¹⁸ Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 176

²¹⁹ Meeting minutes, March 11, 1968, in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 5.

me how much we had scared the shit out of the board.”²²⁰ The Board did agree to some key victories, though—namely, the proposed meeting at Lincoln High School, scheduled for March 26 (Chambers voted against), and amnesty on “truant” student strikers. Students had another success when the Board agreed to have the racist Principal at Jefferson High School removed and replaced with a Black Principal.²²¹

However, the Board did not budge on the matter of security, refusing to remove police from campuses or release students currently held in police custody. In fact, in that same meeting, the Board codified its relationship to law enforcement agencies through an emergency procedures memorandum. Superintendent Jack Crowther circulated his newly formulated “Emergency Procedures for Handling Disturbances, Disorders, or Demonstrations,” which had been “developed in conference with law enforcement representatives.” The document gave authority to law enforcement to handle campus protests, prohibited school employees from interfering with law enforcement operations, and indicated that any person on campus or adjacent streets are liable to be arrested if their presence “create[s] or magnify[ies] tensions.”²²²

The “Emergency Procedures” memo underscores the Board’s the mismatched priorities between school officials and the communities they ostensibly served. The Board met for 3 hours and failed to hear a fundamental grievance that marginalized communities had been expressing for years: inadequate and failing schools were inherently unsafe for Black and Brown children, and the presence of law enforcement on campuses only intensifies that danger. Ultimately, the

²²⁰ Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 184-5

²²¹ Meeting minutes, March 11, 1968, in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 5

²²² *Ibid*

way the Board ruled on March 11 exposed a fundamental truth; they would continue to see nonwhite youth as specters of danger, rather than co-creators of educational reform.

Nevertheless, these limited concessions gave students a tangible sense of the power of multiracial movements and coalitions. The sheer number of students walking out across the county that Friday gave organizers the leverage they needed to draft demands and force the Board to receive them.

Conclusion

Looking back on Friday March 8, 1968, Sal Castro estimated that fifteen schools and 20,000 students around Los Angeles County walked out or staged some sort of campus demonstration.²²³ Castro acknowledged the role that Black students played in mobilizing several hundred students in South LA, without whom, the East Los Angeles Blowouts would not have had the same impact: “The black kids instead staged a sit-in, to not only support us but to complain about their conditions. They soon thereafter had their own walkouts. The following week, several hundred black students walked out of Edison Junior High to protest conditions there. The black student walkouts and sit-ins are part of the blowout story that has not received as much attention.”²²⁴

Castro’s acknowledgement is significant. To this day, the 1968 Blowouts continue to be memorialized as the high point of the Chicano Student Movement. Indeed, it certainly was. However, this kind of framing obscures the true power of those first two weeks in March. The Blowouts are significant not because Chicano students organized themselves. The Blowouts are significant because Black and Chicano students organized in tandem and inspired a wave of

²²³ Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 177.

²²⁴ Ibid

sympathy strikes that crisscrossed the boundaries used to maintain racial apartheid and urban sprawl. Black and Brown students climbed and surmounted the barriers intended to isolate them and their communities—locked gates, police blockades, law enforcement decked out in riot gear, freeways that reinforced the racial geography of the city.

Chicano youth, students of Sal Castro, the Social Action Training Center, and Reies Lopez Tijerina's call for Black and Brown coalitions, were primed to see purpose in unity. This was intentional. As the next chapter will show, the power of this moment of Black and Brown organizing is reflected in the demands that students produced, which called for reforms that linked Black and Chicano student protests. The student rebellions of 1967-1968 were significant because they brought national attention to school systems like Los Angeles, which practiced urban neglect and genteel apartheid, and continued to deny it. With their feet, students conducted the largest general strike in educational history and resoundingly dispelled that falsity. Youth living at the edge of marginality challenged repeated attempts at enclosure, and in the process, proved that fences could be climbed or even torn down. That story is worth remembering, especially in the twenty-first century. Today, abolition activists are mobilizing to resist prison-like schools and undergoing a renewed call for collectivist organizing. But if we look closely, we can see the roots of abolition in education are deep, and we find them in histories we thought we knew well. The students of the spring of 1968 can still teach us what it means to refuse and what it means to form collective bonds against enclosures. The next chapter will show how those students took their multiracial movement and embedded it in their demands for a better, safer school system.

Chapter 4

Another School is Possible: Reimagining Education through Student Demands, 1968-1970

In the days following the Monday March 11 meeting, students on the Eastside were jubilant. They had successfully captured the attention of the city, the nation, and even the support and recognition of presidential hopeful Bobby Kennedy. What is more, they had successfully convinced the Board to agree to a meeting at Lincoln High School, set for March 26, where the students would present their demands. Sal Castro remembered the pervasive sense of pride this achievement gave the students: “We had achieved a significant victory by forcing the board to come to us, to have the guts to go into the Chicano community and discuss the grievances about the schools. The kids have given a voice to the Chicano community. They empowered themselves but also their parents and the East L.A. community.”²²⁵ In preparation for the meeting, students met with Sal Castro to refine the demands. They thought meaningfully about the issues, what it would take to begin rectifying them, and what language to use. The language was important. They wanted the demands to have an impact. At the end of it, students produced fifty-five demands. Fifty-five dreams.

Fifty-five became thirty-eight after the Board reviewed their copy, sent in advance of the March 26 meeting, and chose thirty-eight to respond to.²²⁶ The Board received a flood of correspondence from various interested parties either condemning the student protests or supporting them. Educator organizations, parent groups, unions, activists, and concerned citizens all wrote in to make suggestions for how the Board might seize this moment to make changes. The range in opinions and reactions to the student rebellions underscored that this was indeed a

²²⁵ Garcia and Castro, *Blowout!*, 186.

²²⁶ *Ibid*

moment of transformative potential for schooling in Los Angeles—and it could go in any direction.

The student demands are a generative site of analysis because they provide unique windows into the state of education in LA schools, the imaginations of student activists, and the impact of multiracial organizing on them. Close examination of the demands reveals that Chicano students were thinking in collaborative, collectivist ways and this shaped the way they understood educational justice. The weeks preceding the March 26 meeting taught Chicano activists that liberation and abolition is forged in collectivity. It cannot be done alone. And the demands produced by the students reflected this ethos. This chapter argues that the 1968-1970 student rebellions were a moment where abolitionist visions were possible. Students were not just demanding the end to old, racist ways of schooling, but also dreaming and articulating new models that reimagined curriculum, safety, discipline, accountability, campus-community partnerships, and the very notion of a community school.

Several scholarly treatments of the Chicano student movement highlight the points that were meaningful to Eastside schools, such as bilingual instruction and cross-cultural training for school staff. However, students did not craft these demands in an Eastside vacuum. Several of the demands that students presented to the Board were in line with points that Black activists had been demanding for some time prior to the Blowouts. Moreover, these demands also resonated with issues that rebelling students at predominantly white schools, such as Venice High, were pushing for.

This universal vision not only demanded the dismantling of old policies and procedures, but fundamentally reimagined schools and their relationships and accountability to the communities they served. They reimagined what learning could look and feel like—right down

to the built environment of the school itself. In short, the student demands presented on March 26, 1968 envisioned schools as homeplaces for the most marginal of students. Using scholar Bettina Love's concept of abolitionist teaching is instructive here. Love describes abolitionist teaching as a paradigm that is "as much about tearing down old structures and ways of thinking as it is about forming new ideas, new forms of social interactions, new ways to be inclusive, new ways to discuss inequality and distribute wealth and resources, new ways to resist, new ways to agitate, new ways to maintain order and safety...new ways to show dark children that they are loved in this world, and new ways to establish an educational system that works for everyone, especially those who are put at the edges of the classroom and society."²²⁷ When understood through the lens of abolitionist teaching, it is clear that the student demands transcended the fences of the Eastside schools and offered a vision for educational change that was universal in nature.

Finally, this chapter explores how student protests evolved after March 1968. The bonds created between the student movements on the Eastside and South-Central continued and expanded to the junior colleges in Los Angeles. The power of this moment of Black and Brown organizing was reflected in key areas: the vision for educational reform outlined by student demands; in the fact that students in United Mexican American Students (UMAS) and Black Student Unions across Los Angeles continued to find opportunities for solidarity after March. Schools, Not Prisons: Reexamining Student Demands through an Abolitionist Lens

As many studies of the Blowouts have emphasized, one of the primary demands made by student protestors was a call for curriculum reform. This was a shared demand between predominantly Black schools in South Los Angeles, such as Jefferson High, Edison Junior High

²²⁷ Love, *We Want to do More Than Survive*, 88-89.

and Carver Junior High, and predominantly Chicano schools on the Eastside. At the March 14, 1968 Board of Education meeting, the Broadway-Central Coordinating Council, a community action group, presented a list of concerns regarding conditions at Jefferson High School, which asserted that “Negro and Mexican History should be a part of the regular U.S. History requirement.”²²⁸ Chicano students echoed this in their 38 points, demanding that all LA City Schools teach “the contributions of all minorities to United States history and culture.”²²⁹ This, of course, was about immediately increasing the engagement of Los Angeles’s most at-risk and vulnerable students through culturally relevant curriculum. However, the added benefit to teaching the history of racialized groups in the U.S. was that it would positively impact all students. Students envisioned a history curriculum that was not only respectful of their communities but would also enrich the education of all. Calling into question the history curriculum, devoid of racial and ethnic diversity, suggested that all students in LA schools were miseducated to some degree. In doing so, this demand had a meaningful impact on all students in Los Angeles.

In addition, students called for an overhaul of the assessment and student evaluation practices employed by instructors. Students argued that Eastside schools’ low reading scores, high dropout, and high failure rate were reflective of ineffective teaching and racist environments in the classroom. Therefore, the high incidence of failure required a systemic evaluation of grading policies to ensure fairness. This demand reflects one of the longstanding complaints of Black and Mexican American parents about the inferior educational quality students of color received in Los Angeles. Months prior to the Blowouts, *La Raza* publicized dropout rate

²²⁸ Meeting Minutes, March 14, 1968, in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 5.

²²⁹ Meeting Minutes, March 26, 1968 in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 3.

statistics for Eastside schools dating back to 1959. Garfield and Roosevelt High Schools consistently ranked in the top 10% of schools in the county with highest dropout rate, every year.²³⁰ The newspaper also featured stories on the abysmal reading scores, which East Los Angeles principals attributed to Spanish-speaking parents and “Mexican-American ‘language handicap.’”²³¹

Though the demand specifically called out Eastside schools, it could have easily applied to South LA’s predominantly Black schools whose retention and performance rates were equally poor. For example, a 1967 accreditation report at Jefferson High School found that the dropout rate exceeded 35%, and the majority of students were reading far below grade level.²³² As opponents to the Blowouts blamed apathetic or absent parents in Black and Chicano neighborhoods for poor learning outcomes, students turned the attention back on the schools themselves for failing their students. Forcing schools to reassess their grading practices was a change that could have universal impact.

Another common issue between Black and Brown schools was the poor state of campus and community relations. Both communities complained of parents being kept in the dark, and lack of communication between administrators, teachers, and parents. To remedy this, student demands called for cross-cultural sensitivity training for teachers and administrators, as well as extending more opportunities for community involvement on campuses. For example, one of the demands imagined parents and community members serving as teacher aides in the classroom. Having a familiar face, a witness, to not only help teacher-student relations, but also to help

²³⁰ *La Raza*, October 29, 1967, Vol 1, No. 4.

²³¹ *La Raza*, February 10, 1968, Vol 1, No. 9.

²³² Meeting Minutes, November 6, 1967, in Board of Education Records, Box 410.

students feel safe in the classroom. Students also wanted their campuses to look more like their communities in terms of greater diversity in faculty, staff, and administrators. Suggests that students wanted their classrooms to feel like homeplaces. Interestingly, teachers and the Board were open to most of these ideas, especially the prospect of improving community-campus relations. In their response to the student demands, the Board expressed agreement with need for greater diversity, and with the idea of community teacher aides.

Reimagining safety in schools also required reforming the district's disciplinary policy; an area where the demands met obstinate refusal from the Board. Students called attention to the problematic discipline that was rampant in Eastside and South Central schools, asserting that administrators gave out suspensions arbitrarily and seldom provided explanation or justification for the punishment to parents. The nature of discipline in the schools was emblematic of larger issues such as lack of trust and open communication between parents and schools. To remedy this, students demanded that all suspensions must come with documentation to be sent home. Students took this opportunity to open the door for an overhaul of the district's rules for suspensions. They demanded that the community should be given the opportunity to assess disciplinary policy. From their perspective, an effective disciplinary policy was one where the "community, the administration, and the teachers [are] in substantial agreement concerning the rules governing student suspensions."²³³

In addition, students also called for an end to corporal punishment; a disciplinary method that was overused in predominantly Black and Mexican American schools. In no uncertain terms, the students stated directly that "corporal punishment should be abolished. Students are

²³³ Meeting Minutes, March 26, 1968 in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 3.

not to be swatted at any time for any reason.”²³⁴ Taken together, these demands for community review of suspension rules and abolition of corporal punishment are significant for several reasons. First, it placed the blame for lack of trust and communication firmly on the shoulders of school leadership, that had routinely neglected to notify parents of student discipline. Demanding community review and approval of suspension policy undermined the common and false assumption that Black and Brown parents were uninvolved in their student’s educational lives and apathetic regarding campus affairs. It also underscored a primary theme of the student demands overall: a desire to make schools safer for marginalized students.

The Board agreed on some of these points: that suspensions should be written and provided to parents in appropriate languages. However, they refused to permit the community a voice in disciplinary policy. They firmly retorted that suspension policy is determined by state code and Board regulations, but that they “should be understood by students, parents, and the community.”²³⁵ Similarly, the Board reaffirmed its existing policy on corporal punishment, recognizing it as a “proper disciplinary method.”²³⁶

More importantly, students used the demands to imagine campuses as sites where student rights would be valued, respected, and protected. This is most clearly evident in the demands for free speech and free press. This demand echoed calls that students had also raised in Venice High School several freeways and miles away. Indeed, this was a common refrain among most, if not all, protesting students in those first two weeks of March. From East Los Angeles to South Central, to San Fernando, students collectively felt that their schools should be places of free

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

expression. The demands read as follows: “No student or teacher will be reprimanded or suspended in any efforts which are executed for the purpose of improving or furthering the educational quality in our schools...Students should have access to any type of literature and should be allowed to bring it on campus.”²³⁷

The fact that students expressed the need for this demand in the first place makes clear that students felt their rights were not respected at school. What’s more, the demand reveals that students considered their campuses adversarial spaces—spaces that would retaliate against them for speaking openly. In their visions for a democratic school, students also included protections for faculty—a clear nod to instructors like Sal Castro, and other campus employees that were supportive of striking students. In their response to these demands, the Board exposed their inability or reluctance to appreciate the urgency, foresight, and expansive need for free speech and free press. It was a failure to understand free speech as a necessary pressure valve, that would ultimately relieve student-administrative tensions in the long run.

Instead, the Board shifted the rights discussion away from student strikers, and onto the school employees and student strikers who opposed the boycotts: “Teachers and students, in their efforts to secure improvement of school programs, must recognize that other students and members of school staffs also have rights...There are established channels of communication that should be used. Walkouts and other disruptive acts have served their purpose.”²³⁸ In this false equivalency, the Board dismissed the calls made by upwards of 20,000 students across 15 different campuses, in favor of the “other students and members of school staffs.” As if this vision of schools as democratic safe havens didn’t also include their rights as well.

²³⁷ Ibid

²³⁸ Ibid.

Initially, the Board ruled similarly towards the issue of free press: prohibiting literature that spreads propaganda or fosters membership in an organization “not directly under the control of school authorities.”²³⁹ However, a few days after the Lincoln High School meeting, Board member Julian Nava produced a follow up document to share with student organizers entitled “Student Rights and Responsibilities.” This document began by conceding a central point that student strikers had raised: “We must show students more respect.” On the issue of free press, the Board seemed to backpedal. The Board recognized students’ right to circulate (nonsubversive) materials. Notably, this permitted the circulation of *La Raza* and *Inside Eastside* “so long as they are legally circulated outside campus.”²⁴⁰

One demand that has not garnered as much scholarly attention is the call for open schools. This demand is quite revealing of what students imagined could be possible on Eastside campuses, and by extension, all schools in Los Angeles. The demand specifically stated that “All high school campuses should be open. Fences should be removed.”²⁴¹ Fencing became symbolic of the myriad problems facing Black and Chicano schools: institutions that are sealed off from the communities they served, lack of trust, prioritizing discipline and security over student rights, and student success. Removing fencing was one way to make campuses more fluidly integrated and accessible to their communities. Moreover, fencing also represented the feeling of confinement that shaped the student experience. In their protests, students climbed fences that were deliberately locked and even tore them down. They carried picket signs that equated their schools with jails, bearing slogans that read: “School, Not Prison.”

²³⁹ Ibid

²⁴⁰ Julian Nava “Student Rights and Responsibilities” March 28, 1968, in Board of Ed Records, Box 1898, Folder 3.

²⁴¹ Meeting Minutes, March 26, 1968 in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 3.

However, some residents of East Los Angeles did not agree with the student's position on fencing. Some felt comforted by the presence of fencing and policing in school vicinities. In a letter to the Board, Enrique Ortega expressed the positionality of those who opposed open campuses: "As to the open campus demand that fences be removed, I wonder how many of you are aware of the reasons why the front portion of Garfield High School was enclosed."²⁴² Claiming to represent the "98% majority" of Eastside residents, Ortega suggested that the high schoolers were too young to be aware of the community problems that led to the placement of the fencing in the first place. He reminded them: "In the fall of 1964 the custodians informed the principal that too many couples were coming on campus during the night and using the grounds for a motel."²⁴³ The fencing, in other words, protected the school grounds from indecency and sexual immorality, for the sake of the children. In his view, Chicano youth were twisting the purpose of the fencing that ultimately was for their benefit, "many persons since that time have chosen to use the fence in a manner calculated to incite with statements such as 'they are treating you like animals.'"²⁴⁴ Whether Ortega's letter truly reflected the positionality of the 98% majority, it is clear that for Chicano youth who actually attended school and dealt with the fencing on a day-to-day basis, it represented nothing less than a prison-like environment.

In addition to the fencing, students in South Central and East Los Angeles schools complained about locked bathrooms (a related student demand), which were done as a preemptive measure to discourage students from loitering in bathrooms, ditching class, or using narcotics. The everyday school experience for Black and Brown students involved routine

²⁴² Letter to the Board from Enrique Ortega, in Board of Education Records, Box 1898 Folder 3.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

containment. Months before the protests, *La Raza* wrote about how the culture and built environment made the students feel imprisoned. For example, *La Raza* wrote that the “teachers are more like wardens than instructors,” and that Garfield High School operated in a state of “martial law.”²⁴⁵ At Garfield, the fencing, which the paper nicknamed the “East Berlin Fence” functioned primarily to keep the neighborhood residents off school grounds. The fencing was also reinforced by heavy police surveillance, who “constantly patrol” the school and its environs. Anyone in the vicinity could be stopped, “questioned and their names are put on a list.”²⁴⁶

Transforming Los Angeles schools into open campuses wasn’t just about tearing down fencing. It was about changing the spirit of schooling, rebuilding its relationship to the community, and reflecting those changes in the built environment of the school itself. Therefore, demanding an open school also necessitated a reevaluation of the presence of law enforcement on campuses, who helped to maintain the feeling of constant confinement that students were rebelling against. Many different organizations and community members validated students on this issue and wrote to the Board to share their concerns about police presence. For example, the Echo Park Democratic Club urged the Board to “give serious consideration to the demands of the striking students” and demanded that “the police be withdrawn from the various schools involved.”²⁴⁷ Similarly, a Western Union telegram from Louis Flores, Chairman of the Mexican American Spanish Sur-Name Issues Conference demanded “the immediate cessation of the harassment physical and verbal brutality by the law enforcement authorities of Los Angeles” on high school students. Echoing this call, John Herrod, faculty president at Jefferson High School,

²⁴⁵ *La Raza* October 29, 1967, Vol 1, No.4; December 2, 1967, Vol 1, No. 5.

²⁴⁶ *La Raza*, December 2, 1967, Vol 1, No. 5.

²⁴⁷ Correspondence, March 13, 1968 in Board Records, Box 1898, Folder 4.

warned that all “progress made toward getting the students to return to campus will be negated should policemen be sent to the campus.”²⁴⁸ The cacophony of voices underscored a key point that students boldly made in their demands: that open schools don’t have enclosures and they don’t have police presence. The first step in rebuilding trust and mutual respect required removing fencing, and above all else, law enforcement.

These very measures that were instituted by school authorities to provide security did just the opposite, especially for Black and Brown students. But of course, the Board failed to meaningfully understand this demand. The Board maintained that “fencing of campuses is regarded as an essential part of pupil protection in order to keep non-students off school campuses...Without some means of controlling campus entrances, it would be difficult to...provide the security deemed essential.”²⁴⁹ However, the Board did provide some small concessions on the issue of campus security and use of agents. The Board determined that “appropriate security measures...are not intended to physically force students to remain on campus when they request to leave.”²⁵⁰ Additionally, the Board agreed that security personnel on campuses should not carry lethal weapons. These small concessions indicated that the Board had missed the point. Schools that operate in willful isolation from their communities are unsafe. Schools that deny their students free speech in the name of security are unsafe. Schools that continue corporal punishment in the face of wide-spread opposition are unsafe.

Ultimately, the concessions that students received were a mixed bag with some important steps forward and some refusals to budge. Overtime, schools did receive more teachers and

²⁴⁸ Correspondence, March 9, 1968 in Board Records, Box 1898, Folder 4.

²⁴⁹ Meeting Minutes, March 26, 1968 in Board of Education Records, Box 1898, Folder 3.

²⁵⁰ Nava “Student Rights and Responsibilities” March 28, 1968, in Board of Ed Records, Box 1898, Folder 3.

administrators of color. In 1975 the Board finally abolished corporal punishment. In addition, the demand for Ethnic Studies soon inspired university and college students, who continued the push. Whatever the Board's shortcomings, it does not take away from the impressive, sweeping changes the demands tried to initiate. Indeed, the demands should be appreciated for the boldness to dream up a school that did not exist and demand that elected Board leaders make it so. That vision, as I have tried to show, was not narrowly interested in improving Eastside schools but in improving the state of public education for all in LA City Schools. That vision was deeply inspired by community activism modeled first in Black Los Angeles, and by key figures on the Eastside and the larger Chicano movement that influenced youth to view their struggle for justice and liberation as a shared one. For a brief moment in time, Black and Brown youth brought the public school system to a standstill and forced the city to listen to their ideas what schooling should look and feel like. Those ideas made an impact, whether or not the Board agreed to them.

The Board Strikes Back: 1969 Rebellions and the Law-and-Order Crackdown

After March, Eastside parents met to determine how to continue the momentum. The Educational Issues Coordinating Committee was established by parents, community religious leaders, college students, and organizations such as MAPA and the East Los Angeles Democratic Club. The goal of the EICC was to take on Board negotiations on behalf of the students, so that youth could return to their studies. After the EICC assumed this role, student rebellions in East Los Angeles schools largely subsided.

However, this doesn't mean that things were peaceful. By mid-spring the District Attorney, Evelle Younger, worked in secret to bring charges against activists involved in the Blowouts. According to Sal Castro, it was apparent that Younger was hoping to leverage publicity for prosecuting the Blowouts for his larger political ambitions as a law-and-order figure

in city government.²⁵¹ In the middle of the night, the LAPD raided the homes of Brown Beret leaders, college students, Sal Castro, and the Church of the Epiphany (targeting editors of *La Raza*). Castro had a suspicion that a legal response was mounting. In late April and early May, Castro had received phone calls from connections he had in the District Attorney's office, who had worked with him at the Mexican American Youth Leadership Conferences. This connection suggested to Castro that he should go speak to the D.A. because there was a chance he would be indicted for his role in the Blowouts.²⁵² On May 31, as he prepared for prom night at Lincoln High School, Castro was arrested and taken to LA county jail in downtown.

In all, 13 men were arrested and charged with conspiracy to disturb the peace and disturbing a school. Disturbing the peace and disturbing a school are both misdemeanor charges. By adding "conspiracy" to the charges, Younger elevated the charges to felony status, which carried a 66-year sentence if convicted. After much community pressure, the East L.A. 13, as they came to be known, were eventually released and the charges were dropped. The grand jury investigation of the East LA 13 was indicative of important trends in the larger story of activism and education in Los Angeles. Primarily, it shows an attempt on the part of city leaders, such as Younger, to "felonize campus protest."²⁵³ This strategy is an outgrowth of the one used to silence Margaret Wright during the Manual Arts protests in the fall of 1967. There, a court injunction prevented her, and 50 other "John Does," from coming near campus, in an attempt to block further student demonstrations. But this strategy only succeeded in convincing student activists that further organizing was still needed.

²⁵¹ Castro and Garcia, *Blowout!*, 199-200.

²⁵² Ibid, 198

²⁵³ Davis and Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire*, 393.

Student protest continued in the fall of 1968 and beyond, particularly in South Los Angeles, with smaller episodes in East Los Angeles. What is of note is that the key flashpoints of student unrest were inflamed by the issue of law enforcement and security in the schools. Another significant point is that the later mobilizations continued to evoke the multiracial spirit of the spring walkouts.

The unrest at Fremont High School, and the subsequent response it provoked in the Board demonstrated that it was turning increasingly towards draconian measures in order to stop the movement for community control—or community participation, for that matter—in the schools. In December, students at Fremont, a predominantly Blacks school in South LA, walked out after Principal Robert Malcolm suspended 4 Black Student Union (BSU) leaders. Nearly 1,000 students gathered around the front of the school and burned the California and United States flags. In typical fashion, as mandated by the “Emergency Procedures for Handling Disturbances, Disorders, or Demonstrations,” Principal Malcolm called in the LAPD, who immediately declared a tactical alert on the area. A subsequent BSU rally in the auditorium was ambushed by law enforcement, who entered the building with weapons drawn, and 3 students were arrested. Solidarity protests erupted in nearby schools such as Jefferson High School and Crenshaw High School. Students there also experienced their own confrontations with administrators or police.

At the Monday Board meeting on December 16, 1968, community members from Fremont and Eastside schools showed up to pressure the Board.²⁵⁴ The demands made by the BSU should have surprised no one. They reiterated similar demands that had been presented in March, namely, the desire for Black administrators and community control. The demands

²⁵⁴ Meeting Minutes, December 16, 1968, in Board of Education Records, Box 426.

included a governing board consisting of faculty, students, and parents, and the removal of Principal Malcolm. Malcolm was replaced by Donald Bolton. Bolton navigated the waters much more skillfully than his predecessors and expressed openness to the concept of community control. who expressed openness to the concept of community control. This concession gave the BSU the confidence they needed to declare a partial victory, and the Fremont strike ended peacefully.

However, the issue of security in the schools continued to be sticking point between students and administrators. While the Fremont strike might have seemed like a victory for community control, it coincided with some legislative changes that would hinder future organizing efforts. In this sense, the Fremont strike and the Board's handling of it, came to represent a further turn towards law and order in the schools. At the next meeting, Thursday, December 19, the Board shared a proposed amendment to section 10607.5 to the Education code, which involved student suspensions.²⁵⁵ This amendment proposed extending court action in suspensions for students who were 18 years old or older. The proposed suspension enhancements clearly flew in the face of everything student activists had pushed for 8 months prior and gave suspensions the added weight of the criminal justice system. Second, the Board shared a legislative proposal to amend section 602.9 of the Penal code, which made unlawful business or disruption a misdemeanor if it occurred on or nearby school grounds, including a "street, sidewalk, or public way close to the school."²⁵⁶ Both measures raised the legal stakes for activism on or near school grounds, for students and community members alike.

²⁵⁵ Special Meeting, December 19, 1968, in Board of Education Records, Box 427.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

Undeterred and disillusioned with the pace of change, 1969 ushered in a new wave of student rebellions. In late February 1969, students at Carver Junior High in South Central organized and demanded Black studies at their school—an outstanding concession that was still unfulfilled. The threat of student unrest caused the Principal to resign, leaving a leadership vacuum at the school. It was temporarily filled by Andrew Anderson, a Principal from the San Fernando Valley. Under Anderson’s leadership negotiations with students were fruitless and frustrating, pushing 500 students to walkout on March 8th.

Like previous student rebellions, students at Carver faced police repression. Despite being 13 years old and younger, student demonstrations were violently confronted by law enforcement called in by administration. In one clash, students occupying the administration building were ambushed by Metro Squad cops who descended on students without warning. In the aftermath, 6 were arrested and 5 were hospitalized.²⁵⁷ Here was yet another opportunity for the Board to reconsider its relationship with law enforcement and the ways in which police presence often escalated student unrest. However, in response to the Carver protests, the Board refused to budge on its security protocols. Moreover, the Board moved to rescind campus privileges and recognition to the following student organizations at any school and junior college in the district: Students for a Democratic Society, Black Student Union, United Mexican American Students, and Third World Liberation Front. The motion was passed unanimously.²⁵⁸

The actions of the Board reminded students all over Los Angeles that the encroachment of law enforcement on a junior high campus in South Central meant that no campus and no student organization in the district was safe. The courage of middle schoolers to stand in the face

²⁵⁷ Davis and Weiner, *Set the Night on Fire*, 409.

²⁵⁸ Meeting Minutes, March 13, 1969, in Board Records, Box 431.

of police and Board obstinacy inspired a massive wave of multiracial protests against authoritarian school governance and use of police force across the county. All 18 predominantly Black junior high and high schools boycotted class in solidarity with Carver. That week, students at Roosevelt High School walked out after Principal Dyer suspended UMAS.²⁵⁹ Roosevelt was followed by at least 3 other Eastside schools. Mobilizations spread also to the junior colleges, including East Los Angeles College and LA City College, where Black and Brown students there pledged to form a “coalition against the use of police force on campuses.”²⁶⁰ As the week progressed, student protests spread to include schools in the San Fernando Valley and Pasadena, and the LAPD expanded its tactical alert to 9 different divisions across the city, the largest tactical alert since the Watts rebellion of 1965. Exactly one year apart from the 1968 rebellions, approximately 15,000 students from junior high, senior high, and junior college levels went on strike, again, protesting the same conditions as they had before.

Conclusion

By the end of the month, most of the campuses had resumed normal attendance, but the year of student rebellions left an indelible mark on the city of Los Angeles and its educational system. Flare ups of unrest would continue into the next year, and even spread beyond the county, with walkouts occurring in areas such as Duarte and San Bernardino.

Their efforts did achieve some significant outcomes, including the start of some key initiatives like bilingual education, increased diversity in faculty and administrative leadership, and abolishing corporal punishment. Their efforts also helped fuel the larger movement for Ethnic Studies, inspiring college and university students—not the other way around. As Ethnic

²⁵⁹ Ruben Salazar, “UMAS to be reinstated at Roosevelt High,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1969.

²⁶⁰ Davis and Weiner, *Set the Night on Fire*, 410.

Studies has expanded locally in recent months—with the inclusion of Ethnic Studies graduation requirements in Los Angeles Unified School District and California State University systems—it is clear that we are all beneficiaries of the vision students offered 52 years ago.

The student rebellions were powerful precisely because they were multiracial. Their activism crossed physical and non-physical barriers and produced demands for change that were sweeping and universal. The vision of education that Black and Brown students gave us put the most vulnerable at the center, but ultimately stood to benefit all students in LA City Schools.

But what made the student movements so powerful—their unity—is also what made them so threatening to Board members, Principals, unsympathetic teachers, and the so-called “silent majority.” For simply giving student rebels meeting time to present their demands, Board members received disgruntled letters from “taxpayers.” These “taxpayers” retaliated by voting down school bonds A, B, and C in 1969 and warned: “Before you ask for bonds and support for our schools, there should be guards or police employed...Private schools have employed guards and they don’t have trouble.”²⁶¹

As the next chapter will show, the Board summarily responded by obeying the silent majority’s wishes: turning towards police, increasing security, and reinforcing fencing. This was not a foregone conclusion, however. Board member Nava openly expressed reservations about campus reliance on police to quell school disturbances. After yet another episode at Jefferson High School in the Fall of 1969, Nava opined that “the presence of police officers on campus had contributed to the unrest.”²⁶² Nevertheless, in the coming years, LA schools erected fences and

²⁶¹ Correspondence, April 24, 1969, in Board Records, Box 433.

²⁶² Meeting Minutes, October 13, 1969, in Board Records, Box 441.

surveillance systems, transforming themselves into fortresses, further removed from their communities, and the dream of open campuses.

For a moment in time another school was possible. Though many of their original fifty-five demands have yet to be realized, it remains a powerful example of what is possible when students express their agency and their dreams collectively. The student rebellions remind us that liberation and abolition are only promises, but what we get out of it is community and a commitment to the process. This is the victory.

Chapter 5

Part-Time Police Stations: Surveillance and Security in the Los Angeles Unified School District, 1968-1983

In August of 1968, Los Angeles Police Department took over Alain Locke High School in Watts and used the site as a command post after a night of unrest following the Watts Summer Festival. Police officers patrolling the grounds of Will Rogers park the night of the festival got into an altercation attempting to arrest a young woman they accused of public drunkenness. A crowd gathered around the officers, and they called for backup. Three dozen police cars, the Special Weapons and Tactics teams, a helicopter, and 300 police and sheriff rushed to Watts, and by 11:20 a tactical alert and roadblocks were placed as law enforcement occupied the community from land and sky. Alain Locke High School, a new campus built after the 1965 uprising, was the center of the Watts, and therefore, a fitting location for a temporary police headquarters. By 5:30 A.M. the following morning, the barricades came down and streets opened up to traffic, but police remained “saturated” in the area. There were 3 dead, 41 injured, and 35 arrested. Speaking to the *Los Angeles Times*, Police Chief Reddin defended the law enforcement response, “There will be those who said we overreacted...but its better to overreact and control it. In this case, we did react massively.”²⁶³

Protesting the occupation of Locke High, Roger Segure, Executive Secretary of the American Federation of Teachers, Local 1021, addressed the Board of Education and urged administrators to exercise caution in their current and future use of law enforcement on school grounds, “I doubt that it was absolutely necessary for the Police Department to commandeer this school...and of course many of us are wondering why the police would choose a school that was in session during the summer...I am positive that in times such as these it is unwise for us to

²⁶³ Jack Jones, “Watts Violence Takes Toll of 2 Dead, 41 Hurt.” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1968.

allow the students and the community of the Inner City to identify our schools as part time police stations.”²⁶⁴ Segure’s warnings went unheeded. Between 1968 and 1983, Los Angeles City Schools not only increased their working relationships with law enforcement, but also refined campuses’ security capabilities. Through the implementation of security hardware, regular drug and truancy sweeps, a dedicated school police force, and the establishment of strict disciplinary codes and safety plans, Los Angeles’s urban schools normalized policing, surveillance and mundane infringement of privacy in the everyday lives of children, particularly black and Chicano youth.

This research draws on several important recent works on postwar policing and the War on Crime. Specifically, monographs such as Elizabeth Hinton’s *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, and Naomi Murakawa’s *First Civil Right*, which teach us how postwar liberalism and fear of urban rebellions drove federal policy and legislative changes that laid the foundations for intense overpolicing and mass incarceration. This project contributes to this body of scholarship by showing how at the local level, “progressive” city leaders such as Mayor Sam Yorty, and later Tom Bradley, supported law enforcement, and their activities in urban centers in the name of crime control. In fact, Yorty actively thwarted attempts at police oversight by blocking the American Civil Liberties Union from establishing a police review board, despite evidence and citizen testimony of routine police brutality and malpractice. In Los Angeles, the city government’s alliance with law enforcement eventually made its way to other public institutions such as Los Angeles schools and the Board of Education. This project further adds to

²⁶⁴ Roger Segure address to Board of Education, Meeting Minutes, August 15, 1968. Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records, Collection 1923, Box 1831, Folder 3. (Hereafter “Board of Education Records”)

this scholarship by showing how schools not only collaborate with law enforcement but become key spaces for police activity and surveillance projects.

This dissertation also draws on emerging work on the carceral state and the school-to-prison pipeline. More specifically, this chapter draws on the work of Erica Meiners and Damien Sojoyner. This essay follows Erica Meiner's contention; children are simultaneously victims of the carceral state and are also used to justify its expansion. Policing and surveillance projects often hinge on the logic of protecting the safety of society's most vulnerable: children. But does so at the expense of children who aren't deemed innocent—such as poor, non-citizen, differently abled, gender non-conforming, and nonwhite children. If children are at the heart of the carceral state, then schools, by extension, are as well. Schools not only participate in the policing and incarcerating of children, but also assimilate them into the law-and-order logic of the prison regime.

Similarly, I am influenced by Damien Sojoyner's work *First Strike*, and how his scholarship problematizes the school-to-prison pipeline framework. Sojoyner writes that the defining feature of Black education in Los Angeles is physical and ideological enclosure; a multifaceted process that involves the "removal/withdrawal/denial of services that are key to the stability and long-term well-being of communities."²⁶⁵ In this sense, budget cuts, elimination of arts and cultural programming, the erection of fencing, security, surveillance, and closed campuses are all forms of educational enclosure. Further, enclosure helps us to rethink the school-to-prison pipeline. While schools absolutely play significant part in funneling children into the criminal justice system, the school-to-prison pipeline trope overlooks the fact that schools themselves, with their own police forces, security hardware, fencing, uniforms, and strict

²⁶⁵ Damien Sojoyner, *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, xiii.

discipline codes, become prison-like in their own right. This impacts children whether or not they get suspended, expelled, arrested, or otherwise funneled into the juvenile court.

One cannot fully understand the story of policing in Los Angeles schools without understanding the Watts rebellion in 1965 and the student boycotts in 1968. These two pivotal moments in LA history transformed the nature of policing inside and outside of schools in both method and degree. Though LA schools had employed night patrolmen in select schools since 1945, in the wake of the Watts rebellion, the Board of Education became increasingly concerned with campus safety and student discipline. For example, when called to testify to the governor's commission on the riots, Superintendent Jack P. Crowther used the crisis to deflect attention away from failing segregated schools to student violence and insubordination. He informed the commission that assault perpetrated by students, specifically in the curfew area "in the class and in the halls...[is what] we are working on right now."²⁶⁶

In the Board meeting following the riots, the members planned to take advantage of Economic Opportunity Act programming and pledged more resources and opportunities for urban schools to relieve crowding, recruit more teachers, and improve infrastructure (one such solution was the establishment of a new school, Alain Locke High School). However, at the same time, the board approved the allocation of funds to hire six new security personnel for select campuses. More than just night watchmen, these security agents wore plainclothes and were tasked with ensuring campus order and safety during all school hours. Their job description included protecting against "threatening activities and incidents of dangerous aggressive action

²⁶⁶ Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965 Vol. VI, 38.

toward school personnel,” cooperating with administrators and the LAPD, as well as preventing “the formation of large groups on or near a school campus.”²⁶⁷

Between 1967 and 1969, high schools and junior highs experienced a wave of student protests that rocked the unified district, and raised questions about equity, community access, culturally relevant curriculum, student rights, and conversely, campus safety. Most famous of these student rebellions are the East Los Angeles Blowouts, in which approximately 22,000 students across five predominately Mexican American high schools walked out of classes, bringing the school district and the Board of Education to its knees, shining a national spotlight on the plight of urban Chicano students. Though the Blowouts remain the most massive example of student protests of the time, it should be noted that East Los Angeles was not alone in student and community activism. Several predominately black campuses such as Manual Arts High School, Jefferson High School, and Washington Carver Junior High mobilized significant student protests at the same time. This was truly an apex of Black and Brown resistance in Los Angeles. These movements had several long-lasting victories, not the least of which included more diverse faculty, curriculum changes, and consciousness-raising.

Nevertheless, as the previous chapter demonstrated, these student movements also facilitated responses from law enforcement and the Board of Education that signaled an embrace of punitive methods of discipline and student control. For example, many of the student demonstrations in South Central and East Los Angeles were met with violent police confrontations and administrator indifference—in fact, in many instances, school principals called in law enforcement to crack down on the peaceful student protestors. Second, while Black and Chicano students demanded open campuses that would be more porous and accessible to

²⁶⁷ Communication No.1 Subject: Additional Security Agent Positions, September 2, 1965 in Board of Education Records, Box 1335.

their communities, LA schools became the opposite. Schools across the county embraced fencing and security to effectively close campuses and monitor traffic into and out of the facilities. In 1967, for example, Los Angeles Unified School District's legal team successfully obtained a court injunction prohibiting "outside agitators," and 50 "John Does" from entering school grounds or "engaging in demonstrations...on adjacent streets" near Manual Arts High School after two-days of student and community unrest.²⁶⁸ Such efforts to worked to alienate school campuses from the communities they were intended to serve, further advancing the process of enclosure.

Finally, student movements, like many other activist organizations at the time, fell victim to counter-insurgent policing and infiltration. For example, when students held blowout planning meetings at La Piranya coffee house in East Los Angeles, they were often targeted for harassment or traffic stops by sheriffs who had a substation adjacent the coffeehouse. Student meetings were also infiltrated by undercover law enforcement sent to spy, like officer Fernando Sumaya. The Federal Bureau of Investigation even kept files on George Washington Carver Junior High, a predominately black middle school in South Central, and some of the youngest to be caught in the web of counterinsurgent surveillance.²⁶⁹ It is within this context of urban rebellions, student movements, and counterinsurgency, that policing in LA City Schools grew and became institutionalized.

Cameras, Cops, and Campus Sweeps: Normalized Surveillance in LA Schools

²⁶⁸ John Dreyfuss, "School Board Will Seek Court Order for Manual Arts," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1967.

²⁶⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, part of this dissertation's intended research included access to FBI files kept on Roosevelt High School and George Washington Carver Junior High through a Freedom of Information Act request. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these files have not been accessible for me to view, and thus, could not be part of this dissertation.

In the decade following the tumultuous student movements of the late 1960s, Los Angeles's urban schools underwent a series of changes that accelerated the process of enclosure. Schools serving predominately African American and Mexican American communities increased their surveillance capabilities and normalized policing and everyday supervision in the daily lives of children, which ultimately became a defining feature of the school experience. As silent majority voters living in white suburbs such as West Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley complained about lack of safety in the schools and lack of strong leadership, Board members felt pressure prove their backbone—lest they jeopardize their seats and their bonds be rejected by angry voters.

To meet these demands for law and order in the schools, the Board made changes incrementally, and began by hiring more security personnel and Juvenile Court liaisons. Beginning in 1967, the Board approved \$50,000 specifically for the recruitment and hiring of additional security agents. That same day, the Board agreed to spend \$9,097 to hire Juvenile Court relations support staff and \$119,403 for the Child Welfare and Attendance Supervisors Branch. It should be noted that Assistant Supervisors of Attendance could be assigned to truancy detail, whose policing functions mirrored that of security agents in that they were permitted to detain and apprehend children suspected of truancy. By the early 1970s, the security section of LA Unified employed over 300 plainclothes agents. Though not yet recognized as full-police officers, they carried badges so that they could “identify themselves as law enforcing agents,” and empowered to “arrest, during school hours, without warrant, any child between eight and fifteen years of age...who has been reported to him,” according Section 15831 of the Education Code.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Communication to the Committee of the Whole, January 30, 1947. Board of Education Records, Box 1831.

Despite the growth of the security personnel assigned to urban campuses, schools also worked collaboratively with law enforcement in a number of ways that impacted the daily lives of students. In the fall of 1969, the LAPD piloted a “Police in Government” course at Jordan High School in South Central Los Angeles. The course sought to “ease tensions among minority youth by having police officers discuss pertinent laws and police practices.”²⁷¹ Though Mayor Yorty touted this program as an “unqualified success,” recruiting police to educate youth of color on proper behavior around law enforcement is hardly an olive branch to reconcile the damage wrought by decades of over-policing, unchecked brutality, and lack of accountability. Instead, “Police in Government” courses sought to “ease tensions” by assimilating students into the law-and-order logic of the carceral state. As Damien Sojoyner argues, these types of courses “teach Black youth the ‘true’ meaning of their rights and how they should and should not act within a very narrow scope of a legal apparatus that already severely limited Black freedom.”²⁷² Mayor Yorty, LA School, and the LAPD were so pleased with these courses that they expanded it beyond South Central Los Angeles to San Fernando High School, a majority-Mexican American campus.

In addition to teaching courses, law enforcement also collaborated with school administrators to conduct campus sweeps looking for narcotics or truant students. At first, police patrolled streets near select campuses after receiving complaints from residents about loitering students and claims of burglaries and attempted break-ins. In February of 1970, the 77th Street Division of the LAPD launched “Operation Sweep,” in which juveniles “without benefits of

²⁷¹ “Mayor Reports Success of ‘Police in Government’ Classes”, in *Police and Community Report*, Vol 3, No 4, April 1970. ACLU of Southern California, Collection 900, Box 230 in Charles E. Young Research Library Special Collections (hereafter ACLU Collection)

²⁷² Damien Sojoyner, *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 35-6.

parental or school authority supervision were confronted and detained by the police.”²⁷³ After one week, 296 juveniles had been apprehended by police. Though happy with the results of their program, looking for truant youth demanded considerable time from the 77th Street Division officers, and the station decided to share the load with schools. The division partnered with LAUSD’s attendance personnel in December and conducted a four-day program in which 174 students were caught and processed—several of whom had prior arrests on their records. Based on this success, LAUSD and LAPD agreed that they should continue collaborative work develop guidelines to streamline future joint efforts.²⁷⁴

Between January and November of 1971, approximately 10 sweeps had rounded up truant youth. But it was one particular “shakedown” of Dorsey High School and Los Angeles High School that drew the attention and criticism of the American Civil Liberties Union and the *Los Angeles Times*. Across four days in mid-October, well over 300 students between the two campuses had been arrested. According to the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, approximately one-sixth of the total student body at Dorsey High School had been arrested due to “Operation Sweep.”²⁷⁵ Police description of the program maintained that apprehended juveniles were to be returned to campus or their parents, and that it would be conducted across all sections of the city. However, parent and student complaints reveal that it disproportionately targeted poor youth of color and was overly punitive. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Operation Sweep “concentrated only on minority areas and subjected many innocent young people to humiliating treatment” through the use of handcuffs and chains.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Inter-Office Correspondence “ ‘Police Sweep’ Project”, October 21, 1971. In ACLU Collection, Box 230.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ “300 Students Arrested at Dorsey” *Los Angeles Sentinel* October 4, 1971

²⁷⁶ “Mass Arrests of L.A. School Truants Halted” *Los Angeles Times*.

The threat of a joint suit from the ACLU and the Western Center on Law and Poverty, coupled with public criticism temporarily stopped truancy sweeps. However, the program remerged with a new name, Operation Responsibility, and revised methods. Operation Responsibility discontinued the use of handcuffs, paddy wagons, and other restraints in favor of a referral system. Announcing these changes, Police Chief Ed Davis proposed a city-wide system, modelled after the San Fernando Valley's Operation Referral, in which officers would record names and addresses of "suspected" truants, and submit the information to school authorities for handling.²⁷⁷ In one year, the program had netted 557 referrals.²⁷⁸ While some viewed these changes as an improvement, the ultimate outcome was still the same. Taken together, Operation Sweep, and later Operation Responsibility remained true to its core mission—policing the movement of youth. For students, especially students of color, the message was abundantly clear, school authorities and law enforcement agencies were a united front invested in their surveillance.

Episodes such as Operation Sweep stirred up questions pertaining to police involvement on campus and how it was regulated. The answer: it was murky, and the Board's own legal team lacked a straightforward response to this question. Responding to an inquiry from the Michigan ACLU, Jerry Halverson, Legal Adviser to the Board of Education made the distinction between two types of law enforcement personnel utilized by the district: security officers and municipal law enforcement. The role of the former involved protecting the students and staff, as well as the real and personal property of the school district. However, the question of how and when to use law enforcement on school grounds was uncertain. Halverson wrote that school authorities call

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ "Inter-Office Correspondence: Campus Safety and Security" January 4, 1973. In ACLU Collection, Box 231.

on police only in instances of serious crimes or threat of disorder, yet law enforcement agencies “uniformly take the position...that they have the obligation to enter a campus and deal with criminal activities regardless of whether or not an invitation to do so has been extended...There are, therefore, no written guidelines which set forth conditions under which police officers are permitted to enter the schools.”²⁷⁹ As a result of this legal ambiguity, Halverson maintained that “we are not in a position to define the role of law enforcement or to regulate its use on campus.”²⁸⁰

Halverson’s inability to clearly articulate the rules for police activity and presence on campus reveal startling truths and questions about LA city schools. First, it raised questions about the ability or willingness of school administrators to protect students from police harassment, and potential violations of their rights. If schools lacked the capacity to define and limit police functions on school grounds, what recourse did vulnerable students have? Second, Halverson’s response to Ronald Parks reveals that although schools remained closed to the communities they served, they were open and permeable for law enforcement. Perhaps one of the most pervasive and far-reaching outcomes of the War on Crime in public education is that it dispossessed low-income communities of color of their neighborhood schools, precisely at the same historic moment where grassroots organizations were fighting for community-control.

In addition to the presence of police on campuses, LAUSD’s use of technology and security hardware also worked to normalize surveillance in the daily lives of children. Taking advantage of block grant funding made possible by the 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, LAUSD began planning its security system modernization in 1973. According to

²⁷⁹ Letter to Ronald Parks, ACLU from Jerry F. Halverson, March 11, 1971. Board of Education Records, Box 1831, Folder 3.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

scholar Elizabeth Hinton, the block grant formula helped expand incarceration nationally in the early 1970s because it gave states considerable power to “develop crime control strategies as they wished.”²⁸¹ Since LA schools were already a locus of crime control and police activity, it is unsurprising that the Board of Education seized on this opportunity to use federal dollars to advance its security apparatus.

After discussing the idea in January of 1973, the Board of Education submitted a formal application to the California Council for Criminal Justice (CCCJ) to receive block grant funding. The proposal outlined the implementation of a silent and mobile security system to be installed in five predominately Black and Chicano schools: Crenshaw, Dorsey, Locke, and Garfield High Schools, and El Sereno Junior High. Each teacher and staff member would be supplied with an “ultrasonic mechanical signaling device,” shaped like a ballpoint pen.²⁸² When triggered, the ballpoint pen would activate an alarm signal designed to communicate with school security, pinpointing the location of the emergency. In January of 1974, LAUSD entered into a contract with the City of Los Angeles to accept the CCCJ grant, totaling \$498,333 for the installation and operation of the new silent and mobile security alarm system. The equipment inventory included “signal transmitters, room and exterior services, a master control panel, and, walkie-talkies.”²⁸³ Dropping Garfield and El Sereno, the security systems were eventually rolled out in schools located in concentrated geographic area specifically designated by the CCCJ: Crenshaw, Dorsey, Jordan, Locke, Manual Arts, and Washington High Schools. Bounded by the Santa Monica

²⁸¹ Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*, Harvard University Press, 2016, 14.

²⁸² “Communication No.1 Prepared by the Office of the Superintendent” April 2, 1973 in Board of Education Records, Box 877, Folder 7.

²⁸³ “Business Operations Committee Report, No.1” November 8, 1973 in Board of Education Records, Box 877, Folder 7.

Freeway, Alameda Boulevard, Artesia Boulevard, and the San Diego Freeway, the schools targeted by the CCCJ grant were located within the 15.5 square miles of South Central Los Angeles.

While South Central schools were test cases for the special silent and mobile alarm systems, LAUSD expanded the reach of security to campuses in the county. Actively participating in the emergent school security industry, LAUSD received brochures from various security companies looking to sell products to the nation's second-largest school district—evidently, school security was good for business. For example, companies like Baldwin Electronics advertised their Baldwin/Hawkeye Radio Alarm Central Security System to Board members, which had already secured plans to install in 50 Chicago schools.²⁸⁴ Los Angeles also received a \$600,000 grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to furnish buses with electronic devices;²⁸⁵ And the funding did not stop there. Board of Education records indicate that the district allocated \$650,000 to extend surveillance and install intrusion alarms in 30 schools, bringing the total to 103 alarm systems in operation across Los Angeles.²⁸⁶ An additional \$250,000 were allocated to update or enhance fencing, grills, screens and other security hardware to effectively enclose schools and transform them into fortresses.²⁸⁷

Accompanying this build-up of security infrastructure and technology in the schools was a safety plan, written by the United Teachers of Los Angeles union (UTLA) to help define and protect teacher safety in the classroom. The 1973 School Safety Plan outlined prohibited

²⁸⁴ Board Meeting Minutes, September 11, 1973. Box 877, Folder 7.

²⁸⁵ Hinton, 238.

²⁸⁶ “Inter-Office Correspondence: Campus Safety and Security” January 4, 1973. In ACLU Collection, Box 231.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

conduct, appropriate administrator protocol for safety violations, and what constitutes “safe conditions.” In terms of behavior and conduct, the safety plan reinforced existing disciplinary policy that was established in 1959. However, it included a more prescriptive approach to suspensions, and specifically referenced the use of police when crimes were committed on campus. For example, a student accused of assault or battery warranted a minimum of 5 days’ suspension. If the crime was severe, the safety plan required the immediate removal of all persons who threaten the safety of the school and school property, and notification of police of crimes committed.²⁸⁸ These clear suspension and expulsion guidelines correlate with the spike in suspensions and expulsions in Los Angeles schools beginning in 1973.²⁸⁹

Equally significant are the “safe conditions” proposed by UTLA. Safe conditions included specific morning, entrance, and exit security procedures that embedded the priorities of enclosure into the physical space and daily operations of the school. For example, school buildings had to be checked by security personnel before the start of the school day and were required to remain stationed by the main entrance for the duration of the day. With the exception of the main entrance door, all doors on campus were to be locked unless dismissing or admitting students, with outside handles removed. Moreover, security personnel were required to periodically check doors to ensure they were locked, and regularly check halls, stairways, and student bathrooms to “insure safe conditions.”²⁹⁰ These safety guidelines created an environment in which lockdown was both a part of routine operations and culture of the school. Yet locking down schools to ensure “safe conditions” was not enough. UTLA called for more

²⁸⁸ “UTLA Guidelines for School Safety Plan” In ACLU Collection, Box 231.

²⁸⁹ Hinton, 239.

²⁹⁰ “Implementing School Safety Plan” in ACLU Collection, Box 231.

perimeter checks for truancy, school patrols, even more security, and a “transfer of city and county police resources from victimless crime enforcement to school crime enforcement.”²⁹¹

The increase in security personnel, security hardware, and safety protocols coincided with a moral panic regarding gangs and violence in schools. Board memoranda from the period reveal increased concerns with students bringing weapons on campus, and the specter of gang activity in and around schools. These fears motivated the Board to give law enforcement wide latitude to enter school grounds and access student’s confidential information. A 1972 memo from Superintendent James B. Taylor recounted how school Board officials came to agree upon such an arrangement. The December 5th meeting was a veritable who’s who of the Los Angeles criminal justice system: Chief Davis, Sheriff Pitchess, the District Attorney, City Attorney, the presiding judges of the Superior Court, Juvenile Court, and Municipal Court, as well as the Chief Probation Officer and the Deputy Chief of the California Youth Authority; representing LA schools were the Board President and the Superintendent. The meeting resulted in new operational procedures for handling the issues of school crime and gang activity, which included agreements to share student records and information, as well as releasing students to police custody. Moreover, the operational procedures granted law enforcement the right to enter campus “to carry out their responsibilities as they related to gathering information and apprehension and arrest of individuals.”²⁹²

This meeting indicated that cracking down on gang activity was a shared effort. It proved to a broader “taxpaying” public, increasingly frustrated by perceived Board “permissiveness” in the wake of the 1967-1969 student rebellions, that school officials took youth crime seriously. It

²⁹¹ Ibid

²⁹² “Gang Activities and Problems” December 29, 1972, in ACLU Collection, Box 231.

also proved to law enforcement that schools were willing partners in the larger project of policing young, male, Black and Brown bodies. Although it might have appeared that the Board was a collaborative partner in crime prevention projects, it ultimately ceded all authority to cops to enter school grounds, access student records, and apprehend and remove students. As scholar Ana Muñiz has detailed in her work, *Police, Power, and the Production of Racial Boundaries*, community policing is a “top-down, rather than collaborative, endeavor in which the police use community groups for their own purposes.”²⁹³

This flexibility created opportunities for police to conduct student surveillance for mundane and unremarkable campus activities such as football games. At an October 11, 1971 meeting Roger Segure complained about this very issue. Segure revealed that funds were earmarked for police officers for crowd control purposes. This money was part of a “package deal the school district made with Police Chief Davis,” which required that schools hire groups of 20 policemen “whether or not the occasion demands that number of policemen.”²⁹⁴ Segure argued that the money spent on police could be better used to pay teachers and community members to supervise football games and school events: “Last year a principal of a high school in the Inner City arranged supervision of his home games by teachers and community people and there were no incidents of trouble throughout the entire season.”²⁹⁵ Segure’s presentation demonstrated that the district’s partnership with police resulted in a default reliance on law enforcement even when it was not necessary. He concluded that “even where it can be shown

²⁹³ Ana Muñiz, *Police, Power, and the Production of Racial Boundaries*. Rutgers University Press, 2015, 59.

²⁹⁴ Segure presentation to the Board of Education, October 11, 1971, in ACLU Collection, Box 230.

²⁹⁵ Ibid

there is no demonstrable danger you prefer to pay policemen instead of teachers to supervise our students.”²⁹⁶

More importantly, relaxing school boundaries for law enforcement paved the way for other important and pernicious community-police partnerships that would occur in the following decade such as gang injunctions. As Muñiz describes, gang injunctions are a “restraining order, not against an individual, but rather against an entire neighborhood.”²⁹⁷ Gang injunctions are designed to surveil neighborhoods that have high crime or gang activity and do so by criminalizing behaviors within a neighborhood that are otherwise legal, such as dressing in certain colors or congregating in groups of 2 or more. The injunction names hundreds of “John Does,” who can be identified at a later point for violating the rules of the injunction. In this sense, the injunction allows law enforcement the ability to “carry out extralegal control and repression.”²⁹⁸ The first gang injunction in LA history occurred in the Hamilton High School environs, targeting the Playboy Gangster Crips in 1987. The fact that Hamilton High School became a testing ground for gang injunctions is not surprising. Since 1967, schools have weaponized the court injunction to silence dissent and target student and community activists. In the aftermath of student rebellions and the decades that followed, schools continued to be important laboratories for experimenting with new policing techniques.

“Destroy the Schools to Save Them”: Secret Police, Student Rights, and the Campus Drug War

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Muñiz, 6.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 54.

The fear of gangs fueled a militarized turn in urban non-white schools. However, the embrace of heightened security and police presence had significant implications for all public schools in the city. By the mid-1970s, a moral panic around teen drug use facilitated the expansion of policing into more affluent, middle-class schools. In other words, inner city schools were bell weathers for larger trends taking root in the district, which included enhanced surveillance capability.

The concern over teen drug use was rooted in data sensationalized by newspapers and media outlets regarding rising narcotics consumption nationwide. Newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times* warned that teens were becoming particularly susceptible to the prevalence of narcotics in U.S. cities. For example, a ten-year study in San Mateo, California, funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse, found that there was a rapid increase in cannabis, amphetamine, barbiturate, psychedelics, and alcohol use among teenagers between 1968 and 1977.²⁹⁹ Such statistics terrified parents and school administrators alike, pushing them towards stricter methods of intervention, such as increased police presence on school grounds.

In this context, LA schools initiated a program called the School Narcotics Buy Program, which employed undercover police agents to crack down on drug sellers and users. The program began in 1973 and lasted for at least 10 years. In that time, police agents posed as students and infiltrated the intimate social worlds of youth. The program resulted in the arrest of hundreds of students on school grounds, a procedure facilitated by the expanded discretion that the school Board granted law enforcement in the years prior. According to an *LA Times* article, in one 14-week period alone, secret police arrested 121 students at 6 different schools ranging in distance

²⁹⁹ Harry Nelson, "Rapid Rise in Teen Drug Use in Last 10 Years" *Los Angeles Times* March 30, 1977.

from Van Nuys High in the San Fernando Valley, to Roosevelt High on the Eastside.³⁰⁰ Articles such as these further reinforced the public's belief that schools were hotbeds of drug abuse. What's more, the widespread nature of the operation, from whiter, middle-class areas to urban, non-white campuses reflected the belief that teen narcotics use was a tidal wave that transcended the racial and class geography of the city. Captain John Sparkenbach told the *Times* that the department's position was that "the drug-abuse problem is prevalent on all high school campuses."³⁰¹ Therefore, spreading police out on campuses across LAUSD was perceived to be an effective prevention strategy in the larger war on drugs occurring in Los Angeles schools.

The School Narcotics Buy Program not only increased the rate of on-campus arrests but also resulted in the mundane infringement on student's private lives. Secret police had access to confidential student records and were able to use that information to share with their home departments and home in on students they deemed suspicious. The invasion of students' private lives went above and beyond the search for narcotics. According to student statements gathered by the Children's Rights Organization, a non-profit organization, students were made to fill out questionnaires that asked personal questions regarding sexual history, venereal diseases, and drug use. These questionnaires were subsequently turned over to the LAPD.³⁰² Students also complained about invasion of privacy in their home lives as well, as undercover police often came over to students' homes after school hours: "The police visited in these students homes, gained the trust of many students and parents and thus acquired much information, personal and confidential by posing as friends."³⁰³ According to the Child Rights Organization, secret police

³⁰⁰ "121 Suspected Drug Pushers Arrested" *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1979.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Letter to the Board, Child Rights Organization, December 9, 1974, in Board Records, Box 1831.

³⁰³ Ibid

then used information gathered in and outside of school to mount arrests. They charged that “After acquiring information on all contacted students and parents, the police proceeded to carry out a mass arrest for alleged drug violations, based on information gathered through classroom discussion, student confidence, overheard conversations, and home and family contacts.”³⁰⁴ These “military-diversionary tactics used against children” were not only a flagrant violations of student privacy, but also traumatizing experiences that altered student’s relationships to their schools. Students reported an unwillingness to participate in class discussions, feeling guarded in passing periods and lunch courtyards, and an inability to trust other students. In short, “the school ha[d] become no longer conducive to learning.”³⁰⁵

In addition to loss of faith in educational institutions, secret police on campus grounds led to violations of other liberties. Before long, representatives of the Southern California ACLU went before the Board to denounce LAUSD’s drug war and use of secret police. For example, the ACLU claimed that police access to student files constituted a denial of due process, particularly in disciplinary hearings. The ACLU argued that allowing law enforcement unfettered access to student and parent information without subpoena was a violation of federal law, Public Law 93-380, Section 438 to be exact. Moreover, the organization charged that Los Angeles schools colluded with law enforcement to keep parents unaware of student arrest reports. Arrest and “buy reports” used by the Board in disciplinary hearings were obtained from law enforcement, but deliberately kept from parents, and allegedly denied when requested. Such actions led the ACLU to conclude that schools were no longer serving students: “To hold back official records, which the district has used, at the request of the police is to make our

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

educational institutions a handmaiden of law enforcement—and in violation of the law at that.”³⁰⁶ On these grounds, the ACLU called for the immediate removal of all secret police from LA schools. Allowing police such open access to campuses was a direct threat to students’ civil liberties, right to privacy, and the educational experience as a whole. All casualties in the name of a war against drugs. “To adapt an expression that is left over from the Vietnam war,” the ACLU cautioned, “you may ‘destroy the schools to save them.’”³⁰⁷

Despite these impassioned pleas, many parents and concerned citizens wrote letters to the Board commending them for the School Narcotics Buy Program. One Sherman Oaks parent thanked undercover agents working at Grant High School, even though his own son had been apprehended by them. He wrote “There must be no islands of safety for dope pushers and we do not feel that the school board should be able to keep the Police from making an investigation and protecting our children.”³⁰⁸ Similarly, the President of School Community Advisory Council in Woodland Hills expressed widespread, even “unanimous,” support for police at Taft High School. In her letter to the Board, the President of the council inverted the argument of student rights used by the ACLU and others to applaud secret police for their work: “a student poll indicated that the students welcome the police... ‘We would rather sit next to an “agent” than a “pusher.”’ Does not the majority have rights? Are not students entitled to the protection from the very, very few who are lawbreakers?”³⁰⁹

Ultimately, the increased presence of police on campus increased the likelihood of more arrests, which only worked to the advantage of law enforcement. As police interacted with

³⁰⁶ Joyce S. Fiske, presentation to the Board, January 6, 1975, in Board Records, Box 1831.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Letter to the Board, June 9, 1975 in Board Records, Box 1831.

³⁰⁹ Letter to the Board, June 8, 1975 in Board Records, Box 1831. Emphasis in original.

students on a daily basis, data regarding violence and crime committed on school grounds seemed to justify the continued presence of law enforcement. One report in Board Records provided alarming figures: “the truly outrageous magnitude of crime in Los Angeles schools emerges when the six-year period from 1973-1974 through 1978-1979 are cumulated. During that six-year period, there were 15,341 reported assaults, 1,666 arsons, 17,507 thefts, 11,624 vandalisms and 31,203 burglaries. That is a total of 177,341 reported crimes.”³¹⁰ Whether crime rates were indeed rising in schools is debatable. However, what is clear, is that the frequency, scope, and amount of police surveillance on school grounds—both overt and covert—had increased dramatically since 1968.

Increased arrests, and the publicity that this data garnered in news outlets, convinced the public that police were necessary components of the school environment. Police presence, in other words, became a standard, and the Board of Education was willing to pay large sums to finance safety and security. In 1980, LAUSD estimated that it paid approximately \$10 million annually on “security force costs.” This sum did not include the money spent on fire and burglary alarms, fencing, and insurance, which “altogether it is probable more than \$100 million” had been spent fortifying LA schools.³¹¹ Rather than continuing to outsource control and discipline to the law enforcement, LAUSD course corrected this financial loss by formalizing its relationship with the LAPD. By 1983, LAUSD had its own police force, that was armed, POST-certified, and enjoyed full police powers—making it the fifth-largest law enforcement agency in the county, and the largest independent school police department in the nation. The Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) began with a 382-member

³¹⁰ Board Records, Box 2668

³¹¹ Ibid.

department. Their Central Dispatch was located in the LAUSD main offices at 450 Grand Avenue in downtown, with two substations serving the San Fernando Valley and the Harbor areas.³¹²

Conclusion

With innovative security systems, growing security personnel, fencing, locked doors, and perimeter checks, drug and gang sweeps, and now, independent police forces, urban schools effectively became prisons. Taken together, these changes that LA schools underwent in the name of security not only increased the number of juveniles caught in the criminal justice system, but also normalized the experience of policing and carceral supervision as part of the schooling process. The history of LA schools from 1968 and beyond teaches us that crime control efforts and state-of-the-art security hardware do not prevent crime, they only increase the probability of finding an offense, which has serious consequences for students. More importantly, as policing powers within schools grew, the rights of juveniles to privacy diminished. In this regard, LA schools provided a model for the nation. In 1985, in *TLO vs New Jersey*, the Supreme Court ruled that school officials can legally search students without a warrant, under reasonable suspicion, rather than probable cause. This legally diminishes juveniles' fourth amendment protections, and further empowers school police to operate according to this standard.³¹³

In 1994, the Clinton administration signed the Gun Free Schools Act. This legislation encouraged public schools to develop violence prevention programs in collaboration with local police departments by providing funding for such efforts. Four years later, amendments to the

³¹² "LASPD Dept Info" in Board Records, Box 2667, Folder 1.

³¹³ Barry Feld, *The Evolution of the Juvenile Court: Race, Politics, and the Criminalizing of Juvenile Justice*. NYU Press, 2017, 14.

1968 Safe Streets act approved the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) in public schools. As scholars of the school-to-prison pipeline have noted, a school's reliance on law enforcement means that ordinary school infractions can carry the weight of criminal offenses. Yet the story of security and surveillance in LA schools shows us that the consequences of enclosure extend well beyond crime and punishment, student conduct and discipline. Whether or not children obeyed school rules or got into fist fights, their daily routines involved submitting to constant surveillance when they approached the school gate, and sometimes even beyond school grounds. In doing so, schools compromised their students' privacy in the name of safety, while socializing them into the logic of the carceral state: accept police scrutiny and institutionalized surveillance.

Conclusion

“Serving our Future Today”³¹⁴: Policing and Surveillance in LA City Schools in the 21st Century

*“Some say no city in the world incarcerates more people than Los Angeles. If so, Los Angeles, the City of Angeles, is, in fact the City of Inmates, the carceral capital of the world.”*³¹⁵—Kelly Lytle Hernández

*“It would be difficult to find any group of non-incarcerated people in the U.S. who have had more contact with law enforcement on a daily basis than Los Angeles public school students.”*³¹⁶—Community Rights Campaign, Labor/Community Strategy Center

*“...the key to the ultimate success of all students means police-free schools. Our goal is to fully defund school police in LA and fund Black futures.”*³¹⁷—Students Deserve

In the City of Inmates, no one is safe. Nowhere is safe. Not sidewalks, or corner stores, not bus stops or front porches. Not schools, and not children. Fences must be built around schools to protect children from the outside world, and surveillance systems and security agents must be installed to protect staff from children, children from staff, and children from children. In the City of Inmates there are no innocents. Kids become super predators, their backpacks house all manner of paraphernalia and concealed weapons, their friendship networks are valuable sources of intelligence. In this city, the carceral state expands and is fueled by moral panics which traffic in fear and penetrate public life and institutions in new ways.

In this carceral city, we disproportionately invest in punishment. A 2016 audit of Los Angeles found that the county spends \$233,600 a year to incarcerate a single child. Meanwhile,

³¹⁴ Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) mission statement. <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/15609>

³¹⁵ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017) 1.

³¹⁶ Community Rights Campaign and Labor/Community Strategy Center, “Black, Brown, and Overpoliced in L.A. Schools.” October 2013.

³¹⁷ Sarah Djato, Sierra Leone Anderson, Quiano Assoon, and Khalila Williams. “High School Students: Police don’t belong in schools. Here’s how we forced them out.” *USA Today*, April 16, 2021.

Los Angeles Unified School District spends a paltry \$10,452 a year per pupil.³¹⁸ It would be tempting to look at this financial mismatch and conclude that what is needed is simply more funding for schools. However, in a district that houses the largest school police department in the state, whose force commands a \$70 billion dollar budget, this would not be justice.³¹⁹ What is needed is a reimagination of what safety means. This dissertation has told the story of the arrival of the carceral state in LA City Schools—through disciplinary policy, security, enclosures and surveillance systems, which were erected to maintain control, order, and safety over LA’s sprawling racial geography. But the result has been schools that are unsafe for all students, especially for Black and Latinx youth.

In 1983, Los Angeles, ever the pioneering city, established the nation’s first and largest independent school police force. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) resembled its older sibling, the LAPD. The LASPD had a K-9 unit, its very own SWAT team, and broad police powers.³²⁰ In the early 2000s, under the leadership of Chief Kerstein, the LASPD successfully persuaded the Board of Education to expand the LASPD’s authority beyond school grounds in a policy termed “Village Policing.”³²¹ Village Policing permitted the LASPD the power to arrest anyone within one-half mile of a school, center or office. With 1,100 LAUSD-owned properties and buildings within a 710-square mile radius, Village Policing gave the LASPD incredible reach and oversight over of the city. Simply put, the expansion of the LASPD matters to all Angelenos, student and non-student alike.

³¹⁸ “LA County spends more than \$233,000 a year to hold each youth in juvenile lockup” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 2016.

³¹⁹ Michael Burke, “Los Angeles Unified cuts school police budget by \$25 million following weeks of protests.” *EdSource* July 1, 2020.

³²⁰ Superintendent Ramon Cortines disbanded the LASPD SWAT team in 2008.

³²¹ Max Taves, “LAUSD’s Finest: The Los Angeles School Police” *LA Weekly*, September 2, 2009.

In addition, during this time, the LASPD grew its community policing capabilities, by expanding the department's fleet of patrol cars to over 300 vehicles and creating a dedicated bike team. The bike team is trained in various riding skills from traversing stairs, maneuvering around obstacles, and pursuing fleeing suspects.³²² On a more mundane level, the department's squad of patrol cars also focuses on traffic safety and parking enforcement. Under the tenure of Chief Manion and Chief Kerstein, LASPD's patrol generated a 333 percent increase in traffic tickets, and 203 percent increase in parking tickets—all of which was welcome news for the department, since it gets to keep the revenues earned from citations.³²³ The expansion of ticketing power not only affects parents and relatives picking up and dropping off students in a school day, or the lives of residents who find themselves within the vicinity of a school. It also has been incredibly disruptive and harmful for students themselves. Between 2005-2009, the LASPD doled out truancy tickets to 47,000 students, which carried a \$250 fine for the first offense. Truancy ticket fines could grow up to \$1,000 or more including penalties and court fees.³²⁴ According to research gathered by the Community Rights Campaign and the Labor/Community Strategy Center, the majority of students were ticketed near school or on school grounds for tardiness, not for ditching. These tickets disproportionately impacted low-income students who relied on L.A.'s problematic public transportation system to get to school each day, and 88% of students ticketed were Black and Latinx.³²⁵

³²² "Specialized Assignments" LA School Police. < <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/15630>>

³²³ Max Taves, "LAUSD's Finest"

³²⁴ "LA City Council Votes 14-0 to Fix Law That Led to \$1,000 Tickets for Late Students" Public Counsel, <<http://www.publiccounsel.org/stories?id=0084>>

³²⁵ Community Rights Campaign, "Black, Brown, and Overpoliced in L.A. Schools."

By the 2010's the LASPD swelled to 410 sworn officers, 101 non-sworn school safety officers (SSO), and 34 civilian support staff. Perhaps more astonishing than the size of the force was its arsenal of weapons. A recipient of the Department of Defense's 1033 program, the LASPD, like other municipal law enforcement agencies around the country was granted surplus military grade weapons by the federal government. The LASPD collection included three grenade launchers, 61 M-16s, assault rifles, and one Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Tank.³²⁶ The LASPD and school district defended the possession of these weapons as "essential life-saving items."

This is how enclosure operates in a public school setting. With each expansion of the LASPD—from broad policing powers, to weapons possession, and bloated budgets—LAUSD upheld and defended these measures as vital to the safety and wellbeing of children. In the words of Damien Sojoyner, these acts of enclosure which harm students of color are "praised as a means of educational progress under the guise of public safety."³²⁷ However, many students at LAUSD feel the opposite. Instead, coming to campus has felt like entering a battlefield for students of color, who constantly feel criminalized by school police. One LAUSD student, Sarah Djato told *USA Today* that seeing police interact with Black students on campus has been traumatizing: "It was traumatic seeing students from my neighborhood, students I grew up with, getting pepper-sprayed. Two of my friends, a junior and a senior, were arrested."³²⁸

³²⁶ "L.A. schools have given up the last of their Department of Defense-issued rifles." *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 2016.

³²⁷ Damien Sojoyner, *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2016) x.

³²⁸ Sarah Djato, Sierra Leone Anderson, Quiano Assoon, and Khalila Williams. "High School Students: Police don't belong in schools. Here's how we forced them out." *USA Today*, April 16, 2021.

Black and Latinx students overwhelmingly feel an adversarial relationship exists with school police, and the data bares this collective sentiment out. According to research compiled by the Community Rights Campaign of the Labor/Community Strategy Center, 93% of all arrests and tickets at LAUSD between 2011-2012 went to Black and Latinx students.³²⁹ Nearly half of them were under the age of 14. More importantly, officers have the power of discretion when handing out tickets and arrests. The most common arrest and ticket charges are minor offenses or vague categories of rule breaking, such as disturbing the peace, cannabis possession, and daytime curfew violations. This suggests that for the majority of charges, the LASPD officers could have considered alternative remedies, such as referrals to administrators or counselors. According to the same report, “virtually every arrest category, and all ticketing categories, are discretionary. That is, the police officer had the leeway in nearly every incident to weigh the situation and decide to arrest, ticket, or do neither.”³³⁰ In other words, if the students of color feel unsafe, singled out, and criminalized in school, it is because they are.

The LASPD, much like the LAPD, has been notoriously impenetrable. According to journalist Max Taves, the force lacked oversight and LAUSD has failed to hold it accountable. In his investigations, Taves uncovered as many as 16 officer complaints that LAUSD allowed to lapse and failed to follow-up on. The LASPD, therefore, is “one of the least-examined, least transparent police departments in California.”³³¹ Nevertheless, over the course of several years, students, teacher unions, and grassroots community organizers have been slowly chipping away at the armor of the LASPD. Following the model of collectivist, abolitionist organizing set by the

³²⁹ Community Rights Campaign, “Black, Brown and Overpoliced in L.A. Schools,” 11.

³³⁰ Ibid, 14.

³³¹ Taves, “LAUSD’s Finest”

student rebellions of the 1967-1970, LAUSD students are once again reimagining education, campus safety, and what it means to refuse.

In many ways, this new generation of student activists are doing things differently. For one, they are playing the long game. Rather than issuing a long list of demands, they are targeting issues one at a time, and using each victory for momentum to keep the process going. Secondly, students are partnering with advocacy groups, activist movements, and teacher unions in order to accomplish their goals. They know that the work of abolition is a continuous struggle that requires multiple hands-on-deck. It cannot be done alone. Beginning with the issue of truancy tickets, students and community organizations such as the Labor/Community Strategy Center began mobilizing a campaign in 2009. Students shared their stories and the Labor/Community Strategy Center compiled data to illuminate the extent of the problem. Their work earned them the support and collaboration of the Public Counsel, a pro-bono law firm, and the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California. Together, they spearheaded negotiations with LAUSD and the LAPD in 2011, and successfully won the elimination of truancy tickets on school grounds and within the first hour of the school day. In doing so, students exposed one way in which schools and school police had been more invested in fining and punishing youth rather than supporting their retention in school and ability to get to campus. One chip at the armor.

From there, student activists and their allies set their sights on suspensions. In LAUSD, and statewide, students were often suspended for “willful defiance” a subjective and vague charge that could be broadly applied. It was the basis for 54% of suspensions and 25% of expulsions in California.³³² According to the California Education Code, willful defiance is

³³² Susan Frey, “LAUSD will no longer suspend students for ‘willful defiance’” *EdSource*, May 15, 2013.

defined as: “Disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties.”³³³ This disciplinary measure, which was pioneered by LAUSD 1959 disciplinary policy, has led to the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of Black, Latinx, LGBTQ+, foster youth, and disabled students. For example, in LAUSD, Black students are 9% of the district’s student population, and 26% of suspensions.³³⁴

Students and activists from the organization Brothers, Sons, Selves coalition, the Community Rights Campaign, Community Asset Development Redefining Education (CADRE), the Community Coalition, and many more flooded Board of Education meetings to give public comment on the experiences of Black and Latinx students with unfair suspensions and its detrimental impact. Their stories persuaded Board members to eventually end willful defiance suspensions as part of a larger policy shift called the “School Climate Bill of Rights” which focused on alternate methods of addressing misbehavior and misconduct and reversing zero tolerance discipline in schools. A key component of this Bill of Rights is a focus on positive behavior interventions, and restorative justice approaches to resolving conflict. In addition, the Bill of Rights expressed a commitment on behalf of the Board to “redefine and limit the role of police in school discipline.”³³⁵

According to some teachers, the School Climate Bill of Rights has led to a drop in suspensions across the board and improved student morale. Emily Grijalva, a restorative justice

³³³ Carolyn Jones, “L.A. Unified’s ban on willful defiance suspensions, six years later” *EdSource*, December 13, 2019.

³³⁴ Public Counsel “Los Angeles Schools End Suspensions for 'Willful Defiance' to Keep Students Learning” <<http://www.publiccounsel.org/stories?id=0112>>

³³⁵ Fight for the Soul of Cities, “School Climate Bill of Rights passes LAUSD, 5-2 vote!” <<https://fightforthesoulofthecities.com/portfolio/the-school-climate-bill-of-rights/>>

coordinator at Mendez High School in Boyle Heights told *EdSource* that the re-examination of discipline at the district and campus level has created a better learning environment for students: ““We had to establish a culture... We had to make school someplace students wanted to be. So we tried to find as many opportunities as we could for students to be engaged. We figured that if they’re engaged, they’re more likely to come to school and have a positive experience.””³³⁶ Grijalva’s comment is a testament to the power of student activism to change the quality of learning environments in school. With their testimonies and stories, students were able to impress on educational leadership that their schools were not only not serving students, but that they felt deeply unsafe and unsupported on their campuses. They pushed their campuses to reimagine what discipline looks and feels like. Districtwide, suspensions for all offenses have been down 75% as a result of the passage of the School Climate Bill of Rights.³³⁷

Building on the momentum of this victory, students and their allies next targeted LASPD’s military-grade weapons arsenal. Again, relentlessly hounding the Board of Education to answer to students, community members, and parents why grenade launchers, tanks, and M-16s were deemed “essentials.” After much pressure, Superintendent Ramon Cortines announced that the district was moving to return its weapons received from the 1033 program. However, a simple return without transparency was not justice. The Labor/Community Strategy Center commandeered Board meetings to demand proof of return, a pledge to end all relations with the Department of Defense, a full inventory of LASPD’s weapons arsenal, and a formal apology. In May 2016, the Labor/Community Strategy Center declared a complete victory after they

³³⁶ Carolyn Jones, ““L.A. Unified’s ban on willful defiance suspensions, six years later”

³³⁷ Ibid.

received a letter from Chief Steven Zipperman of the LASPD agreeing to their demands.³³⁸

Thanks to their efforts, schools became a bit safer for students whose encounters with the LASPD are often adversarial. More importantly, Black and Brown students and their coalitions forced the LASPD and LAUSD to recognize that procuring military-grade weaponry is inconsistent and fundamentally unsafe in a “civilian or K-12 public school setting.”³³⁹ A crack in the LASPD armor, both literally and metaphorically.

Next, students focused on privacy issues, and got to work ending random searches in LAUSD. As chapter 5 of this dissertation discussed, the routine invasion of student privacy in LA city schools took root in the aftermath of the student rebellions of 1968. However, by 1993, the district began implementing widespread student searches at random after a series of shootings at Fairfax and Reseda High Schools.³⁴⁰ In 2011, the district expanded the policy again, requiring daily random searches at middle school and high school campuses. As in previous campaigns, a coalition of students, community organizations, parents, and legal advocacy groups all spoke out against this policy. In this instance, a coalition called Students Not Suspects comprised of students, Brothers, Sons, Selves, the ACLU, Public Counsel, and United Teachers Los Angeles, and other groups, collectively rallied, researched, and applied pressure to the district. Using LAUSD’s own data, this coalition argued that random searches were ineffective at confiscating weapons, and only succeeded at humiliating students and creating an unwelcome and unsafe learning environment. According to the district data from 2013 to 2015, analyzed by

³³⁸ Eric Mann, “The Strategy Center—Finally—Gets the Tanks and M-16s Out of the LA School System” *Huffington Post*, May 23, 2016.

³³⁹ Chief Zipperman, letter to Labor/Community Strategy Center quoted in Eric Mann, “The Strategy Center—Finally—Gets the Tanks and M-16s Out of the LA School System”

³⁴⁰ Sonali Kohli, “Do L.A. Unified’s daily random searches keep students safe, or do they go too far?” *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 2017.

UCLA’s Civil Rights Project, random searches were more likely to find and confiscate markers, scissors, and body sprays than they were to find knives, razor blades, and mace.³⁴¹ The random searches have been especially worrisome for LGBTQ and undocumented students, as well as students experiencing housing insecurity.

Students didn’t stop there. They organized students across 75 campuses and worked to take their message to the public. They crashed the superintendent’s fundraiser in 2018 and performed street theater in Santa Monica dramatizing the carceral experiences of students of color in LA schools for the city to see.³⁴² Once again, research, relentless pressure, and collective action resulted in a victory for students. In June 2019, the Board of Education voted to approve a resolution that would end all random searches by July 2020. The resolution permits administrators to search students under reasonable suspicion, but it diminishes the necessity and reliance of schools on LASPD in these sensitive matters pertaining to student privacy. Another chip at the armor.

Finally, and most recently, students are turning their undivided attention onto the LASPD itself—and this time, they are coming for their money. But as they have learned after each success, victory is found in collective action that commits to the long game. Mobilized and inspired by the 2020 summer of racial justice in the wake of George Floyd’s murder at the hands of Minneapolis police, students responded to the moment to expand their movement. They marshalled the newfound public receptiveness to antiracism and abolitionist policies to their advantage. Students Deserve, an organization led by students, parents and teachers has led the

³⁴¹ Ibid

³⁴² Sarah Djato, Sierra Leone Anderson, Quiano Assoon, and Khalila Williams. “High School Students: Police don’t belong in schools. Here’s how we forced them out.”

call to defund the LASPD, and in the process, “make Black lives matter in and beyond schools.”³⁴³ Students Deserve partnered up with Black Lives Matter LA, and organized a march in June 2020— the “March to Defund LA School Police,” and then formed their own coalition, the Defund LA School Police Coalition, with over 70 partners. In addition, they gathered student voices by creating a survey on cops in schools. The survey received 5,000 responses in five days from LAUSD students, alumni, and LAUSD-affiliated persons. The results confirmed what student organizers already knew. 86% of all respondents supported fully defunding the LASPD. 85% reported negative experiences with LASPD, including “racial profiling, being followed, and use of force.”³⁴⁴

Armed with their data, student organizers held protests every Tuesday at the Board of Education office in downtown Los Angeles. Their numbers were so large, they shut down the streets, and told their stories to the world through speeches, dance, songs, and poetry. Those that went into the buildings gave public comment and demanded that the Board of Education divest from carceral practices that harm students and make schools unsafe, such as the LASPD. Instead, they argued, the Board should redirect that money towards serving Black students and investing in Black futures. Later that month, the students received their first victory: an agreement to cut \$25 million dollars, or 35% of the LASPD budget, and divert that money towards hiring counselors and social workers at predominantly Black schools. In addition, the Board’s budget cut resulted in substantial reductions to the LASPD force, laying off 65 officers and canceling 40 prospective positions.³⁴⁵ In response to these developments, the LASPD Chief of Police Todd

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Michael Burke, “Los Angeles Unified cuts school police budget by \$25 million following weeks of protests.” *EdSource*, July 1, 2020.

Chamberlain announced his resignation. Chamberlain released a statement stating that these cuts to the department would be detrimental to the safety of the community: “In good conscience, and in fear for safety and well-being of those I serve, I cannot support modifications to my position, the organization and most importantly, the community (students, staff and families) that I believe will be detrimental and potentially life-threatening.”³⁴⁶ 20 officers resigned with him. Despite Chamberlain’s reaction to the budget cuts, LASPD remains the largest school police force in California.

In February 2021, the Board banned the use of pepper spray on students and recommitted its \$25 million cut to the LASPD budget. Further, they pledge to invest an additional \$11.5 million in funding for services to 53 campuses with the highest concentration of Black students. That money would go towards adding therapists, restorative justice coordinators, and expanding ethnic studies programming. In addition, this latest plan lays off 70 officers, 62 nonsworn officers, and one support staff member, reducing the LASPD down to 211 officers—it’s smallest size yet in its 38-year history.³⁴⁷ A sizable crack in the once impenetrable amor of the LASPD.

In many ways, this powerful twenty-first century student movement has built off of and departed from their late 1960s predecessors. They have continued the multiracial model of collective organizing that made the 1968-1970 rebellions so remarkable. They have flooded Board meetings, occupied the offices and issued public comment, like their predecessors. They have picked up the torch to make campuses open, and accessible to their communities, and safe for students. But these students of the twenty-first century have also refined their movement and organizing strategies in new ways. Student activists partnered with grassroots social movements,

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Jill Cowan, Shawn Hubler, Kate Taylor, “Protestors Urge Defunding the Police. Schools in Big Cities are Doing It.” *New York Times*, February 17, 2021.

community organizations, and established advocacy groups to help sustain pressure, marshal resources, gather data, and present arguments. These collaborative strategies have helped students to grow their movements, reach new audiences, and delegate new campaigns.

While they celebrate each milestone and hard-won victory, LA student organizers are not resting yet. Nothing less than police-free schools will do. Until LAUSD dismantles the LASPD, no one is safe. Activists with Students Deserve have articulated what their vision of safe schools and abolitionist education looks like: “a positive school climate with an abundance of resources available for Black students. We want to be the last generation of students that gets traumatized by police at school. We want the kids in future generations to look at us crazy when we tell them police used to do this to us when were supposed to be learning. Safety at school—its what every Black student deserves.” With their continued focus, persistence, creativity, and collectivity, they will achieve it. And everyone will benefit.

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