Washington and Lee University

What Happens to a Dream Deferred: The School Desegregation Crisis in Cleveland, Ohio And the Rise of Carl Stokes

History Department Honors Thesis

By

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Table of Contents

Introduction. 2

1: The Curtain Slowly Descends. 4

2: The Storm Hits. 17

3: Cleveland's Dream Deferred. 35

Conclusion. 47

Bibliography. 50

Introduction

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court handed down the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. This ruling formally ended segregation in public schools. The Court attacked only segregation by law and explicitly mandated by school board policies. As school districts in the South slowly ended segregation in the late 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activists began efforts to integrate Northern schools.

School desegregation in the North was not as successful as the effort in the South. Civil rights activists in cities like Cleveland, Ohio, attempted to integrate the schools by applying the tactics of the Southern civil rights movement, most notably the use of direct action protests. But the residential or *de facto* segregation that prevailed in North allowed school boards to prevent change by establishing schools in segregated neighborhoods. The segregation did not arise from school district policy, so the *Brown* decision did not apply. Without the support of the Court, the effort to integrate the Cleveland public schools failed.

Failure to integrate the school system did not end the civil rights movement in Cleveland. The civil rights community changed its tactics from mass protest to voter registration and political action. A crisis in Cleveland's schools created a grassroots political movement that increased voter turnout and block voting by the city's black community. The failure of the integration effort, combined with the success of campaigns to register black voters, led directly to the election of Carl Stokes as the Mayor of Cleveland in 1967. The campaign made Stokes the first black mayor of a

major urban city in the United States, a feat Cleveland's black community could not have achieved without the movement to integrate the schools.

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The Curtain Slowly Descends

The history of race relations in Cleveland is not unlike that of many other Northern cities. Its public school system was segregated when it began in the 1830's. By the end of the 1840's, however, Cleveland had ended this policy. There was some backlash in the white community to the decision, and in 1859, a group of whites who lived in Cleveland's Sixth Ward offered to pay for construction of a separate school house exclusively for black children to prevent them from mingling with white children.[1] The Cleveland Board of Education rejected the proposal. After the Civil War whites accepted integrated schools, and integration continued until the turn of the century.[2]

Cleveland felt the effects of the Great Migration as much as any other northern industrial city. The black population grew rapidly, and increased from one and a half percent of the population in 1910 to more than four percent in 1920, and more than eight percent by 1930.[3] A 1900 survey revealed that 71.6 percent Cleveland's black population had been born outside of Ohio.

The Great Migration sparked residential segregation in Cleveland. In 1900, no two wards in Cleveland could claim more than twenty-seven percent of the total black population; by 1910, the Twelfth Ward alone had one-third of its African-American

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[1] Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 16.

[2] *Ibid.*, 17.

[3] *Ibid.*, 10.

population.[4] Distinct black neighborhoods emerged around the old Central area and expanded between Euclid and Woodland Avenues. Soon sixty percent of the black population in Cleveland lived between Central and Euclid Avenue in the North and South, and Scovill and Woodland Avenues on the East and West.[5]

The African-American community was confined to this small area for a variety of reasons, the most important one economic. Many landlords responded to the increased demand for housing by increasing rents to prevent blacks from moving in. A wartime investigation found blacks paid a disproportionate share of their income for rent compared to whites who lived in similar housing and neighborhoods. The landlord of one apartment in Central Avenue charged a black family thirty-one dollars a month, while whites paid only twenty-two dollars for similar spaces. [6]

The city's school system reflected this growing residential segregation. The segregating of blacks in ghettoes was clearly reflected in Cleveland's elementary schools. From 1921 to 1923, there was an increase of 2,352 black students in elementary schools. Ninety-seven percent of these students enrolled in schools that were already five percent or more black. Black migrants settled only in areas where the black community had already established itself. During the same period, the number of all-white schools increased from 17 to 30 of 112 schools. Several schools also experienced substantial declines in the number of black students when families moved out of predominantly white neighborhoods.[7] By the end of the 1920's, 89 percent of Cleveland's black junior

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[4] *Ibid.*, 42-3.

[5] Phillips, 129-30.

[6]Phillips, 133.

[7] Kusmer, 162.

high school students attended only 4 of 23 schools. Sixty-one percent of all black senior high students attended Central High School alone, a school which had become ninety-seven percent black.[8] The technical high schools in Cleveland were also segregated. All three technical high schools were either all-white or greatly restricted the access of black students.[9]

School board policies also began to reflect new racial attitudes within the city. By the late 1920's, some African-American parents complained about the busing of their children to nearly all-black schools when other schools were closer. East Technical High School was ninety-six percent white in 1929, despite being located in the heart of the Central Avenue district.[10] The school board had formulated an elaborate plan to bus white students from the West Side to attend school there, yet they virtually banned blacks students living around the school from attending. Segregation also applied to faculty. Some schools even began banning black teachers from the school cafeterias.[11]

Racial segregation in the 1920's resulted from the city's changing demography, but in the 1930's the school board played a more active role in the segregation. It attempted to reinforce and expand segregation through policy. Some black parents complained in 1933 that all black students on the East Side were bused to Central High even though many of their children lived closer to other schools. During the 1930's, some blacks accused the school board of making selective transfers, busing nearly all

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[8] Kusmer, 183.

[9] Phillips, 159.

[10] Kusmer, 183.

[11] Phillips, 159.

black students living on the East Side to Central High, while permitting white students living in the Central High District to attend other schools. This policy continued for several decades. In the 1960's, when a similar busing program was proposed to end segregation within the school system, the white community violently opposed it.[12]

The school board also changed the curriculum in many schools when African-Americans made up the majority of the students. Instead of emphasizing a college-bound curriculum like the predominantly white schools, black high schools emphasized industrial skills. This change was particularly apparent at Kennard Junior High School, where board policy eliminated foreign languages, added industrial classes, and slashed the number of electives. In 1933, the Cleveland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) discovered that half of all tenth graders at Central High could not study mathematics, nor electives such as German, Spanish, bookkeeping, and stenography because the schools no longer offered these classes. Such curriculum changes not only lowered the expectations of many black students, but it also channeled blacks into lower paying jobs. Only half a century earlier the Cleveland Public School system had been a symbol of racial integration, but now it symbolized the growing racial discrimination in the city.

After World War II, it appeared that life for African-Americans in Cleveland would improve. During the 1940's and 1950's, the Cleveland Chapter of the NAACP and the Cleveland Urban League boasted that Cleveland was "the best location in the nation" for African-Americans. These organizations based their claim on the political success of many African-Americans. Cleveland had more black judges and City Council

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[12] Kusmer, 183-4.

representatives than any other city in the country. With groups like the NAACP and the Urban League painting such a favorable picture, whites in Cleveland believed that the black community had no real grievances.[13] The seeds of racial protest against school board policies, however, were sown in the 1950's.

The size of the black population grew rapidly after World War II. From 1950 to 1965, the black population grew from 147,847 to 279,352. Ninety-nine point nine percent lived on Cleveland's East Side, a clear indication that discrimination in housing and employment continued. The overall population in Cleveland shrank from 914,808 to 810,858 but blacks increased from sixteen to thirty-four percent of the population in only fifteen years.[14]

Black Cleveland relied on two civil rights organizations through the 1950's. One organization was the NAACP. It had one of the oldest chapters in the country, founded by thirteen black postal workers in 1912. By the 1950's it was one of the largest branches in the nation with more than ten thousand members. It was also one of the most active.[15] The Cleveland Urban League was the other source of black leadership. It had formed in 1917 to help southern migrants adjust to city life and to combat employment discrimination.[16] Both the NAACP and the Urban League were conservative organizations that preferred to work behind the scenes to affect change. They tried to

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[13] Leonard N. Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis in Cleveland, Ohio, 1963-1964: The Catalyst for Black Political Power in a Northern City," *The Journal of Urban History* 28 (January 2002): 139.

[14] Moore, 135.

[15] Leonard Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 24-25.

[16] Moore, 25.

keep black frustration hidden from the larger community and to trumpet the success of individuals.[17]

In 1954, the Cleveland branch of the NAACP began to protest school board segregation policies. The NAACP believed school district boundary lines and student transfer policies were discriminatory. In one of the nation's earliest attacks on *de jure* segregation, the NAACP demanded that "Existing school boundary lines. . . be enforced and that the unwarranted transfer of pupils out of their school districts [was] not in keeping with the spirit and letter of the Supreme Court ruling against segregation in public schools."[18] While an important step, the NAACP protest did not advance beyond writing letters to the school board. Civil rights organizations in Cleveland continued to rely on negotiation rather than direct action.

The rapid post-war growth of population also had a profound effect on the school system. From 1950 to 1965, the number of children in the Cleveland Public Schools increased from 98,000 to just under 150,000. Black children were now the majority in the district, and represented fifty-four percent of the district's population. Black parents began to take grievances to the school board: inferior teachers, teacher segregation, high student-teacher ratio, a lack of remedial teachers, poor physical facilities, inadequate social services and a lack of vocational courses. The all-white West Side, on the other hand, had the most experienced teachers, the best service, the most attractive buildings, and a low student-teacher ratio.[19]

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[17] Moore, 31.

[18] Dr. James E. Levy, to Mark Schinnerer, 20 October 1954, Cleveland NAACP Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[19] Moore, 135-6.

The problems in the Cleveland schools were most evident at the elementary level. From 1952 to 1963, the number of elementary school students in Cleveland increased from 66,798 to 92,395. School administrators in black schools were unable to accommodate such an increase and had to improvise, and to convert libraries, gymnasiums, storerooms, playrooms, basements and attics into classrooms. Some schools sought additional space in nearby libraries, churches or community centers. Despite these measures, the district was still unable to accommodate all of the city's black children. Consequently, they put prospective kindergarten students on a waiting list during the 1950's. In 1956 there were 1,465 names on the list.[20]

In 1957, the school board adopted a new program to deal with the growing problem. With permission of the Ohio State Board of Education, it authorized congested schools to allow students to attend school for only half the day. Under this policy, half the student body attended classes in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. This solution was far from ideal. By 1961, the number of students on the wait list actually increased to at least 1,700 students, even with students attending only half a day.[21]

Meanwhile, as black schools struggled to find classrooms for all of their students, white schools enjoyed luxurious facilities. While black schools operated half-day sessions because of crowding, many white schools operated as much as fifty percent below capacity. The school board revealed that approximately one hundred sixty-five classrooms were empty in the fall of 1961.[22]

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[20] Moore, 136.

[21] Moore, 136.

[22] Moore, 137.

The Cleveland Educational Association (CEA) filed a law suit against the school board in 1959. It asserted that the school board provided better educational opportunities for children in some sections of the city than others. Although details of the law suit were supposedly secret, many people knew it was about race. The CEA objected that most of the schools operating on half-day schedules had predominantly black students. Nonetheless, the CEA had to drop its lawsuit in December 1959 under pressure from its parent organization, the National Education Association.[23]

At the end of the 1950's many members of the black community began to turn to new civil rights organizations. As new migrants from the Deep South moved into Cleveland, the black community became more militant. Many blacks in Cleveland considered the NAACP elitist and out of touch with the community, while the Urban League seemed more concerned with not alienating its white supporters than the plight of ordinary blacks.[24] Starting in the late 1950's, the lower class and poor blacks turned to new organizations for leadership.

One of the new organizations was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). It formed in 1962 under Roena Rand, a native of Cleveland who had been active in a California chapter of CORE since 1959. Rand and the other founding members of the Cleveland Chapter participated in the 1961 Freedom Rides sponsored by CORE through the South.[25] Unlike most CORE chapters across the country that had white majorities,

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[23] *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), 22 December 1959.

[24] Moore, 25.

[25] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 24 March 1962.

the Cleveland chapter was predominantly black from the beginning.[26] The members were young and militant—and immediately found an audience within the black community. Unlike traditional black organizations, CORE defined the problems of urban Cleveland in terms the lower classes could understand: housing, jobs and schools—concerns rarely addressed by the black middle class. CORE also worked for the success of the entire community.[27]

The other new organization was the Relay Parents March to Fill Empty Classrooms, an organization formed by Daisy Craggett for black parents in the Glenville district. The Relay Parents demanded full day sessions. In a resolution presented to the school board, the parents stated that research showed "the loss of two months of achievement for every nine months of [half-day] classes. . . student grades decline, library use falls off, absenteeism increases, and the best students suffer the most." The Relay Parents called on the school board to end "part-time education . . . with all deliberate speed."[28] The Relay Parents proposed a new busing plan to end the double sessions and bus black students from overcrowded schools to empty white schools. When the School Board refused to act, the Relay Parents decided to take direct action. Throughout September and October of 1961, they picketed in front of the school board offices.[29]

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[26] August Meir and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 199.

[27] Moore, 31.

[28] "Relay Parent's to School Board" NAACP Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; quoted in Leonard Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis in Cleveland, Ohio, 1963-1964: The Catalyst for Black Political Power in a Northern City," *The Journal of Urban History* 28 (January 2002): 136.

[29] Leonard Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis in Cleveland", 137.

The Relay Parents use of direct action was an important development. Local civil rights organizations had relied on negotiation with white officials since the 1930's. Inspired by Southern civil rights activists, the Relay Parents believed direct action would attract attention and force changes. The Relay Parent's had no connections with the traditional black leaders of Cleveland. In the past, only ministers and leaders of the NAACP or the Urban League took responsibility for civil rights in Cleveland. The majority of Relay Parent's were southern, college educated migrants who had moved to Cleveland because it offered greater opportunities.[30]

The Relay Parents' tactics achieved results. In January 1962, the School Board agreed to their demands. Beginning January 29, it would bus 1,520 black elementary students to white schools. Black students and teachers would meet at their original school at 8:30 am and take a school bus to their new white school. Students attended classes from 9 A.M until 2:40 P.M. Finally, black elementary students could receive a full day of education.[31] For many of the fifth and sixth grade students, it was their first ever full day of school. The program was implemented without incident. There were plain clothed police at one school in an Italian neighborhood, Murray Hill, to prevent outbreaks of violence, but there were none.[32] This apparent victory put Cleveland on notice that the black community was prepared to use direct action, and its white citizens needed to be more conducive to change.

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[30] Moore, 137.

[31] *Cleveland Call and Post* (Cleveland), 27 January 1962.

[32] *Cleveland Call and Post* (Cleveland), 3 February 1962.

The joy of victory did not last long, however; as the Relay Parents quickly learned the school board had modified the busing program. The parents had pushed for a plan to bus black students and teachers from crowded schools to white schools that were not. They initially favored the plan because it allowed students to have a full day of school in an environment that was not crowded. But before it voted to launch the plan, the school board decided that it was impractical to bus black students to underutilized schools on the West Side. Instead, they sent them to only a few schools on the East Side. The board claimed this policy would cut travel costs and commuting time. In reality, its intention was to appease white parents on the West Side who were furious that black children would attend the same school as their children.[33] Black parents were outraged when they realized the policy was designed to appease white, segregationist parents.

The black parents' anger increased when they learned about the poor treatment their children received schools on the East Side. The schools segregated the black students and teachers. The schools relegated them to separate classrooms and banned them from activities, assemblies and physical education classes. Black students could not use the school nurse or eat at the school cafeteria. Black students could only use the rest room at one designated time each day.[34] One observer noted that the bused children were treated "like a containerized shipment of cattle."[35]

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[33] Moore, 137.

[34] Moore, 138.

[35] "Transcript of Meeting Between the Cleveland School Board and the United Freedom Movement," NAACP Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; quoted in Leonard Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis in Cleveland, Ohio, 1963-1964: The Catalyst for Black Political Power in a Northern City," *The Journal of Urban History* 28 (January 2002):137.

The schools segregated the students to appease white parents. Before it launched the busing plan, the school board and administrators promised white parents that the busing plan was only temporary until new schools were built and that they would not integrate the school system. School Superintendent William Levenson explained the policy: "We were launching an endeavor about which there was a great deal of concern to the people of a certain racial area. This is quite obviously the reason we did it as we have." Levenson believed blacks could receive equal education in a segregated setting.[36]

The School Board had little choice but to bow to the demands of the white community. There was only one black member on the seven person board, and nearly all of them relied on the support of white voters to keep their positions. School Board President Ralph McAllister was no exception. Despite living on the predominantly black East Side, McAllister relied on the support of whites. His supporters, like their counterparts in the South, believed black children were intellectually inferior to whites, and feared miscegenation. Unwilling to compromise their standing with their supporters and despite the outrage of the black community, the school board enacted the busing plan.[37]

In 1963, the Cleveland NAACP released the results of an investigation that added more fuel to the fire. The investigation revealed that Cleveland had forty four all-white elementary schools and eleven all-black schools. Three high schools were over 95% black. Twenty-five schools were 99% black, seven 95% to 98%, and four 80% to 94%.

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[36] *Ibid.*, 138.

[37] Moore, 139.

The NAACP report demonstrated the effect of residential segregation in Cleveland, and set the stage for massive protests by black parents.

The Relay Parents, now known as the Hazeldell Parent's Association (HPA), again called its members to action. All of the bused students were from Hazeldell Elementary School, which had 2,250 students and was the largest elementary school in the city. The Hazeldell Parents turned to a new organization for support-- The United Freedom Movement (UFM)—to lead the fight against the school board. Few could have foreseen the racial unrest that their protest would cause during the 1963-64 school year.

2

The Storm Hits

There was little cooperation between Cleveland's civil rights organizations in the 1950s and early 1960s. Relations between CORE and the NAACP were often tenuous. Throughout the North, the NAACP believed CORE was infringing on its territory, and as more of a threat than an ally. Hostility between the two organizations usually stemmed from either frustration or resentment. The NAACP usually took a more conservative approach to solving problems and relied on negotiations with the school board. CORE favored direct-action demonstrations.[38]

To address such organizational bickering, Cleveland's civil rights leaders formed an umbrella organization. The NAACP called a meeting of all local civil rights groups on June 6, 1963, and the organizations voted in favor of the proposed umbrella organization, the United Freedom Movement (UFM).[39] With its creation, Cleveland became one of the few northern cities in which civil rights groups united under a single flag.[40]

The UFM's goal was "To unite the non-violent, direct-action forces for freedom. . . and to direct this strengthened force into an effective civil rights program designed to

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[38] August Meir and Elliot Rudwick *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York, Oxford, 1973), 229.

[39] Harold B. Williams, Cleveland, to Organizations Participating in Cleveland Civil Rights Mobilization, Cleveland, 7 June 1963, Urban League of Cleveland Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[40] Meir and Rudwick, 231.

achieve equal opportunity and justice for all residents of Greater Cleveland."[41] The UFM also committed itself to non-violence, and stipulated in its Constitution that "All members shall be required to sign a non-violent, non-racist pledge which shall be filed with the United Freedom Movement."[42] The UFM formed committees to fight segregation in employment, education, politics and voting, health and welfare, and housing.[43]

After its formation, the UFM quickly focused its attention on the public schools, and adopted seven demands for reform of the school system:

- integration of the apprentice-training program at the Max S. Hayes Trade School
- integration of classes of black children transported from crowded schools to under populated ones
- use of qualified black land appraisers in the purchase of real estate for new schools
- use of only building contractors and sub-contractors who do not discriminate in hiring and are likely to hire blacks
- city participation in the federal school lunch program
- use of integrated textbooks, supplementary reading materials and visual aid
- creation of a Bureau of Integration and Human Relations to work toward ending de facto segregation and eliminating discrimination against African- Americans in teaching assignments.

The UFM demanded that school board comply with its demands by September 23, 1963. The school board refused.[44] On September 24, the UFM met to consider its response.[45]

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[41] "Constitution: The United Freedom Movement of Greater Cleveland," Cleveland NAACP Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] *Ibid.*.

[44] *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cleveland) 29 September 1963.

The UFM established strict rules for direct action protests in an issued flyer: "The following rules are those used by NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and SNCC. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE FOLLOW THEM, IF OUR DEOMONSTRATION IS TO BE A SUCCESS." It asserted that "non-violence is essential." It urged members to remember that "demonstrators must never respond to remarks from onlookers" and "must not respond to violence. If you are assaulted, do not respond with violence, but carry on the demonstration."[46] The UFM had taken its cue for direct action protest from the southern civil rights movement.

The UFM met on September 24 to vote to approve the use of direct action. Co-Chairman of the UFM education committee, the Reverend David Zuverik, believed the UFM had no other choice. He said, "All we are demanding are basic rights. . . we seek meaningful integration. . . we have bent over backwards to accommodate the Board, but now we apparently have to take stronger action."[47] UFM President Harold Williams took an even more radical stance: "The revolution has come to town, let's hit the street like one mighty wave. The school board has been given a golden chance to take a great step forward, it hasn't, when we picket we are simply exercising an extension of the right of freedom of speech."[48] Support from CORE and the HPA increased the determination of the UFM to picket the school board on September 25. The vote marked a dramatic

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[45] Leonard Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis of Cleveland, Ohio, 1963-1964: The Catalyst for Black Political Power in a Northern City," *The Journal of Urban History* 28 (January 2002): 141.

[46] "United Freedom Movement: Rules For Demonstration," UFM Freedom School Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[47] *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland) 25 September 1963; quoted in Moore "The School Desegregation Crisis of Cleveland, Ohio," 141.

[48] *Ibid.*, 141.

change in the civil rights community in Cleveland. One UFM member remarked that after the September 24 vote, "Rarely was a motion to take direct action turned down in favor of a lesser course of action."[49]

The protests began on September 25 when approximately 250 people picketed the offices of the school board. The Protestors carried signs with slogans which read "Ghetto Schools Must Go!" and "McAllister Is Stalling!" On September 30, after five days of continuous protests, the school board gave in. It agreed to integrate the schools by busing some students immediately and to bus all students by the beginning of the second semester. The board did insist that it would bus students only if the decision met "sound educational principles." It promised to complete the integration of the bused students by January 15, 1964. As a sign of good faith, the UFM agreed to end its protests.[50]

The success of the UFM's protest seemed to validate direct action as a means of forcing concessions from the school board. The protests attracted enough attention from the media to force the school board to cooperate. UFM efforts to negotiate with the school board had failed to produce any results, but direct action had led to a complete victory in less than a week. Even conservatives within the organization had to concede that direct action had been an essential part of to the UFM's victory.[51]

Despite the victory, bickering within of the UFM persisted. Some groups remained hesitant about the use of direct action. The most prominent of these organizations was the NAACP, which continued to favor peaceful negotiation with white

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[49] *Ibid.*, 141.

[50] *Ibid.*, 142.

[51] *Ibid.*, 142.

officials. The NAACP was the largest component of the UFM, and its strategy had the support of many UFM members. CORE and the HPA led the faction that argued for more direct action because concessions by the board demonstrated proved the effectiveness of the more militant approach.[52]

The debate over tactics could have split UFM between its conservative and militant elements. Fortunately, this did not happen. The key to maintaining unity was their common enemy: the Cleveland school board. Policies of the board angered black conservatives as well as militants. They affected all social classes; wealthy, middle class, working class and poor blacks who attended the public schools. The two sides agreed to a compromise to defeat their common enemy. The NAACP voted for direct action and CORE and the HPA supplied most of the protestors. The school board's resistance actually brought the organization closer together.[53]

When the second semester of the public school year began in January 1964, citizens fixed their eyes on the Cleveland school board. The agreement between the school board and the UFM called for busing 940 students. When the schools opened in January; however, it quickly became clear that the school board had no intention of implementing the plan. Instead, the school integrated roughly twenty percent of the blacks for only forty minutes each day. Classrooms remained segregated at all other times.[54] President Ralph McAllister argued that the board had not violated the agreement. In a press conference McAllister said, "The NAACP is saying that we

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[52] *Ibid.*, 142.

[53] *Ibid.*, 142.

[54] *Ibid.*, 144.

promised to integrate the classes, but we never promised this. We said as long as it was in keeping with sound education procedure pupils would be integrated."[55] This new policy left more than 95% of the bused black students in segregated classrooms.[56]

McAllister had the support of Cleveland's white community. One angry white parent warned the school board that "forceful diffusion will result in forceful resistance." Another white parent said, "We are looking for education for our children, not Negro sons and daughters in law. I don't want my grandchildren black. I am proud of my race. I want to stay white."[57] To retain their positions, McAllister and the board bowed to the demands of the white electorate.

The announcement stunned the Cleveland civil rights community. When the school board resolution was read at a UFM meeting, "A moment of shocking silence engulfed the audience."[58] The crowd quickly expressed anger. Bettie Eckland, a UFM member, expressed the feelings of many members of the organization: "McAllister is not going to get away with this. The board made those resolutions and it's going to stick to them."[59]

The UFM rejected the board's plan and began to plot a new strategy. First, the organization adopted a new resolution. It listed its grievances and declared that "There are clear indications that Cleveland school administrative polices have contributed to the

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[55] *Call and Post* (Cleveland), 25 January 1964.

[56] *Call and Post* (Cleveland), 25 January 1964.

[57] Kenneth Rose, "The Politics of Social Reform in Cleveland" (PhD. Dissertation, Case Western Reserve University. 1987), 89; quoted in Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis of Cleveland, Ohio," 145.

[58] *Call and Post* (Cleveland), 25 January 1964.

[59] *Call and Post* (Cleveland), 25 January 1964.

disorganization and racial tension in these areas through de facto and de jure segregation." It also charged the school board with "Illegally hiring cadet teachers when qualified and trained teacher are available" and with engaging in "discriminatory hiring and placement of teachers and playground personnel." The UFM also called for the board to "Establish a Commission on Human Relations and Integration to serve as an internal organ to investigate and eliminate discriminatory practices in the Cleveland School system" and to establish "an in-service training program for all new teachers."[60] The UFM then called a meeting the following week to discuss a city-wide demonstrations to protest the board's plan.[61]

The UFM decided to restart its direct action campaign on January 26. It planned to set up picket lines at the receiving schools to publicize the treatment of the bused children.[62] The protests began January 28 at William H. Brett Elementary School in the white, working class Collinwood district.[63] 200 members of the HPA, the UFM and ministers from local churches formed the picket line. A group of white parents confronted them. At first, the whites only taunted them. They taunted the ministers, "Some kind of religion this is," and "Hey preach, where you gonna tell ya congregation you were this week?" When the protestors refused to respond, the mob became violent. They grabbed the picket signs and destroyed them, and shouted, "Let's push them off the street. . . Get on the street, you dirty niggers. . . Get out there you trash. . ." The mob then

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[60] "Education Resolution- United Freedom Movement," Cleveland NAACP Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[61] *Call and Post* (Cleveland), 25 January 1964.

[62] Moore, 146.

[63] *Press* (Cleveland) 29 January 1964.

formed a human blockade that forced picketers to march in the street instead of on the sidewalk. A small fight broke out, but no mob violence took place. The Police forced the protestors to remain in the streets.[64]

The protest did achieve the UFM's goals. The next day, both of Cleveland's daily newspapers, the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* and *Press,* carried stories about the protest. The *Press* even put the story on the front page. But the school board remained firm. Board President Ralph McAllister asserted that the board would not relent: "There will be no change in our general policy, but we want to study in detail the way it is being implemented." The UFM announced that evening that it would expand its protests to other receiving schools the following day. Protests began at Memorial Elementary School the next day, January 29.

Memorial Elementary was in the center of Cleveland's Little Italy, in the Murray Hill district. When the protestors arrived at the school on the morning of the 29th, they faced a primarily male, entirely white mob numbering about 1,400 people. Unlike the previous day's encounters, Murray Hill quickly erupted in violence. The violence began at roughly 9:45am and continued into the afternoon. 200 whites marched around the school carrying bricks, baseball bats, guns and lengths of pipe. Members of the mob ate pizza and doughnuts, and one member described the scene as "Like a party." Another white shouted at a UFM minister, "Jesus Christ wasn't black. God wasn't black." The mob destroyed four cars owned by demonstrators and attacked and injured several UFM picketers, including a seventeen year old boy whose head wound required emergency treatment. Whites also attacked two reporters for the *Call and Post*, the local black news

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[64] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 1 February 1964, and *Press* (Cleveland) 28 January, 1964.

weekly. Writer Ken Temple remembered arriving at the scene. Within "a few seconds the large crowd had swarmed around us. I knew they weren't going to listen to what we had to say, but I got set to let them know that we were reporters, only doing a job." As the crowd descended upon him, he recalled:

> My eyes focused on one man in particular, this was a typical looking laborer. The type of man one sees on the street each day with a lunch pail in his hand. The type of man who would stop to discuss the weather and working conditions. At this time he wasn't for discussing anything, he wasn't an individual but part of a blood-thirsty mob. While looking at the man whom I might have called a friend at any other time, I felt the punches against my body. I doubled up and put my arms up around my face to protect it.[65]

Call and Post reporter Allen Howard remembered an equally terrifying scene:

> I don't know about Ken, but I suddenly felt like Daniel in the Lion's Den. Frightened and speechless, we realized we were trapped. . . . There we stood, with about 200 red-blooded American mobsters staring us right in the eyes. Hate and prejudice dripping from their eyes like blazes of fire. And then they started. First there was a kick, which fortunately landed short of the mark. Then the whole pack rushed forward. Since kicking was their most effective weapon, I decided to crouch to avoid serious blows. . . . With the sting of blows about my head and neck and the ring of profanity in my ears I stumbled up to a policeman and told him what had happened. He said, "You went in there and started something. You incited a riot. Don't start anything. Get out of here."[66]

One black protestor asked a reporter, "Are they trying to make this another Mississippi?" Sixty white policemen were on duty in the Murray Hill area that morning, but they failed to intervene and made no arrests.[67]

The appearance of white counter protesters demonstrated that the school crisis had escalated. It was no longer a battle between black residents and the school board, but

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[65] *Press* (Cleveland) 30 January 1964 and *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 8 February 1964.

[66] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 8 February 1964.

[67] *Press* (Cleveland) 30 January 1964.

rather a struggle between black and white Clevelanders.[68] One white parent described her view of the crisis:

> I had no prejudice until the Negro pickets invaded our neighborhood Wednesday. Their children have come to our school for a long time and have been accepted. But this is like having a guest picket your house because he didn't like the dinner you served. . . . It's not a matter of color, they are a distraction. Forceful diffusion will be met with forceful resistance. We also have a right to place our children in classes—with their neighbors.[69]

The violence in Murray Hill made it clear that Cleveland's white community would not accept integration without a fight.

After the clash at Murray Hill, the UFM changed its tactics. Instead of erecting a picket line at the schools, protestors staged a sit-in at the Board of Education. The sit-in began with roughly sixty-five demonstrators who filled the hallways of the third floor. Violence erupted again, this time led by Cleveland police. The police entered the building swinging clubs at the protestors. The police hit demonstrators over the head, and sent two women to the hospital.[70] Hazel Little complained that the police abused her when they arrested her inside the Board of Education building: "I was dragged down three flights of stairs by the police, and when they got me to the bottom of the stairs, they threw me in a corner. At the hospital, I was treated for numerous bruises and abrasions."[71] Mary Ann Myrick had a similar complaint: "I was pulled by my hair. I was dragged along the floor. I was stepped on. I was dragged by my feet. . . . I was dragged down two flights of stairs in such a way that my head and back hit against several of the

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[68] Moore, 147.

[69] *Press* (Cleveland) 1 February 1964.

[70] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 8 February 1964.

[71] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 8 February 1964.

steps. I was kicked."[72] One protestor described the violence as "Just like Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas."[73] Myrick also complained of mistreatment in jail: "While in the cell, I was treated horribly, the matrons wanted me to remove my clothing so that they could examine me while policeman and other males were present."[74] Despite harsh treatment, the protestors refused to give up. One told the police, "You can drag me all the way to the police station if you want to, but you still won't keep me from fighting segregation."[75]

After a week of sit-ins, the school board finally agreed to negotiate with the UFM. The board adopted a resolution on February 9 that it hoped would end the dispute. It called for "Integration of the transportation classes forthwith and a discontinuation of the transportation class system as soon as space becomes available in the sending schools area, by whatever means the board deems necessary and proper."[76]

In light of its previous experiences with the school board, the leaders of the UFM remained skeptical. Harold Williams, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, said, "We will have to wait and see if the school board carries out the resolution." He feared that "discontinuing the transportation classes could mean sending the pupils back to substandard classrooms."[77] Eddie Gill, President of the HPA, said, "This resolution still

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[72] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[73] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[74] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 8 February 1964.

[75] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[76] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[77] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

sounds vague, I'm still waiting for them to explain it more."[78] Much of the UFM's skepticism was the product of the word "forthwith" in the resolution. Williams wondered, "How long is forthwith? This could mean two months, in which time this semester will be almost half over." Ruth Turner, Executive Secretary of CORE, expressed a similar concern: "What does forthwith mean? Two weeks or two years?"[79] The two sides agreed that the date for full integration would be March 9, 1964, and the UFM agreed to suspend all protests.[80] Nonetheless, Williams warned the school board, "We do not intend to tolerate half-day classes, portable schools, rented buildings, or overcrowded schools. If this happens we will be back in the streets again."[81]

White and black parents wondered if the school board would honor the deadline. When the day finally arrived, many whites prevented their children from attending school. Two hundred white parents attended a meeting at Brett Elementary on March 9 at which leaders explained the new policy. After the explanation, most parents seemed satisfied, and returned with their children later in the day. UFM officials found out; however, that only a small percentage of the bussed students had been integrated. Many black parents expressed outrage at the boards' failure to fulfill its promise.[82]

The school board also shifted its tactics after the March 9 deadline. It had announced plans to construct three new elementary schools and began to receive bids for

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[78] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[79] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[80] Moore, 148.

[81] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[82] Moore, 149.

the construction in early March.[83] After the deadline passed, the school board announced it had fired two architects, dusted off old plans for other schools, rushed the acquisition and preparation of property, and began to build three Glenville elementary schools.[84] The board hoped its actions would appease white parents. The three new elementary schools were meant to relieve overcrowding of Hazeldell Elementary, the district in which most bused students lived. School officials tried to convince white parents to accept integration by promising that it was only a temporary and would end as soon as the new schools were built.[85]

The UFM viewed the new construction as an attempt to continue segregation rather than to relieve overcrowding. Historically, the board had used construction to continue segregation. All twenty five schools completed between 1955 and 1962 were *de facto* segregated: eighteen were all black and seven were all white.[86] In response, the UFM changed the focus of its protest from the diffusion plan to the school board policy of maintaining neighborhood schools. At first, the UFM explained its opposition to construction in practical terms. It argued that "the program does not meet the needs either of quality education or sound school planning." One proposed school site in Woodview was too small and provided too little space for playgrounds. The Lakeview site was located on a major road and was therefore unsafe; the road was scheduled to be

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[83] *Press* (Cleveland) 5 February 1964.

[84] "An Interpretation Paper of the United Freedom Movement- April 1964," United Freedom Movement Freedom School Papers. Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[85] Moore, 149.

[86] Moore, 149.

widened and would result in demolition of the school. The UFM argued that the policy was both unwise and uneconomical.[87]

Later the UFM expressed its views in more theoretical terms. It argued that "the schools must provide a model of life and activity in a pluralistic, democratic society, and they must provide equal educational opportunity." To achieve that goal, they argued, "there must be continuing contact among children of all ethnic, racial and social backgrounds." The *Brown* decision of 1954 required states to integrate their facilities, and it cited the provisions of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. The UFM argued that "when a school reflects the rigid color line of society, we cannot expect the child to be highly motivated." Segregation, whether *de facto* or *de jure*, "will always produce inequality, frustration and hatred."[88]

The UFM also believed the Cleveland schools forced two major problems: the geographic concentration of low income and ethnic groups within the inner city, and the unequal distribution of educational resources and facilities. It argued that the best way to solve the problems was to consolidate educational facilities and programs. The UFM therefore called on the school board to "undertake an immediate re-evaluation of its entire housing program," and to re-draw district boundaries for elementary schools to eliminate the racial imbalance.[89]

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[87] "United Freedom Movement," Cleveland NAACP Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[88] "Position Paper on Educational Needs," United Freedom Movement Freedom School Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[89] "Position Paper on Educational Needs," United Freedom Movement Freedom School Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

Many whites criticized the UFM's call for a moratorium on the construction plan. The UFM responded that people did not understand their arguments. Rather than end the construction of new schools, the UFM wanted to "get it moving in a bold, new and more satisfactory direction." The moratorium was necessary to end the school board policy of neighborhood schools. It wanted the neighborhood school policy replaced because, "The [UFM's proposal] would consolidate educational facilities whereas no one group would be favored."[90]

Despite the UFM's pleas and efforts to negotiate, construction of the schools began in early April 1964. The UFM announced that it would picket the construction sites.[91] The protest began at the Lakeview construction site on April 6. Protestors surrounded the site and threw themselves in the path of the excavation equipment. Twenty members of CORE were arrested.[92]

The following day, UFM members arrived at the site in greater numbers for what proved to be the most costly day of protesting yet. The protestors gathered at the Lakeview site in the afternoon of April 7. The Reverend David Zuverink and three other picketers broke ranks and dived underneath a cement truck. Two other picketers dove in front of a cement truck and The Reverend Bruce Klunder lay down behind it. The operator put the truck in reverse to avoid hitting the protestors in front of him, and crushed Bruce Klunder.[93] He was the first northern casualty of the Civil Rights Movement.

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[90] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 7 March 1964.

[91] Moore, 151.

[92] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 11 April 1964.

[93] Lewis G. Robinson, *Making of a Man* (Cleveland: Green and Sons, 1970), 93.

The protestors reacted violently. Reporters from the *Call and Post* wrote, "The reaction of the angry mob was as if, somehow, police had failed their duty on the excavation site, and police thereupon became the target of abusive remarks and actions that sparked and fizzled throughout the afternoon."[94] Lewis Robinson, one of the founders of the UFM, noted that angry blacks in the neighborhood threw mud and bricks at the police, and also looted several near by white-owned businesses.[95]

Leaders of the UFM herded the mob into Corey Methodist Church and attempted to use Klunder's death as a rallying point. Speakers portrayed Klunder like Medgar Evers, a martyr for the civil rights movement. They urged people, "Don't just sit there and applaud but get out there with us and take some action."[96] An editorial on the front page of the *Call and Post* warned Cleveland's residents, "If the death of Rev. Bruce Klunder doesn't shock this city out of its complacent, smug prejudice, then he will have died in vain."[97] Dr. Eugene Blake delivered a eulogy at Klunder's funeral:

> He died for the cause of racial justice. He died for equal opportunity for all Americans. He died for freedom for men to be men. And he died in the front line of those who, having pledged themselves to non-violence, are pledged also to stay in the struggle until the victory is won. . . Out of this sacrifice there must arise new unity and dedication of the whole community to the new pattern of justice which this day demands.[98]

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[94] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 11 April 1964.

[95] Moore, 152.

[96] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 11 April 1964.

[97] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 11 April 1964.

[98] Dr. Eugene Blacke; quoted in "One More Death Marks a New Beginning," Bruce Klunder Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

After Klunder's death, the UFM decided to expand its efforts in bold, new directions. On Tuesday, April 14, it picketed in front of the May Company and Higbees, two of the cities most popular department stores, as well as the offices of the *Cleveland Press* because of its biased reports of the crisis. The protests convinced white business leaders that they could no longer ignore the racist practices of the city's schools.[99]

The UFM then announced a city-wide school boycott for April 20. Leaders asked parents of black and white children to send their children to "freedom schools" sponsored by the UFM, rather than to their normal schools. Within days of the announcement, it recruited more than nine hundred teachers and one hundred school locations, and drafted a complete schedule and curriculum. At the freedom schools, leaders explained, students would study "Negro History and an explanation of what the civil rights fight is all about."[100] Topics for discussion included, "Freedom, equality, integration, segregation, self-pride, [and] race pride." Students also learned to use the four methods of direct action protest: mediation, picketing, boycott and paid advertising.[101] When asked how successful she thought the protest would be, Executive Committee member Baxter Hill replied, "I feel we will have the support of all the parents and the boycott will be a big success for Cleveland Negroes and will aid in the struggle for equal education."[102]

Hill's predictions proved to be accurate: the boycott was a huge success. On April 20, 92% of black students participated in the boycott. Only 100 out of 1,900

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[99] Moore, 152.

[100] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 18 April 1964.

[101] "Direct Action Methods," United Freedom Movement Freedom Schools, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[102] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 18 April 1964.

students attended school in the Glenville area.[103] The *Call and Post* said of the boycott, "It was the dramatic climax to an era that has seen a gradual separation of the chaff from the wheat, a crystallization of the issues of racial bigotry and deprivation and resentment." It concluded, "It was a victory for Negro unity."[104] The success of the boycott was more complete than similar actions in other cities. Boston's boycott had only a 25% participation rate; Chicago had only 44%.[105] As the UFM and its supporters headed into the summer of 1964, the black community had never been more unified nor more ready for action.

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[103] *New York Times* (New York) 21 April 1964.

[104] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 25 April 1964.

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Cleveland's Dream Deferred

Cleveland's civil rights community was more unified than ever in the spring of 1964. All of the organizations in the UFM had joined together to stage a successful school boycott. It had attracted attention not only in Cleveland, but also from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* It appeared that the push to integrate Cleveland schools would succeed. Unfortunately for the civil rights community, events began to turn against it before the school year ended.

As the school construction battle slowly heated up in the spring of 1964, the NAACP moved to abolish the policy of neighborhood schools. NAACP lawyers sued in the Court of Common Pleas on May 3, 1964 to halt construction of the three new elementary schools. They did not base their argument on race but instead argued that construction contracts were non-competitive and therefore void. They made three points: that the specifications restricted competitive bidding; that the advertisement of the contracts was insufficient; and that the advertisements had not been recorded in the school board's minutes as required by law.

The school board's attorneys hotly contested the argument that the board had failed to advertise the projects adequately. School board policy dictated that construction bids be advertised in two publications "for a period of four weeks."[106] The NAACP

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[105] *New York Time* (New York) 25 February 1964.
[106] *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland) 4 May 1964.

contended that the advertisements had to appear for twenty-eight consecutive days, but the school board countered that advertising once weekly for a month was sufficient.[107]

The next day, May 4, the U.S. Supreme Court struck a serious blow to urban efforts to desegregate schools. In *Bell et al v. School Board of the City of Gary, Indiana,* the Court allowed a lower court ruling to stand that stated: "School systems have no obligation, under the Constitution, to correct racial imbalance of school enrollment when it results solely from area housing patterns."[108] The Court's decision gave white parents reason to rejoice. John Angelone, President of the Murray Hill District Council, responded: "Most people want the neighborhood school concept retained, and the court seems to agree this is right. We do not want enforced transportation for a minority."[109] The civil rights community did its best to remain optimistic. Louis Stokes, NAACP attorney and the litigator in the elementary school construction case said, "Yesterday's ruling does not affect our situation one iota. The court did not rule on the merits of the case, so it really did not sustain the decision of the lower courts."[110]

The civil rights community could not put a positive interpretation on the ruling the U.S. District Court handed down on June 5. The Court ruled against the NAACP's suit to prevent construction of the elementary schools. Judge Girard E. Kalbfleisch wrote, "I find absolutely no proof that there is any threat of irreparable injury to these [Negro] children if these schools are built. The motion for a temporary injunction is

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[107] *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland) 4 May 1964.

[108] *Press* (Cleveland) 5 May 1964.

[109] *Press* (Cleveland) 5 May 1964.

[110] *Press* (Cleveland) 5 May 1964.

denied."[111] NAACP attorney Ralph Rudd challenged Kalbfleisch on the issue of segregation but Kalbfleisch remained firm. He asked Rudd, "What legal right do the children have to be transported? Point to a law. Give me a legal right." Kalbfleisch insisted that the three new elementary schools would benefit black children. "Well, their [African-American students'] right to a full day's education will be observed in the construction of these new school buildings." Kalbfleisch demonstrated the northern limitations of the 1954 *Brown* ruling: "The Supreme Court was dealing with a state statute that specifically said this school shall be 100 percent Negro and this school 100 percent white. The Supreme Court did not define segregation. If segregation isn't 100 percent one or 100 percent the other, how many of one and the other shall there be?"[112] This decision was a crippling defeat for the civil rights community, and ended attempts by the UFM to use civil disobedience and other disruptive tactics to force change. When the new school year opened in the fall of 1964, the three new elementary schools opened their doors to student bodies that were nearly all black.[113]

The Court's decision revealed a harsh reality to the civil rights community. The failure to prevent the construction of the elementary schools demonstrated the limitations of negotiation, direct action, boycott, and legal action in attempts to bring about permanent change. In order to create permanent change, the black community would

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[111] *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland) 6 June 1964.

[112] *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland) 6 June 1964.

[113] August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 258, 249.

have to look beyond mere protests. Change would only come if the black community turned to the political arena and realized the potential of black political power.[114]

Leaders of the UFM now understood that voter registration drives could be an important means of furthering the cause of desegregation. Signs of the transition to politics from boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience appeared as early as February 1964 during the violence in Murray Hill. After the passage of the school board resolution that called for complete integration by March 9, UFM Executive Secretary Harold Williams cautioned supporters that the victory could become a defeat if it were not accompanied by an increase in black voting. He told an audience of nearly two thousand, "These votes don't belong to the Democrats or the Republicans. We must guard against letting one political party think it has all the Negro votes."[115] Williams also told the crowd, "there is one job yet unfinished. That is to get everyone eligible registered to vote."[116] The UFM set out to fulfill this goal.

The call to register voters increased in April when CORE brought Louis Lomax and Malcolm X to Cleveland. During the visit, Malcolm X gave his famous "The Bullet or the Ballot" speech. He admonished his listeners that 1964 would be "the most explosive year," and asked, "why? It is also a political year. The year when all the white politicians will be back in the Negro community jibing you and me for some votes." Like Harold Williams two months earlier, Malcolm warned black Clevelanders against blindly supporting one party over another. "The Democrats do get all the Negro votes.

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[114] Leonard Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis of Cleveland, Ohio, 1963-1964: The Catalyst for Black Political Power in a Northern City," *Journal of Urban History* 28 (January 2002) : 155.

[115] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 15 February 1964.

[116] *Ibid.*

And, after they get them, the Negro gets nothing in return. But, it is you who put the Democrats first and the Democrats put you last." Malcolm argued that greater political participation was the only way to elevate the black community. He ended by telling his audience, "In 1964, it's time now for you and me to become more politically mature and realize what the ballot is for and what we are supposed to get when we cast our ballot and, if we don't cast a ballot, we are going to end up in a situation where we are going to have to cast a bullet. It is either a bullet or a ballot."[117] The *Call and Post* reprinted the speech in its entirety in its next edition.

The first opportunity for the UFM to galvanize African-Americans politically came in the spring of 1964. In May, the school board put a new school levy on the ballot. It asked voters to approve a two and a half percent increase in taxes to finance the operation of the schools.[118] The UFM waged an aggressive campaign against the levy. In the past, the school board had relied on the support of the black community to support school levies. In 1962, 86% of Glenville residents had voted in favor of a bond issue that provided new schools for their neighborhood.[119] When asked why they refused to support the new levy, Harold Williams answered, "McAllister has shown that he is incapable of the public trust and we should not give him an opportunity to handle millions of dollars of public funds."[120] The referendum on the school levy provided the first opportunity for blacks to demonstrate their political power in Cleveland.

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[117] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 11 April 1964.

[118] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 2 May 1964.

[119] *Ibid.*

[120] *Ibid.*

The editors of the *Call and Post* joined the campaign to defeat the levy. In an editorial, the paper told the black community, "We have one weapon that the Cleveland Board of Education must respect. That is our ballot." It urged every black voter, "no matter what the sacrifice," to vote against the levy. The *Call and Post* told its readers, "This vote drive should be participated in with the same unity, the same spirit of determination, as was exhibited last week when the school boycott achieved 92% effectiveness."[121] As the day of the vote approached, the UFM carefully watched to see the effect of its tactics.

In the election on May 3, the UFM won a qualified victory. The levy passed with a 55% approval (67,951 in favor; 55, 639 opposed), but it was a victory for Cleveland's black community. Harold Williams claimed, "The vote was delivered along racial lines, just as we suspected the school board wanted it to be."[122] The returns proved Williams correct. The black Glenville district voted heavily against the levy. In 1962 when the levy passed 67 to 33 percent, the three Glenville area wards voted 81 percent in favor. In 1964, in the 24th Ward in Glenville, Precinct L voted 112 to 22 against the levy, Precinct D 110 to 25 against the levy, Precinct S 105 to 46 against, and Precinct M 125 to 15 against the levy. In contrast, the all-white West Side voted nearly unanimously in favor of the levy. In Ward 4, sample precincts voted 152 to 64, 78 to 46, 73 to 45 and 175 to 40 in favor of the levy.[123]

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[121] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 2 May 1964.

[122] *Press* (Cleveland) 4 May 1964.

[123] *Press* (Cleveland) 4 May 1964.

The *Call and Post* declared the black turnout against the levy "another victory of solidarity against tremendous odds and influences. . . . The Negro vote was as overwhelming as could be expected but their efforts were defeated by sheer force of superior numbers." The paper tried to prevent the black community from becoming discouraged with the political process because it had lost the battle: "Failure to defeat the levy was NOT a failure of Negro voters to vote against it as they had been advised. Victory of the levy was a mandate of NOTHING except that there are more white voters available than Negro."[124]

The vote did prove to civil rights leaders that the black community could be galvanized to support a political cause. This new knowledge was more important than any leader had foreseen. In 1965, it inspired Carl Stokes to try to become the first black mayor of a major American city.

Stokes was born in Cleveland on June 21, 1927, the second child of Charles and Louise Stokes. The family was very poor.[125] Stokes remembered growing up in dilapidated housing: "We covered the rat holes with the tops of tin cans. The front steps always needed fixing, one of them always seemed to be missing. The coal stove kept the living room warm; we used heated bricks and an old flatiron wrapped in flannel and together we would rub our collective feet against it" to keep warm. It was a "poor excuse for a shelter."[126]

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[124] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 9 May 1964.

[125] Leonard Moore *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 9-10.

[126] Carl Stokes, "Draft of Autobiography;" quoted in Leonard Moore *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 10.

Stokes attended East Tech, a primarily white high school. Members of the faculty and administration discouraged black students from taking challenging courses, and instead pushed them toward vocational trades. Stokes eventually dropped out of school and spent most of his time with local drug users and con artists.[127] His life changed in 1945 when he enlisted in the Army. After traveling through the South, Stokes realized the importance of education. He returned to East Tech and graduated in 1947. He subsequently graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1954 and later earned a law degree at the Marshall School of Law in 1956.[128]

Stokes began to develop an interest in politics as early as 1949. That summer, he worked as a chauffer for John O. Holly, a civil rights activist. Stokes listened carefully when Holly talked about the importance of creating a black political base, and the message resonated with him.[129] When he completed law school, Stokes was ready to begin his political career. In 1957, he served as campaign manager for Lowell Henry, a race in which Henry defeated Joseph Horowitz for a seat on Cleveland City Council.[130]

Stokes benefited from the increased political activity of the black community that the school integration crisis had created. In the 1961 election, 53 percent of black voters turned out in the four wards that had the largest black populations on the East Side. By comparison, four all-white wards in the West Side had a 55 percent voter turnout. As the

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[127] Moore, 12-3.

[128] Moore, 15-7.

[129] David R. Colburn and Jeffrey S. Adler, eds. *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics and the American City* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2001), 81.

[130] Colburn and Adler, 81.

school crisis began in 1962, black turnout dramatically increased to 60 percent.[131] This development helped make Stokes the first black Democrat in modern times to win a seat in the Ohio Legislature.[132] In 1964, the year the school desegregation battle reached its climax, Stokes was re-elected and the black voter turnout skyrocketed to 88.2 percent. The school crisis helped to spur the increase and to raise Stokes to office. More important, it demonstrated black political power in Cleveland.[133]

Stokes was a veteran of the school desegregation battle in the city. He was active in school demonstrations, but did not take a leadership role in the movement. He did, however, show the black working class and poor that he identified with their struggle. He was a man of the people.[134]

Stokes attracted attention in 1964 during a debate over redistricting in the Ohio Legislature. The US Supreme Court had ordered Ohio to re-draw its district lines so that each district contained approximately the same number of people.[135] The Democratic Party proposed to move the black 24th, 25th, and 27th to the all-white 22nd Congressional District, which would have greatly diluted the black vote in the District. Stokes joined Republicans to support Harold Williams' proposal which guaranteed the "ethnic solidarity" of black areas in the 21st Congressional District. Williams' plan kept the

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[131] "City of Cleveland Wards" and "Estimates of Total Number of Registered Voters", Carl B. Stokes Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[132] Colburn and Adler, 81-2.

[133] "City of Cleveland Wards" and "Estimates of Total Number of Registered Voters", Carl B. Stokes Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[134] Moore, 38.

[135] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 5 December 1964.

black 24th, 25th, and 27th Wards in the 21st District. Williams' success opened the door for the election of six black candidates to the state legislature.[136]

Stokes enjoyed a solid reputation in the black community that viewed him as a defender of its political rights and power. After the 1964 debate, the power of the black electorate in Cleveland was strong and focused, and the time had come for Stokes to apply his leadership skills to his home town. In 1965 he decided to run for Mayor, not as a Democrat, but as an independent.

Stokes believed he could win in 1965. The black community had grown to 39 percent of the total population, a voting block large enough to turn the election. He was a veteran of the civil rights movement, personally familiar with the harsh realities of urban poverty, and a political independent.[137] Stokes also understood the benefit the school desegregation campaign provided his candidacy. The campaign had created a strong momentum within the black community, and he realized that he had the background, experience and personal characteristics to transfer that momentum into a mayoral campaign.[138]

The civil rights community turned its efforts to electing Stokes mayor of the city. In 1965, a voter registration drive led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Special Project Committee for Voter Registration and Citizenship gave Stokes' campaign a significant boost. The campaign set a goal of registering 40,000 new black voters in time for the mayoral election. Large numbers of blacks who had migrated from the South after World

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[136] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 5 December 1964.

[137] Moore, 40.

[138] Moore, "School Desegregation Crisis in Cleveland, Ohio," 155.

War II registered, the same segment of the population that was particularly active in the school crisis.[139] The effort of the civil rights community was essential because without a high voter turnout by the black community, Stokes did not stand a chance of defeating Mayor Ralph Locher.

On the eve of the election, editor William Walker of the *Call and Post* appealed for racial solidarity: "The Negro who votes against Stokes is a traitor; the Negro who cowardly stays home to keep from voting is worse. When the polls open on Tuesday the Negro race, not Carl Stokes, will be on trial."[140] Stokes lost to incumbent Ralph Locher by 2,142 votes, 87,858 to 85,716. But a record 72 percent of the black community had voted, and Stokes had received 85.4% of their vote.[141] In 1967, Stokes ran again, this time as a Democrat. He faced Mayor Locher in the Democratic primary.

Civil rights organizations again led a massive effort to register voters. After the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, many national organizations had looked for a new cause, and Stokes' campaign was the beneficiary of the search. Martin Luther King, Jr. announced that he would lead the registration drive. King was still reeling from his failure in 1966 to eliminate slum housing in Chicago. Due to King's drop in popularity from this defeat, Stokes opposed King's plan to go Cleveland and pleaded with him to stay away from the city.[142]

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[139] Moore, *Carl Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power,* 41.

[140] *Call and Post* (Cleveland) 30 October 1965; quoted in Leonard Moore *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 43.

[141] Michael Preston, Lenneal Henderson and Paul Puryear, eds., *The New Black Politics: The Search For Political Power* (New York: Longman, 1982), 190.

[142] Carl Stokes, *Promises of Power*, 100-3; quoted in Leonard Moore *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 56.

The Cleveland branch of CORE also made a valuable contribution to the campaign. The chapter had received a $175,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to aid its efforts to register voters, the first time a civil rights organization had received financial support for voter registration.[143] In the summer of 1967 the combined efforts of CORE, the Urban League, the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference resulted in the registration of more than fifty thousand black voters.[144] The registration efforts were important because city officials had purged thirty percent of black voters in the city from the voter list after the 1965 election by changing the voting laws.[145] Without the effort of these civil rights organizations, Stokes would not have won the 1967 election.

On the night of October 3, 1967, the civil rights community celebrated its greatest victory. Stokes defeated Mayor Ralph Locher by more than 18,000 votes, 110,769 to 92,033. A month later, on November 7, he defeated Republican candidate Seth Taft 129,396 to 127,717. A remarkable 79.7 percent of eligible black voters participated, and Stokes won 95 percent of their votes.[146] Cleveland had elected the first black mayor of a major city and demonstrated the political power of black America.

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[143] Moore, 58-9.

[144] Colburn and Adler, 85.

[145] Moore, 58.

[146] Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1984), 140.

Conclusion

Like other efforts in Northern urban areas, the massive effort by the UFM to integrate the Cleveland Public School system failed. A 1967 Report by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission reported that 91.5 percent of all public school students in Cleveland attended schools that were at least 80 percent white or black. At the elementary level, 90.5 percent of all students attended schools that were not integrated, and most were 95 to 100 percent black or white. Of the 23 black principals in the school district, two supervised schools that were at least 60 percent black and the other 21 supervised schools that were between 95 and 100 percent black.[147] Forty-five percent of teachers in the district were black, and almost all taught in schools that were predominantly black. Most white teachers taught in predominantly white schools.[148] The 1967 Civil Rights Commission Report concluded, "It seems clear from all that has been said thus far that the Cleveland Board of Education is a political institution in a political environment which does not support racial integration of the schools. School officials would have to be willing to court tremendous opposition in order to initiate any serious attempt to reverse the trend toward complete racial isolation."[149]

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[147] "Education of Negroes in Cleveland, Ohio," Urban League of Cleveland Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[148] "Memorandum," Urban League of Cleveland Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

[149] Willard C. Richan, *Racial Isolation in the Cleveland Public Schools: A Report of a Study Sponsored by the United States Commission on Civil Rights* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1967), 5-7; quoted in Mary F. Ehrlander *Equal Education Opportunity: Brown's Elusive Mandate* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2002), 208.

What made Cleveland's experience unique was the way the black community capitalized on the successes of the integration movement. In 1965 the civil rights leader Bayard Rustin predicted that the civil rights movement would lead directly to black political power.[150] Cleveland was the first urban area that proved Rustin correct. Faster than any other city in the United States, Cleveland's civil rights movement swiftly evolved from a protest against *de facto* segregation to a campaign to acquire political power.[151] After its failure to integrate schools, Cleveland's black community realized the limitations of protest and legal action. But it realized its potential to create black political power by turning their efforts to the political arena. The civil rights community was determined to replace Ralph Locher as mayor of the city,[152] and dealt with its anger and frustration by elevating Carl Stokes, a member of their own community.[153]

Stokes' election was a major development in American history. It gave the black community influence and power. It also represented a massive uprising of the black community against uncooperative white political leadership.[154] Black communities throughout the nation adopted the strategy. During the decade following Stokes' election, cities elected more than two hundred African-American mayors; by 1990 the figure exceeded three hundred.[155] Through its efforts to integrate the Cleveland school

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[150] David Colburn and Jeffrey Alder, ed., *African American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 2.

[151] Colburn and Adler, 23.

[152] Leonard Moore, "The School Desegregation Crisis of Cleveland, Ohio, 1963-1964: The Catalyst for Black Political Power in a Northern City," *Journal of Urban History* 28 (January 2002) : 155.

[153] Michael Preston, Lenneal Henderson, and Paul Puryear, ed., *The New Black Politics: The Search for Political Power* (New York: Longman, 1982), 191.

[154] Preston, Henderson, and Puryear, 191.

[155] Colburn and Adler, 1.

system, the UFM created a massive change in American politics. The school crisis in 1963 and 1964 was essential to Carl Stokes' ability to mobilize the black community, and become the first black mayor of a major American city.

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