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**Black, White and Green:
High School Student Civil Rights and Environmental
Activism in New York City and on Long Island, 1968-1975**

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation highlights the contributions of high school student activists in both the Civil Rights and Environmental Movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Through an in-depth analysis of various New York City and Long Island community case studies, the project sheds light on the importance of place as a theoretical concept in the evolution of student-led social and political activism. The project illustrates how student involvement in both the Civil Rights and Environmental Movements did or did not manifest in two contrasting suburban and urban settings. Moreover, it highlights how place as a construct in and of itself influenced students' participation in both movement types in the post World War II era. Key to this analysis is an examination of not only geographic location and place specificity, but also the race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status of activist students. To contextualize these students' social and political activities, the project also examines the multiple influences within and outside of young activists' families, high schools, residential communities, as well as the local, state and national movements with which the students understood themselves to be associated.

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Introduction

In the fall of 1969, Zoilo Torres and Paulette Samuels, two students at Bellport Senior High School returned from summer vacation with plans of organizing a high school-based Civil Rights Movement in their local Long Island community. Hoping to combat longstanding racial, ethnic and socio-economic inequality, Torres and Samuels founded the Black and Puerto Rican Student Union (BPRSU) and served as its teenaged leaders. Just one year later, Ronald Rozsa, a senior from the same high school, returned after yet another summer vacation with similar plans of organizing local teens for political action. Although unlike his socially-conscious predecessors, Rozsa returned to school with plans of organizing a teen-led environmental action campaign for the preservation of fragile eco-systems within and around the Bellport Community. With the founding of Torres and Samuels' BPRSU, and Rozsa's Students for Environmental Quality (SEQ), youth in this rural Long Island community ushered in a period of teenaged political activism by bringing local life to divergent manifestations of two nationally-significant social movements. These two vastly different movements, however, attracted very different sets of teenaged activists and elicited very different responses from Bellport's adult population. The BPRSU was generally feared, misunderstood, and admonished by local media representatives, high school administrators and members of the surrounding white community; conversely the primarily white and middle to upper-class SEQ was routinely supported, celebrated, and congratulated for its activities. At the same time, while one was perceived as purely disruptive, unwarranted and threatening to the status quo, the other found local favor as

an educational and altruistic endeavor which benefited from the advice and encouragement of faculty mentors in school.

These differences beg the question why? What led to such variances in student interest and public perception of these two social movements, both of which evolved upon this similarly shared suburban landscape? What was it about Bellport that led to the formation of two distinct manifestations of high school student activism in the same community high school? How did Bellport, as a place – both geographically as well as demographically – influence students’ personal and collective decision-making processes when choosing to engage in either civil rights and/or environmental activism? At the same time, how did place influence these same choices in other types of communities, be they suburban or urban, comparable or dissimilar to Bellport? This dissertation project explores these place differences and how they influenced high school student civil rights and environmental activism in varying communities on suburban Long Island and in the New York City borough of Brooklyn. While the project certainly sheds light upon the significant contributions of high school activists in local manifestations of each of these national movements, it centers upon their differences based upon students’ geographic and demographic place in relation to the sites and nature of their activism. The chapters which follow illustrate that despite a few similarly-shared movement trends such as non-place specific, universally-shared student goals, occurrences of high school student civil rights and environmental activism were never mirror images of one another. Students’ lived realities in their own communities – defined by differences in race, ethnicity, class, and local topography, as well as differences intrinsic to the urban/suburban divide – shaped varying forms of high school student civil rights and environmental activism.

In the case of Bellport, while students in both social movements shared a similar suburban landscape, they did not share parallel suburban lifestyles, as their community was rigidly divided along racial, ethnic and socio-economic lines. Moreover, these demographic divisions also manifested geographically as Bellport was legally divided into two distinct neighborhoods: one relatively affluent and primarily white, and the other, much less prosperous and largely African American and Latino. As a geographic and demographically divided community, Bellport provided white, black, and Latino residents few shared spaces for cross-cultural and unifying social interaction. Throughout the postwar era, the local high school filled this void, as the educational facility became one of the only shared public spaces within which residents from either neighborhood, particularly the young, came together. It is within these two separate social worlds that BPRSU and SEQ members located much of their personal and collective motivation to actively engage in civil rights and environmental activism. At the same time, these diverging social realities also limited movement crossover, as student activists participated in only one movement or the other – never both. What is it about such differences, then, that led students from each of these two neighborhoods to choose one form of political activism over the other? Why was there no crossover between these two movements? Moreover, how common was it for a community to experience both high school student civil rights and environmental activism in the same school building? Finally, how significant was socioeconomic difference as a determinant factor in leading one group of students to labor for civil rights, and the other, to organize on behalf of the local environment?

As the analysis on Bellport will reveal, both student movements were grounded by differing sets of organizational priorities largely based upon students' mutually exclusive lived realities in their respective, yet conjoined, suburban neighborhoods. While the majority of BPRSU members hailed from the working-class and less affluent hamlet of North Bellport, the majority of SEQ members hailed from the more prosperous, middle to upper-class, waterfront village. For African American and Latino student activists, such stark contrasts between their neighborhood and that of their SEQ classmates grounded their civil rights activism, as they focused their efforts upon both racial and ethnic diversity in school as well as the alleviation of poverty in the greater community. This did not mean, however, that their northern hamlet was an island of poverty in a sea of suburban wealth. As later analyses of North Bellport will illustrate, while many of its black and Hispanic families found it hard to make ends meet, many had managed to purchase the home they lived in and had secured at least one, if not two, full-time salaries to do so. Still, despite the presence of, what could be construed as, working to lower middle-class families, North Bellport's communal identity has been more closely associated with the inordinate number of families who, from the early 1960s onward, relied upon social services for survival. As later analyses of place will highlight, African American and Latino civil rights activists from North Bellport routinely self-identified with these latter socioeconomic markers and labored to alleviate their impact on themselves, on their families and on their community.

For members of SEQ, issues of socioeconomic inequality were less urgent, as their – typically – middle to upper-class status provided them much more comfortable lifestyles at home, unfettered access to outdoor recreational activities in their free time,

and more time and preparation for advanced academic programs in school. This latter opportunity included an array of elective summer and school-year courses in Biology and in the Marine Sciences. It is through experiences such as these that SEQ members would foment the personal and collective relationships with the local environment that would ground their interest in preserving marine and biotic ecosystems in and around the Bellport community. Still, despite these latter experiences which most of Bellport's environmentally-active students took advantage of, not all SEQ members hailed from middle to upper-class families. Some, including Ron Rozsa, lived along the periphery of Bellport Village and would have characterized their socio-economic status as working or lower middle-class due to their parents' level of education, career responsibilities, and annual salary. Although, even with such socioeconomic inclusiveness, the primarily white SEQ membership typically enjoyed middle to upper-class lifestyles in the much more affluent waterfront village.

This, then, begs the obvious question: how significant a role did class status and socioeconomic difference play as a determining factor in student activism in other community high schools? As mentioned above, youth civil rights activism in Bellport was informed by black and Latino students' various experiences with racial, ethnic, *and* socioeconomic inequality. Therefore, is it possible that *all* other teenaged civil rights and social justice campaigns were influenced by this triumvirate as well? Were there instances when black and Latino student activists focused their attention upon in-school and community-wide racial and ethnic inequality alone? At the same time, how significant was class status and class difference in relation to high school student environmental action? As noted previously, middle class standing was, more often than

not, an unofficial pre-requisite for student membership and participation in SEQ. But, were there cases of youth environmental activism in which middle-class affluence was not generally a determining factor? Were there high schools in which civil rights and environmental activism *did not* coincide with one another, as they had in Bellport? If so, what differences arose between such schools in New York City as opposed to those on suburban Long Island?

To address these queries, this dissertation centers upon four high school case studies in the New York Metropolitan Area including Bellport and Malverne Senior High Schools on suburban Long Island, and John Dewey and Franklin K. Lane High Schools in the urban center of Brooklyn. While all four schools examined in this study experienced the emergence of either civil rights or environmental activism between the years 1968 and 1975, only Bellport witnessed the evolution of both. Through an analysis of each individual high school and its surrounding feeder communities, this project will highlight the significance of place – as a geographic as well as a demographic reality – as it relates to and influences different manifestations of teenaged political activism in similar and dissimilar communities. For example, the suburban community of Malverne only experienced the emergence of high school student civil rights activism, as local teenagers were not drawn to, or interested in pursuing, environmental activity. Despite their similar interests in local civil rights, black and Latino students in Malverne and Bellport hailed from dissimilar social worlds, as the former were members of primarily middle-class, college-educated families and the latter were from less affluent, working-class and, in some instances, impoverished families. What were the effects of class difference and socioeconomic status on each of these two high school civil rights

campaigns? Why didn't Malverne's student population – white or black – engage in local environmental activism? How was Malverne different from Bellport? These questions, and others, will be analyzed in two chapters on high school student activism on suburban Long Island.

This dissertation also examines how both social movements evolved differently upon the urban and suburban landscape, shedding light on the differences between teen activism in high schools on Long Island and high schools in Brooklyn. While similarities certainly existed between activist campaigns in both settings, manifestations of either movement under study were often unique to the racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and geographic realities within the high schools, neighborhoods, and larger communities of their emergence. To this end, two chapters are devoted to instances of high school student political activism in Brooklyn, focusing on Civil Rights/Black Power activity at Franklin K. Lane High School and student-initiated environmental activity at John Dewey. For students at both institutions, the urban experience in New York City was significant as the much larger spatial realities in Brooklyn geographically separated activists' home neighborhoods from their high schools and from the various sites of their political activism.

Unlike their teenaged contemporaries in Bellport and Malverne, the majority of whom lived in close proximity to their high schools, students who attended Franklin K. Lane did not. In the Long Island suburbs, teenaged civil rights activists were not only students, but also members of the local community within which they were active. This spatial reality allowed these latter students the opportunity to focus their political activism on in-school as well as community-wide issues of racial, ethnic, and socio-

economic inequality. At Lane, student civil rights activists did not share such communal ties to their high school, as the majority of African American students traveled to school from Brownsville, a primarily black neighborhood in Brooklyn which lacked a high school facility of its own. Moreover, Lane's location in central Brooklyn placed its students in close proximity to a central hub of the mid to late 1960s social and political activism. This proximity led to a much more separatist, militant and, sometimes violent campaign than the type of civil rights movements that were waged in the nearby suburbs. While Long Island youth were certainly aware of late 1960s social and political unrest in New York City, their suburban existence kept them far enough removed from its influence to allow them to organize much less polarizing civil rights campaigns than the one which emerged at Franklin K. Lane and its sister schools across New York City.

Nevertheless, students at Lane did share at least one unique trait with their counterparts in suburban Malverne: neither of their high schools produced a student-led environmental organization like SEQ in Bellport or the Marine Biology Club at John Dewey in Brooklyn. While both of these latter schools witnessed the emergence of teen-led environmental activism, both instances evolved upon diverging paths which were shaped by the different experiences made manifest by the urban/suburban divide. Akin to students at Franklin K. Lane, members of John Dewey's Marine Biology Club also hailed from various neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn, as the institution was opened in 1969 as a borough-wide, experimental high school. While the same expansive spatial reality existed for students at both urban high schools, students at John Dewey did not experience the same place dissociation that prevented black students from fully connecting with Franklin K. Lane and its surrounding, primarily white, feeder

neighborhood. The absence of this place disassociation provided John Dewey's student population a much more positive experience in a high school to which all had applied and all had opted to attend. Still, this urban spatial reality *did* differentiate members of Dewey's Marine Biology Club from members of SEQ, the latter of whom lived within much closer proximity to their community high school as well as the various sites of their environmental activism. This latter point begs the obvious question: how did such geographic and spatial differences influence and shape high school student environmental activism at Bellport and at John Dewey?

While students in both environmental groups located their inspiration for activism through their study of Marine Biology, and focused the majority of their activism on endangered marine ecosystems, members of both SEQ and John Dewey's Marine Biology Club engaged ecological degradation from two very different positions. For students in suburban Bellport, the sites of their activism were typically local in relation to not only their school but also their homes, a reality which translated into strong personal relationships with the natural environment prior to their membership in SEQ. For students at John Dewey, this relationship was not as evident, as the majority of club members resided much further away from their school and, by extension, the local sites of their environmental activism. For the majority of John Dewey students, cognizance of local ecological hazards – in the vicinity of their school, along Brooklyn's Atlantic Coastline – evolved through their outdoor activities in the school's Marine Biology Program. Unlike in Bellport, where membership in SEQ was primarily an after-school, extracurricular option, environmental activism at John Dewey was much more an outgrowth of, and incorporated into, students' daily Marine Biology coursework. By

virtue of their school's close proximity to Brooklyn's coastal wetland areas, students were routinely assigned marine-based fieldwork through which they were able to foment their own unique personal and collective relationships with local biotic communities. These relationships grounded students' environmental concerns as they encountered various sites of pollution along Brooklyn's neglected beachfront areas, and battled to prevent residential and commercial development atop fragile wetland ecosystems. As the pages devoted to John Dewey's Marine Biology Club will highlight, expansive spatial realities in Brooklyn played a significant role in not only who opted to participate in environmental activism, but how club members' activities would unfold upon the urban landscape they inhabited.

While John Dewey and Franklin K. Lane High Schools certainly provide two intriguing urban examples of high school student political activism, one focusing specifically on environmental activity and the other on civil rights, neither one witnessed the manifestation of both movements within its walls. This situational absence begs the question why? Why did Franklin K. Lane, like Malverne, not produce a high school student environmental action group such as Bellport's SEQ or Dewey's Marine Biology Club? What about John Dewey High School – as a place – prevented its students from pursuing a civil rights campaign similar to the one waged by African American students at Lane? As the chapter on each of these schools reveals, the explanations for these absences lie in the dissimilar racial relations between administrators, faculty and students within each school building itself.

While Franklin K. Lane was often marred by intense racial, ethnic and socioeconomic tensions between teachers and students and among students themselves,

John Dewey was not, as it opened its doors in 1969 as a fully integrated facility, which, from its inception, offered an extremely diverse schedule of humanities, social science and foreign language courses taught by an equally diverse teaching staff. To achieve similar racial and ethnic diversity in their own school, Lane's black student body *had* to engage in civil rights activity, which often manifested violently as a sign of student activists' frustration with in-school and city-wide racial discrimination. While the prevalence of such tensions would not have necessarily quelled student interest in environmental activity, their considerable impact upon Lane's social climate cannot be overlooked as a possible deterrent to the evolution of extracurricular activities such as student-led environmental activism. Neither can the absence of Marine Biology as a program or faculty mentors as motivating figures be overlooked - two factors which played a significant role in the founding of SEQ in Bellport and the Marine Biology Club at John Dewey. Combined with a politically, and at times, violently-charged atmosphere at Franklin K. Lane, this lack of faculty mentorship as well as Marine Biology as a segue program through which students could physically engage the natural environment, limited the likelihood that students would consider high school student environmental activism as a possibility.

This latter point is not to suggest, however, that the emergence of high school student environmental *or* civil rights activism necessitated the involvement of faculty mentors or other adults in the surrounding community. Just like political activists on university campuses and in various adult-led organizations across the 1960s and 1970s American landscape, high school student activists freely engaged in social movements of their choosing and on their own volition. In Bellport, while student environmentalists

found inspiration through their study of Marine Biology, their environmental interests were purely their own as faculty mentors recognized SEQ as a student-led extracurricular, yet political, activity. While instructors at John Dewey provided more structure to students' ecological pursuits, Marine Biology Club members remained the primary agents of environmental activity, as their fieldwork and conclusions grounded the preservationist campaigns waged in their name. For high school student civil rights activists little, if any, inspiration and guidance was provided by faculty mentors or school administrators, as their activism routinely challenged the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status quo in their schools and in their communities. While such students may have worked with, or at times been influenced by, adult organizations or adult mentors in their surrounding communities, their political activism was much more inspired by what their educational experience *had not* provided them than what it actually had. In the chapters that follow, the differing levels of adult influence in each manifestation of civil rights and environmental activism will be explored, as the agency of high school student activists in the local movements they led is forcefully stressed.

While this dissertation focuses heavily upon the significance of place in the evolution of high school student civil rights and environmental activism in the suburban and urban setting, it also emphasizes the significant contributions of late 1960s and early 1970s high school student social and political activists and their organizations. Just as more traditional, adult-led activist organizations set their own agendas based upon members' personal and collective experiences and local concerns, so too did high school student civil rights and environmental advocates, all of whom organized around issues unique to their lived realities in their respective high schools and in their surrounding

communities. In all four case studies examined in this project, high school students organized their peers, set agendas, protested discrimination, rallied against ecological hazards, and, to one degree or another, successfully achieved their stated goals independently of the adult-led organizations in their midst. For student civil rights activists, this often translated into more African American and Latino instructors and administrators, bi-lingual and ethnically-sensitive guidance counselors, diversified Social Studies curriculums and library holdings, recognition of African American and Latino holidays, and financial accommodations for less fortunate students. Similarly, student environmental activists successfully preserved local waterways and tidal wetlands, maintained open and green spaces, safeguarded fragile flora and fauna, introduced in-school and community-wide recycling programs, and, educated their peers and community members of the dangers of organic and inorganic pollutants. In all four case studies probed herein, high school student civil rights and environmental activists were instrumental to the local achievements of each of their respective social movements, as they routinely labored for racial equality and ecological awareness on their own or as members of larger coalitions of local activist organizations.

Students' youth – as teenagers – often provided such activists a unique advantage when engaging in social and political activism – an advantage that adult activists, particularly those on college and university campuses, did not share. First, unlike their adult contemporaries, high school student activists identified much more with the sites of their political activism in both the civil rights and environmental movements. While adult activists on college and university campuses typically engaged in political activity as a part of the college experience – in other places far removed from their homes – high

school students were activists in *their* own neighborhoods of residence or, at least, within the school districts within which they were raised. For some college students, this meant traveling south to labor for equal access to the ballot and the destruction of Jim Crow; for others, this translated into Earth Day seminars in university classrooms hundreds of miles from their home communities. For high school student activists, their activism was never too far removed from the geographies of their youth – such as the schools, neighborhoods, and natural environments they experienced as adolescents. The nature of this more personal relationship with place grounded teenaged activism in both social movements is examined in this study.

At the same time, students' youth also placed them in positions through which they challenged parents, school officials and other community adults to evaluate their relationships with each other and their relationships with their natural environments. Through their activism in both movements, high school students routinely questioned and confronted the conscience of their communities by forcing residents to consider the consequences of both rampant inequality and ecological degradation at their most basic level. While their adult neighbors often considered the political, cultural, and economic implications of social and environmental change, teenaged activists focused upon their agenda items in a vacuum – allowing their own individual and collective senses of “right and wrong” to guide their decision-making processes. For civil rights activists, this meant racial equality should not necessitate months of bureaucratic debate, administrative tabling, and appropriation of taxpayer funds; similarly, for teen environmentalists, waterfront properties were endangered biotic communities, not just prime real estate. It is these somewhat naïve perspectives which grounded high school student civil rights and

environmental activists' campaigns, and these most basic philosophies which often times led to their success.

Until quite recently, high school student activists had received very little attention from historians and other scholars who have examined the social and political movements that have come to characterize the post-World War II era. In most academic analyses, traditional, adult-led organizations and their adult membership have taken center stage in the grand narrative of 1960s and 1970s social and political activism.¹ In the late 1970s, however, a few scholars began to note the participation of high school student activists, particularly those interested in the California-based Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the mid to late 1960s. While the breadth of this work focused upon the contributions of adult Chicano activists, including university students and other college-aged youths, scholars often highlighted a series of high school student walk-outs which took place in East Los Angeles schools throughout 1968. Similar to their counterparts in the African American freedom struggle, Chicano high school activists organized several in-school and community-wide demonstrations for curriculum diversity, Chicano representation on school faculty rosters and local Boards of Education, as well as equitable treatment from

¹ For selected examples, see Lawrence E. Eichel, et al, *The Harvard Strike* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970); Julian Foster and Durwood Long, eds, *Protest: Student Activism in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1970); Calvin B. T. Lee, *The Campus Scene: Changing Styles in Undergraduate Life* (New York: David McKay, 1970); Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up? American Protest Against the War in Vietnam, 1963-1975* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984); Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, *From Camelot to Kent State: The Sixties Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It* (New York: Random House, 1987); James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); R. David Myers, ed., *Toward History of the New Left: Essays from Within the Movement* (Carson: Brooklyn, 1989); Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Suzanne Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Barbara L. Tischler, ed., *Sights on the Sixties* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Tod Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993); David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jennifer Frost, *"An Interracial Movement of the Poor": Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

white faculty and school administrators. While academics such as Armando B. Rendon, Carlos Munoz, Jr., Juan Gomez-Quinones, and Edward Escobar have included the 1968 East Los Angeles student walk-outs in their analyses of the larger Chicano Freedom Movement, teenaged participation has been typically overshadowed by the activism of adult participants and university groups.²

At the same time, high school participants have not been given nearly as much credit as they deserve as planners and organizers of the 1968 East Los Angeles walk-outs. In *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, Carlos Munoz Jr., who certainly recognizes the many contributions of high school student activists to the greater Chicano Movement, strips organizational agency from high school student activists, asserting that “it was not student activists who conceived of the [high school] strike[s].” Rather, as Munoz’s piece suggests, thousands of East Los Angeles high school students only protested at the suggestion and influence of Chicano Social Studies teacher, Sal Castro.³ While the influence of adult parents, teachers, and community members cannot be denied and should not be disregarded as significant, neither should the clear historical agency of high school student activists who, through their participation, not only made such a movement possible, but also faced considerable personal, academic, and legal consequences if it failed. As the case studies in this project will highlight, teenaged civil

²See Armando B. Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), Chapter Eleven; Olga Rodriguez, ed., *The Politics of Chicano Liberation*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 38-40; Juan Gomez-Quinones, *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California, 1967-1977*, (Santa Barbara: Editorial La Causa, 1978); Martin Sanchez Jankowski, *City Bound: Urban Life and Political Attitudes among Chicano Youth*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Carlos Munoz, Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, (New York: Verso, 1989), Chapter Three; Juan Gomez-Quinones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), Chapter Three; 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. (Mar., 1993), 1495-1500; George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 213. See also *Walkout*, DVD. Directed by Edward James Olmos. Home Box Office Video, 2006.

³ Munoz, Jr., 65.

rights and environmental activists served as the architects, the power brokers, and the primary agents of change in the activist campaigns they waged in their high schools and throughout their urban and suburban communities.

Similar to the published accounts on the Chicano Freedom Struggle, the majority of analyses on the African American Civil Rights Movement have primarily focused upon the contributions of adult-led activist organizations. This has included such groups as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress for Racial Equality, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, as well as the Black Panther Party. While countless academics have provided expansive analyses of the many achievements of these and other such famed organizations, they have failed to acknowledge the significant contributions of high school student civil rights activists, save the occasional reference to isolated school walk-outs or student boycotts which seem only to contextualize the adult-led activism under study.⁴ The work of historians Dionne Danna and Dwight C. Wright

⁴ See Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 167; Jeanne Theoharis, "I'd Rather Go to School in the South": How Boston's School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm," in Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 125-151; Penial E. Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement," *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 88, No. 2, "The History of Black Student Activism," (Spring, 2003), 191; Penial E. Joseph, "Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement," in Penial E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 265; Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 193-196.

⁴ For selected examples, see Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Catherine A. Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, (New York: The Free Press, 1984); David G. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Marrow, 1986); Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969); Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963 to 1965* (New York:

have begun to fill this unfortunate void in the literature, as both have made attempts to more fully analyze the contributions of high school student civil rights activists.

In *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organizing in Public Schools, 1963-1971*, Dionne Danns explores late 1960s high school student civil rights activism in Chicago's public school system as an extension of a much larger city-wide, adult-led black campaign for racial, ethnic and socio-economic equality. Similar to the student groups examined in this dissertation, Chicago high school students organized in their individual schools, and as a city-wide unit, for racial diversity on faculty and administrative rosters, for more racially and ethnically-sensitive district-wide curriculums, and for district-wide holiday recognition of fallen black leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. While Danns' book-length account also sheds significant light on the contributions of Chicago's adult population, her piece, published in 2003, offers readers a much more in-depth analysis of teenaged civil rights activism than those offered by her contemporaries in the field. At the same time, *Something Better for Our Children* acknowledges high school students' agency in their own movements for

Simon and Schuster, 1998); James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Glenn T. Eskew, *But For Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981/1993); Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komози Woodard, eds. *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Penial E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

in-school racial equality, as teenaged leaders organized their peers, drafted demands, planned demonstrations, and met with school board officials to implement change.

Unfortunately, however, Danns' study leaves readers questioning whether high school student civil rights activism was unique to Chicago, or whether similar instances of such activism manifested in similar schools and communities elsewhere. Dwayne C. Wright's article (2003) and dissertation (2005) on high school civil rights activism at William Penn Senior High School in York, Pennsylvania leaves readers pondering analogous questions. Like Danns, Wright's research also examines successful high school student civil rights activism, focusing on students' motives, grievances, organizing structure, and their local protest campaign for in-school diversity. Similar to *Something Better for Our Children*, Wright's research only focuses on one place, which deprives readers the opportunity to not only understand high school activism as more than simply random and isolated occurrences, but also the opportunity to understand it in relation to similar or dissimilar forms of high school activism elsewhere. By way of three case studies focusing on teenaged civil rights activism, this dissertation will illustrate that such student protest did not occur in a vacuum and was a much more common occurrence than Danns' and Wright's analyses suggest.⁵

⁵ Dionne Danns, *Something Better For Our Children: Black Organizing in Chicago Public Schools, 1963-1971* (New York: Routledge, 2003); See also, Dionne Danns, "Black Student Empowerment and Chicago: School Reform Efforts in 1968," *Urban Education*, 37 (2002), 631-655; Dionne Danns, "Chicago High School Students' Movement for Quality Public Education, 1966-1971," *The Journal of African American History* Vol. 88, No. 2, *The History of Black Student Activism* (Spring, 2003), 138-150; Dwayne C. Wright, "Black Pride Day, 1968: High School Student Activism in York, Pennsylvania," *The Journal of African American History* Vol. 88, No. 2, *The History of Black Student Activism* (Spring, 2003), 151-162; Dwayne C. Wright, "Black Pride Days," 1965-1970: A Critical Historical Ethnography of Black Student Activism, Curricular Reform, and Memory at William Penn Senior High School in York, Pennsylvania." PhD diss., The University of Georgia, 2005; See also, Barry M. Franklin, "Community, Race, and Curriculum in Detroit: The Northern High School Walk-Out," *History of Education* Vol. 33, No. 2, 137-156.

In 2006, historian Gael Graham put forth the most expansive treatment of high school student activism to date, presenting 1960s teenaged social and political activism as a much more national phenomenon than had her predecessors in the field. In *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest*, Graham highlights the various social issues that engaged high school students in post World War II America, including individual, student and minority rights, freedom of speech, dress, and the student press, as well as the Vietnam War. Similar to Danna and Wright, Graham's analysis explores student activists' personal and collective agency as political actors in local manifestations of nationally-significant movements such as Civil Rights, Black Power, Women's Liberation, Student Rights, and Anti-War. Absent from this list, unfortunately, is the budding Environmental Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a nationally-significant movement which Graham (as well as Danna and Wright who both limited their research to Civil Rights alone) only touches upon in passing and in reference to teenaged participation in the first Earth Day held in April, 1970. For thousands of high school student environmentalists, including those in Bellport and at John Dewey High School, the first Earth Day marked only the beginning of their involvement in what was to become a nationwide, if not international, phenomenon throughout the early 1970s.⁶

While *Young Activists* certainly portrays high school students as significant social and political actors, the narrative, at times, seems much too grand and too far removed from "place" to provide readers an adequate sense of how students' lived realities in

⁶ Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 7, 97, 174, 198, 205-206; See also, Gael Graham, "Flaunting the Freak Flag: *Karr v Schmidt* and the Great Hair Debate in American High Schools, 1965-1975," *The Journal of American History*. Vol. 91, No. 2. (September, 2004).

different places, and how place difference itself, impacted student involvement in local manifestations of nationally-significant social movements. As the chapters on civil rights and environmentalism in this dissertation will examine, place-specific realities upon both the urban and suburban landscape played an instrumental role in shaping differing manifestations of teenaged social and political activity. Just as the aforementioned studies of Chicago and York, Pennsylvania are too place-specific for adequate comparison, Graham's national approach to student activism is far too broad, as individual neighborhoods and local sites of political activism are not more fully explored. By focusing on four separate high schools and their surrounding communities, this dissertation will strike an appropriate balance between both approaches, highlighting the prevalence of teenaged political activism, as well as the differences between various high schools and neighborhoods in which such activism evolved. Moreover, it will provide one of the first analyses of high school student environmental activism.

Despite numerous published accounts of the twentieth century Environmental Movement, teenaged environmental activists have yet to be fully acknowledged for their significant contributions to local preservationist and ecological awareness campaigns. Similar to the traditional literature on the African American Civil Rights Movement, practitioners of Environmental History have focused the majority of their research on adult-led environmental organizations, nationally-renowned movement leaders, and the emergence of environmentalism as a national consensus issue in the years following Earth Day, 1970.⁷ On the few rare occasions when teenaged activists have been credited

⁷ Susan R. Schrepfer, *The Fight to Save the Redwoods: A History of Environmental Reform, 1917-1978* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1983); Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989);

for their achievements, as they are in Robert Gottlieb's *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the Environmental Movement*, Matthew Gandy's *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*, and Julie Sze's *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice*, scholars have only mentioned them in passing, often focusing their brief analysis on student involvement in larger environmental justice and anti-toxic campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s.⁸ As the examples of student environmentalism herein will reveal, high school environmental activists were active participants in the budding movement from its popular inception in the early 1970s.

This study will also benefit from, and contribute to, an already rich literature on American cities and suburbs, as high school student civil rights and environmental

Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Press, 1998); Thomas R. Dunlap, *Faith in Nature: Environmental as Religious Quest*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); and, Bill Christofferson, *The Man From Clear Lake, Earth Day Founder, Senator Gaylord Nelson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2004); See also Robert D. Bullard, *Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder: Westview, 1990); Riley E. Dunlap and Angela G. Mertig, eds. *American Environmentalism: The U.S. Environmental Movement, 1970-1990* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1992); Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington: Island, 1993); Andrew Szasz, *EcoPopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1995); Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996); David E. Camacho, ed. *Environmental Injustices, Political Struggles: Race, Class, and the Environment* (Durham: Duke University, 1998); Daniel Faber, ed. *The Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Environmental Justice Movements in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998); Christopher Sellers, "Body, Place and the State: The Makings of an 'Environmentalism' Imaginary in Post-World War II U.S.," *Radical History Review* 74 (Spring, 1999), 31-64; Luke W. Cole & Sheila R. Foster, eds. *From the Ground Up: Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University, 2001); Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David Naguib Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); and, Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *Journal of American History* 90, 2 (2003), 525-554.

⁸Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 267; Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), Chapter 5; Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 87, 173.

activism manifested in both types of places. As can be imagined, many of the first practitioners of urban history concentrated their research upon the American City, which, throughout the twentieth century sprouted a multilayered foundation for post World War II suburbanization. Beginning with the 1974 publication of Journalist Robert Caro's biography of famed urban planner Robert Moses in the *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, late twentieth century scholars have published myriad academic studies on a variety of urban themes. This has included analyses of urban planning, inner-city politics, neighborhood blight, racial and ethnic inequality, urban renewal, and, "white flight" from city center to urban peripheries and suburban frontiers.⁹ In turn, numerous scholars have surveyed how these same urban realities impacted and contributed to the rise of American suburbs in the post World War II period. While early practitioners, such as Kenneth Jackson and Robert Fishman exposed, what appeared to be, a white, middle-class brand of suburbanization, others, such as Andrew Wiese and

⁹Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1974); Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Sudhir Alladia Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Amanda I. Segliman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2005); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); For more relevant urban histories, see Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmonson Village Story* (Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1994); Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992); Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsey and His Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Jon C. Teaford, *The Twentieth Century American City: Problem, Promise, and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); For more on urban decline, see Robert A. Beauregard, *The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities 2nd Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Todd Gitlin and Nanci Hollander. *Uptown: Poor Whites in Chicago* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *Urban Policy in the Twentieth Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

Becky Nicolaides, respectively, expanded the literature to include necessary treatments of both the African American and white, working-class suburban experience.¹⁰ As both authors' published accounts reveal, the suburban landscape was more often than not a contested terrain, upon which residents from a variety of differing racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds vied for realization of the American Dream. As will be explored in the chapters which follow, high school student activists, their parents, and their neighbors in New York City and on Long Island similarly competed, especially in regard to civil rights activism in schools and in students' communities of residence as well.

Urban and suburban landscapes also witnessed the evolution of high school student environmental activism as the chapters on SEQ and John Dewey High School highlight. While the majority of analyses of the postwar Environmental Movement have neglected high school student participation, their authors *have* explored environmental

¹⁰Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); For more on African American suburbanization, see Andrew Wiese, "The Other Suburbanites: African American Suburbanization in the North Before 1950," *The Journal of American History*. Vol. 85, No. 4 (March, 1999), 1495-1524; Andrew Wiese, "Black Housing, White Finance: African American Housing and Home Ownership in Evanston, Illinois, Before 1940," *Journal of Social History*. Vol. 33, No 2 (1999), 429-460; Bruce D. Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle Class Suburb* (New Haven: Yale University, 2001); Natalie Nay Taylor, *Exploring African American History: Long Island and Beyond* (Hempstead: Hofstra University, 1995); Lynda Rose Day, *Making a Way to Freedom: A History of African Americans on Long Island* (Interlaken: Empire State Books, 1997); Thomas A. Clark, *Blacks in Suburbs: A National Perspective* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1979); For other accounts of the American suburban experience, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); On the federal government's role in residential segregation, see Charles M. Lamb, *Housing Segregation in Suburban America Since 1960: Presidential and Judicial Politics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; For more on the suburban home as achievement and the most prized consumer item, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), Pt III.

activism in both the urban and suburban setting. In *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980*, historian Andrew Hurley provides readers one example of environmental activism in the urban context. Focusing on the relationships among Gary's black and white populace, Hurley explores the issues of ecological health, environmental racism, class division, labor and local movements to alleviate industrial pollution. Throughout the piece, Hurley explores each individual group – white, black, middle-class, and working-class – and their proximity to industrial pollutants, recreational areas, residential space, and place of employment. For Gary's middle-class environmentalists, industrial areas along the Lake Michigan waterfront threatened water purity and impinged upon recreational usage of waterways which negatively impacted the aesthetic value of local beaches. For black and white working-class residents, industrial pollution proved much more personal, as both lived in closer proximity to, and often labored within, Gary's steel facilities.¹¹

Similar to Gary's middle-class environmentalists, John Dewey's Marine Biology Club members also focused their local activism along the urban waterfront, as they routinely battled residential and commercial developers with hopes of preserving and maintaining Brooklyn's endangered wetlands. Unlike in Gary, however, student environmentalism at John Dewey did not touch upon environmental racism or environmental justice. While African American urban dwellers certainly lived in relatively close proximity to many of the beaches and wetlands that students routinely cleaned, studied, and lobbied for, their motives remained purely preservationist in nature and were fully grounded in their study of, and protection of, marine flora and fauna. Still,

¹¹Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

this did not mean that civil rights as a movement was not as prevalent in Brooklyn at the very same time. As the chapter on Franklin K. Lane High School illustrates, late 1960s and early 1970s New York City was a central hub of civil rights and Black Power activity, both of which manifested in school and neighborhoods throughout all five boroughs. This project diverges from *Environmental Inequalities*, however, in that civil rights and environmentalism are both examined separately, as high school student participants in both movements were committed to divergent goals. While members of Gary's black and white adult population both recognized the environmental dangers and physical health implications of industrial pollution, black students at Franklin K. Lane and white environmentalists at John Dewey did not share a similar common purpose.

Environmental historian Adam Rome's *Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* provides scholars a thorough analysis of the American Environmental Movement and the level to which post World War II suburban residential development served as a catalyst for local preservationist campaigns. Following in the footsteps of Samuel P. Hays, Rome attributes the beginning of the modern Environmental Movement to Americans' yearning for an improved "quality of life," which, by the late 1960s, had been achieved by the millions who had relocated to the suburbs. Through a detailed analysis of suburban home construction, site selection, land-clearing, and the ecological impact of postwar amenities such as air conditioning, septic tank waste disposal, and widespread use of electricity – Rome poignantly illustrates the environmental costs associated with late twentieth century suburbanization. More importantly, Rome explains how the resulting ecological hazards were a significant factor in leading hundreds of thousands of Americans to question the

efficacy of this incarnation of the “American Dream;” this, in turn, contributed to the rising popularity of environmental preservation throughout the second half of the Twentieth Century. In suburban Bellport, student environmentalists were influenced by this postwar wave of suburban environmentalism, as they and their families pondered questions of wise land use, the importance of open and green spaces, preservation of marine ecosystems, and the recreational and aesthetic value of local waterways. The same can be said of student environmentalists in Brooklyn, all of whom collectively questioned the value of residential and commercial development when the survival of fragile biotic communities hung in the balance. In the chapters which follow, both urban and suburban spaces will be analyzed in relation to the high school student Civil Rights and Environmental Movements that altered both landscapes throughout the postwar period.

To this end, several key theoretical analyses on, or related to, space and place are employed as a means of understanding the several geographic, demographic, and interpersonal relationships which influenced high school student involvement in the Civil Rights and Environmental Movements. The work of Humanist Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan serves as an invaluable resource throughout the dissertation, especially as it relates to “experiential perspective” and human-beings’ ascription of place significance. In the celebrated *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Tuan states that “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”¹² In other words, through their experiential relationships with open space – which at first holds little if any personal meaning or value – human-beings tend to, over time, ascribe meaning and value to said areas, and through this process, create place and

¹² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

begin to understand a sense of place – which are spaces laden with new meaning, new value, and new significance. For high school student activists in both movements under study, the evolution of place importance played a key role in motivating students to become socially and politically active. For environmental activists in Bellport and Brooklyn, local waterways, coastal waterfronts, and the marine ecosystems in and around both *became* significant and *became* important, over time, as students *experienced* such places during school hours as well as in their private time for scientific as well as recreational purposes. While students in Bellport had experienced the sites of their environmental activism throughout their young lives as residents of the local neighborhood in which their school was situated, John Dewey also managed to experience the sites of their environmental activism, despite the urban spatial separation between their distant homes and their more commuter-oriented high school. As mentioned above, these latter students' study of Marine Biology and their school's proximity to Brooklyn's coastal wetland areas allowed students the opportunity to ascribe meaning and importance to endangered ecosystems they might not have otherwise known. Through their experiences with local flora and fauna, student environmentalists recognized the value of such places and committed themselves to their preservation.

Similarly, high school student civil rights activists also came to ascribe meaning to their local environments and created a sense of place through their personal and collective experiences. In all three civil rights case studies in this project, African American and Latino students experienced various levels of in-school and community-wide racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic bias, leading many to understand place differently than high school student environmentalists. For such students, their sense of place had

been influenced by local histories of residential and educational discrimination, both of which had produced principally white faculty and staff rosters, as well as Eurocentric school curriculums and unrepresentative holiday schedules. Still, high school student civil rights activists did not all share the exact same experiences, as differences in urban and suburban place provided students on both landscapes different lived realities at home and in school. While minority students in suburban Bellport and Malverne experienced their high school and the surrounding community *as* residents who shared a sense of communal belonging, minority students at Franklin K. Lane did not, as their school was spatially disconnected from their neighborhoods of residence. This latter point is crucial if one is to understand Lane students' sense of disassociation as "outsiders" in a public high school which disregarded their heritage, culture, and the realities of racial discrimination. This sense of "place stigma" coupled with intense urban discord in late 1960s New York, marred Lane students' experience of their high school as place, leading to a much more violent civil rights campaign than the one led by their suburban counterparts.¹³ In all three civil rights case studies examined throughout, such negative experiences with place limited students' political activity to the realm of civil rights alone, as their sense of personal politics did not encompass issues of an environmental nature.

To adequately analyze the level of opposition that student activists faced throughout the late 1960s, the chapters in this dissertation will heavily rely upon the theoretical framework of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Just as African American and Latino students and their families developed their own sense of place in their communities and in local high

¹³ Sze, 54-56.

schools, so too did white residents who, throughout the post World War II period, feared the prospect of residential and educational integration. As the chapters on Bellport and Malverne will illustrate, many white suburban residents feared the effects that integration would have on home property values, which they believed depended upon the maintenance of white, working- and middle-class neighborhoods. The same can be said of the primarily white neighborhoods surrounding Franklin K. Lane, many of whose residents recognized their *white* community in opposition to commuting minority students from *other* areas of Brooklyn. With this in mind, the residents of these neighborhoods – both urban and suburban – are examined throughout the project as members of *imagined communities*, which in these instances were neighborhoods shrouded in whiteness. These chapters will be heavily laden with references to the social imaginary, illustrating that white Americans in both city and suburb understood their communities as white space, within which there was little if any room for racial, ethnic or socioeconomic diversity.¹⁴

The concept of the social imaginary will also be applied to high school student civil rights and environmental activists, both of whom – in different spheres – recognized themselves as members of the much larger, national movements for civil rights and environmental preservation despite their very localized and individualized activism. Akin

¹⁴Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983); This idea of the imagined community has been applied to more local and regional studies, most notably Joseph A. Conforti's *Imagining New England: Exploration of Regional Identity From the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). In Conforti's analysis of New England society, he illustrates how New Englanders contrived a regional identity based upon popular myth and representations of an imagined European past. Over time this imagined identity evolved as localities experienced such changes as industrialization, immigration, and social upheaval; Paul H. Mattingly, *Suburban Landscapes: Culture and Politics in a New York Metropolitan Community* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); See also); Christopher Sellers, "Body, Place and the State: The Makings of an 'Environmental' Imaginary in Post-World War II U.S.," *Radical History Review* 74 (Spring, 1999), 31-64.

to Julie Sze's environmental justice activists in *Noxious New York*, the majority of whom understood their personal and collective experiences with environmental racism in relation to victims elsewhere as "racialized communities of color," high school student civil rights activists in Brooklyn and Long Island similarly associated their victimization with that of the larger black and Latino community nation and world-wide.¹⁵ Through visual, audio and print media, student civil rights activists were able to remain aware of state and national movement issues, and identify with similarly situated struggling black and Latino activists and communities hundreds and thousands of miles away. High school student environmental activists were no different, as they too personally and collectively identified with, and believed themselves to be, members of the much larger environmental movement of the early 1970s. Just as regional and national civil rights leaders, gatherings, marches, and legislative achievements created a sense of imagined belonging for black and Latino students, so too did Earth Day, as young activists routinely associated their preservationist achievements on the local level with similar success stories elsewhere. In the case study chapters which follow, high school student activists' identification with larger social movement forces will be noted as paramount to not only their local achievements, but to their initial ability to organize as well.

¹⁵ Sze, 3-4,16

Chapter One: Landscapes of Social Movement – An Overview

Long before American high school students first traversed the landscapes of mid-twentieth century social and political activism, millions of their post-World War II parents, grandparents, distant relatives, and unrelated neighbors laid the geographic and demographic foundations upon which student protest activities would one day flourish. For some, their families had benefited greatly from an explosive postwar consumer economy which afforded them, and millions of other Americans, the financial ability to purchase private homes in newly-developed suburban tract communities on the urban periphery and beyond. For others, their families and distant relatives were routinely denied equal access to these newly settled suburban landscapes, leaving them little choice but to remain in, what would ultimately become, declining urban centers until much later. While early peacetime prosperity left many behind – providing nearly all of its social, cultural, and economic benefits to white Americans and white communities – African American and Latino citizens struggled to quell discriminatory practices in lending, residence, education, employment, electoral politics, public accommodations, and the general consumer market-place. Hoping to one day take full advantage of the same rights and privileges guaranteed white citizens in, what historian Lizabeth Cohen has termed, the postwar “Consumers’ Republic,” minorities in American cities and, for those able to gain entry, suburbs, pursued racial, ethnic and socio-economic justice throughout the postwar period.¹⁶ This chapter provides an overview of this struggle, offering a larger context to the processes of mass suburbanization, urban decline, and metropolitan-based

¹⁶ See Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

Civil Rights activism that manifested in both suburb and city throughout the postwar period.

At the same time, the following pages also provide contextual analysis of the late 1960s and early 1970s Environmental Movement, which akin to civil rights, also evolved upon postwar urban and suburban landscapes. To this end, the larger processes of mass suburbanization, the urban crisis that blossomed in its wake and their impact on the natural environment will also ground this overview chapter. While the mechanics of postwar suburbanization segregated (or re-segregated) American society and created, what historian Eric Avila has termed, “chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs,” mass production of detached, single-family homes on thousands of newly-subdivided suburban tracts wrought ecological degradation in the rural areas surrounding most, if not all, American cities in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁷ As the work of Adam Rome has shown, such denigration of the suburban frontier awoke the environmental consciousness of millions of Americans in cities and suburbs alike.¹⁸ Similar processes took place in American cities, as residential, commercial and industrial expansion routinely threatened fragile flora and fauna, devastated vital marine ecosystems, and jeopardized overall urban environmental health. Within such a matrix, high school student environmental activists would, in the early 1970s, lead their own local environmental campaigns through which they would similarly challenge the voracity of residential, commercial and industrial developers – be they urban or suburban. In the pages that follow, the larger landscapes upon which both the high school student Civil

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

¹⁸ See Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Rights and Environmental Movements manifested in the late 1960s and early 1970s will be explored, shedding light on the co-existence of both in city and suburban alike. While four case studies examined in later chapters will highlight both movements in local communities and in specific high schools, this overview chapter will contextualize these movements within the larger backdrop of late 1960s and early 1970s American experience, illustrating how both are uniquely connected to urban and suburban place.

Landscapes of City and Suburb

In the years following the conclusion of World War II, the United States began to rapidly morph from a primarily urban and rural nation to one in which, as historian Kenneth Jackson noted in 1985, “the dominant residential pattern [was] suburban.”¹⁹ In a time ripe with personal and patriotic optimism, provided by U.S. and Allied Victory abroad, American citizens as well as their leaders rejoiced in the prospect of what the postwar period could yield for them as individuals and for the nation on the whole. Fueled by a revitalized consumer-driven economy, millions of American families migrated from the nation’s matured urban centers to newly-constructed suburban homes, which served as one of the most significant manifestations of popularized notions of “the American Dream.”²⁰ According to historian Jon Teaford in *The Twentieth Century American City*, “the postwar era was a boomtime for suburbia,” as the population of America’s twenty largest cities witnessed a roughly nine percent decrease from fifty-eight to forty-nine percent between 1950 and 1960. In the same ten year period, “the

¹⁹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

²⁰ See Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the American Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Barbara M. Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), Chapter One.

suburban population in their metropolitan areas soared forty-five percent.”²¹ In *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, Kenneth Jackson substantiates this astronomical suburban growth, noting that by 1980, “more than 40 percent of the national population, or more than 100 million people” had relocated to the suburban frontier, a higher proportion than resided either in rural areas or in central cities.”²² Just twenty years later, suburban communities at the close of the twentieth-century were populated by more Americans than rural areas and central cities combined.²³

While such numbers clearly illustrate a popular postwar trend toward suburban migration, many of the federal, state, and local mechanisms which fueled its growth throughout the period were originally established as New Deal initiatives in the mid-1930s, prior to American involvement in World War II. It was during this earlier period, following the stock market crash of 1929 and the onslaught of the Great Depression, that the federal government established the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933 and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934. Signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a means to limit bank foreclosures on private mortgages as well as to stimulate new home construction, both measures offered Americans new long-term, low-interest, government-backed mortgages. While HOLC loans allowed private homeowners the opportunity to refinance their jeopardized mortgages under much more liberal terms and thus stave off foreclosure, the FHA provided millions more the ability to purchase their first private home, typically requiring a down payment of only ten

²¹ Jon C. Teaford, *The Twentieth-Century American City: Second Edition*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 98.

²² Jackson, 4.

²³ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*, (New York: Patheon Books, 2003), 10.

percent of the total purchase price. Byway of both New Deal programs, as Jackson has noted, “builders went back to work, and housing starts and sales began to accelerate rapidly in 1936...[rising] to 332,000 in 1937, to 399,000 in 1938, to 458,000 in 1939, to 530,000 in 1940, and to 619,000 in 1941.”²⁴ With passage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, these numbers continued to increase exponentially in the years following World War II.²⁵

Known popularly as the GI Bill, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act rewarded returning military personnel with a generous benefits package, which included temporary financial support for the unemployed, financial assistance towards a college education or professional training, as well as a government-secured mortgage for a new private home. Unlike FHA loans, however, which required applicants to provide a ten percent down-payment, Veteran’s Administration (VA) loans often guaranteed servicemen and women the full lending value of the purchase price. Through this program, qualified candidates were able to easily purchase a newly constructed home without a down payment, with a low interest mortgage to be repaid over the course of twenty-five to thirty years. This new financial wherewithal, underwritten by both the VA and the FHA, coupled with cutting edge, mass production/assembly-line methods of new home construction, made it more than possible for average Americans – working-class to middle-class – to purchase new suburban homes in the communities of their choosing.²⁶ As a result, thousands of new suburban neighborhoods were founded and settled throughout the postwar era, as millions of Americans took full advantage of this unprecedented access to new home ownership.

²⁴ Jackson, 205.

²⁵ Teaford, 84-85; Jackson, 203-218; Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 56-57; See also Kelly, Endnote No. 36, 243.

²⁶ Cohen, 118, 122; Baxandall and Ewen, 87-88; Jackson, 204; Teaford, 101, 103.

Such opportunities, however, were not afforded to all American citizens equally, as racial, ethnic and class bias were routinely employed by private developers, real estate representatives, financial institutions, and government agencies to create and ultimately maintain white suburban landscapes. While many private developers refused to sell homes to African American and other prospective non-white customers, others attached racial covenants to property deeds to ensure the maintenance of the color-line in the communities they had constructed. Developer Abraham Levitt, of Levitt and Sons, who founded the infamous Long Island community of Levittown, New York, employed both, steadfastly refusing to allow mortgage-qualified minorities from purchasing Levitt homes.²⁷ While the enforceability of such covenants in Levittown and elsewhere was struck down by the United States Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948, discrimination in the suburban housing market continued throughout 1950s and the early 1960s, as individual white homeowners often refused to resell their properties to black buyers in an attempt to maintain the racial homogeneity of existing communities for the benefit of their remaining white neighbors.²⁸ At the same time, real estate professionals often employed the technique of “racial steering” in which agents only led prospective black homebuyers on tours of historically black and/or structurally-aging neighborhoods. Again, such biased practices were utilized to maintain racial homogeneity as well as to

²⁷ Kelly, 60; Baxandall & Ewen, 175-178; Jackson, 241; Teaford, 104; Christopher Sellers, “Nature and Blackness in Suburban Passage,” in Diane Glave & Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 104-108.

²⁸ Jackson, 208; Cohen, 216, 219; Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 211.

sustain property values, which, it was widely believed, decreased when residential neighborhoods integrated.²⁹

Individual homeowners and developers were not alone in their defense against postwar residential integration of the suburban frontier. As Jackson and many others have noted, the federal government, through the HOLC, FHA, and the VA, contributed to not only the creation of a primarily white suburbia, but the urban decline and urban crisis which routinely manifested in its wake. In *Crabgrass Frontier*, Jackson fully exposed the HOLC's biased lending policies, noting how the government agency "initiated the practice of 'red lining,'" which, throughout the postwar period, severely hindered African American migration from city to suburb. He explained.

This occurred because HOLC devised a rating system that undervalued neighborhoods that were dense, mixed, or aging. Four categories of quality-imaginatively entitled First, Second, Third, and Fourth, with corresponding code letters of A,B,C, and D and colors of green, blue, yellow and red were established. The First grade (also A and green) areas were described as new, homogeneous, and "in demand as residential locations in good times and bad" ... The Second security grade (blue) went to "still desirable" areas that had "reached their peak" but were expected to remain stable for many years. The Third grade (yellow or "C") neighborhoods were usually described as "definitely declining," while the Fourth grade (red) neighborhoods were defined as areas "in which the things taking place in C areas have already happened."

With such a rating system in place, areas coded "red" or "fourth" were deemed virtually unsafe for financial investment or mortgage-lending, ultimately committing them and their remaining inhabitants – the majority of whom were African American – to a future of structural decline as aging dwellings fell into a state of natural disrepair. As such areas were "red-lined," white residents, armed with FHA or VA-mortgage guarantees relocated

²⁹ See Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven*; Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), Chapter Four.

to newly-developing suburban communities, many of which denied equal access to African American and other non-white minorities.³⁰

For those denied the suburban experience, expanding urban neighborhoods, many of which would ultimately be popularly classified as “ghettos,” became (or remained) home, as many African American and Hispanic residents rented inner-city apartments or purchased older single-family homes upon the ghetto’s periphery. In Chicago, as historian Arnold Hirsch has argued, federal, state and local governments were complicit in this process, as appropriated funds were routinely employed for the construction of public housing projects within the borders of the city’s existing black ghetto. Rather than insist upon racially inclusive suburban landscapes, government agencies on all three levels “sustained, rather than attacked, the status quo,” allowing millions of white Americans to dominate newly developing suburbs throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. In Detroit, as historian Thomas Sugrue has argued, a similar process, coupled with the devastating impact of postwar deindustrialization and reorganization of labor, led to urban crisis as white residents fled to new suburban developments, manufacturing firms relocated south and west, and the local urban economy contracted as a result of both. Unable to freely follow their white counterparts to the suburbs, Detroit’s African American populace was left to contend with dilapidated infrastructure in aging neighborhoods, a depressed municipal tax base, and a dearth of adequate employment opportunities – all of which contributed to abject poverty in Detroit as well as many other

³⁰Jackson, 197-198; See also Cohen, 204; Baxandall & Ewen, 57; Teaford, 103-104; Kruse, 60-61.

“rust belt” cities throughout the postwar era. By the early 1960s, black urban dwellers throughout the Northeastern United States would be unjustly faulted for such decline.³¹

Similar processes manifested in Brownsville, New York – a community which was uniquely connected to Franklin K. Lane High School and the more prominent Brooklyn-based civil rights activities of late 1960s New York City, including the now infamous Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers Strike of 1968. In his work on Brownsville, historian Wendell Pritchett tracks fluctuations in neighborhood demography, and examines their relationship to a dearth in capital investment and wanton governmental neglect, both of which contributed to structural decay and overall decline in what had once been a vibrant urban community. As postwar suburbs expanded in the late 1940s and early 1950s, local, state, and federal expenditures for refurbishing ailing urban neighborhoods contracted, allowing places such as Brownsville and many others to “rust” which, in turn, inspired those who could relocate to the suburbs or elsewhere to do so. In the case of Brownsville, this led to a loss of roughly 30,000 residents, as the population decreased from 100,000 in 1940 to 70,000 in 1970. More significant, however, was the shift in the neighborhood’s racial, ethnic and socio-economic identity, as the “population was transformed from 85 percent white to 75 percent black and 20 percent Puerto Rican,” many of whom were underprivileged and “lived in the largest concentration of public

³¹ See Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chapter One; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Teaford, *The Twentieth Century American City*, Chapter Six; See also Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Raymond A. Mohl, “Making the Second Ghetto in Metropolitan Miami, 1940-1960,” in Kenneth W. Goings & Raymond A. Mohl, eds., *The New African American Urban History*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 266-298; Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities, 2nd Edition*, (New York: Routledge, 2003); John T. Cumbler, *A Social History of Economic Decline: Business, Politics, and Work in Trenton*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

housing projects” in the borough.³² By the late 1960s, such demographic conversions and the impact they had on residents’ individual and collective lived realities were significant catalysts for local and city-wide movements for racial, ethnic, and socio-economic equality. This included movements for full integration and community control of public schools, as well as the alleviation of urban impoverishment in Brooklyn and across the whole of New York City.³³

While urban disinvestment, suburban growth, and demographic shifts certainly proved detrimental to American cities and the lives of their minority populations, countless real estate professionals managed to profit greatly from the racial fears which underscored instances of white flight from urban centers to the suburban periphery. In many cities and, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, some suburbs, real estate firms utilized the practice known as “blockbusting” in the hopes of expediting urban residential transition. In his study of Detroit, Sugrue explains the process in which hundreds, if not thousands, of formerly white urban neighborhoods transitioned from white to black owner-occupied property throughout the postwar period.

The tactics of blockbusting brokers and speculators were simple. They began by selling a house in an all-white block or neighborhood to a black family, or using devious techniques like paying a black woman to walk her baby through a white neighborhood to fuel suspicion of black residential “take-over.” Most susceptible to the manipulation of real estate brokers were whites who lived near the borders of predominantly black neighborhoods...[Real estate brokers] bought houses from panicked white sellers at below-market prices...Then they placed ads in African American newspapers, offering residents of overcrowded and substandard inner-city housing the chance to escape. They quickly sold the houses at substantial markups to blacks willing to pay a premium for good-quality housing in an ostensibly racially mixed neighborhood.

³² Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1; See also Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 175-217.

³³ See Pritchett, Chapters Six-Eight.

While blockbusting real estate firms did provide African American families the chance to own private homes, “their motivations were complicated,” as Sugrue’s analysis suggests.³⁴ Clearly, such firms took full advantage of the discriminatory housing market, benefiting from the knowledge that they were, in fact, one of the only gateways between their African American customers and private home ownership. By the early 1960s, “blockbusting” and other discriminatory real estate practices would be challenged and ultimately outlawed by state governments, such as New York in 1961, and the federal government in 1968 with passage of the national Fair Housing Act.³⁵

Not all African American families, however, had to wait for such legislation to be adopted *or* utilize unscrupulous real estate firms to purchase private homes along the urban periphery or in newly constructed suburban communities. As the work of historian Andrew Wiese has shown, while racial discrimination in the housing market was certainly pervasive throughout the postwar period, many African American men and women were able to gain entry upon contested suburban landscapes. For some, their existence upon the suburban frontier preceded the post-World War II suburban migration which has come to define the modern suburban experience. For many others, their middle-class, professional status opened up residential opportunities in black enclave communities as well as in various semi-integrated suburban neighborhoods. Still, such residential opportunities were the exception and not the rule, as unhindered access to

³⁴ Sugrue, 195-196; For more on “Blockbusting” see W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmonton Village Story*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Wiese, 243-249; Hirsch, 31-34; Baxandall & Ewen, Chapter Thirteen; Amanda I. Segliman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), Chapter Six.

³⁵ New York Department of State, *Serving the Public: Department of State, Annual Report 1962*. (Albany: Department of State, 1963), 8; Charles M. Lamb, *Housing Segregation in Suburban America Since 1960: Presidential and Judicial Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46-47.

newly developed suburban neighborhoods would only come through a protracted Civil Rights Movement on the local, state, and national levels.³⁶

Landscapes of Civil Rights

While the most widely known civil rights activism took place throughout the American South and has become popularly identified with the African American community's opposition to legally-sanctioned Jim Crow segregation, racial discrimination proved just as pervasive in northern and western regions of the United States in the decades following World War II. As southern chapters of national civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) marched, demonstrated, and petitioned for integrated public schools, voting rights, equal opportunity in employment, and unhindered usage of public accommodations, northern chapters led similar movements in both cities and suburbs, particularly in support of residential and educational equality. Beginning in the early 1940s, civil rights activists – both north *and* south – successfully challenged the legitimacy of racial discrimination in all sectors of American society through their use of the American legal system, the northern ballot box, and non-violent, direct-action protest campaigns.

³⁶ Andrew Wiese, "Racial Cleaning in the Suburbs: Suburban Government, Urban Renewal, and Segregation on Long Island, New York, 1945-1960, in Marc L. Silver and Martin Melkonian, eds., *Contested Terrain: Power, Politics, and Participation in Suburbia*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 61-69; Wiese, *Places of Their Own*; For references to individual suburban black enclaves see Sellers, "Nature and Blackness in Suburban Passage," in Glave & Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History*, 93-119); Baxandall and Ewen, 28-31; Bruce D. Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

In 1941, the threat of mass direct-action alone expanded black employment opportunities in war-time defense industries, as President Franklin Roosevelt feared A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' planned, but later cancelled, March on Washington.³⁷ Later that same decade, civil rights activists were again successful, when NAACP litigators convinced the U.S. Supreme Court to invalidate the enforceability of discriminatory racial covenants in 1948 (*Shelley v. Kraemer*), and when President Harry Truman desegregated the U.S. Armed Services in 1949.³⁸ While both accomplishments were certainly noteworthy, the court's decision in *Shelley* stands out as one of the early movements' most significant achievements, as it served as the first legal step towards federal open housing legislation which would not become a legislative reality for another two decades.

Despite such vital and progressive steps toward racial equality, by the beginning of the 1950s, African Americans – particularly in the south – were still legally and socially barred from full and equal participation in American society. While black and white Americans served together in newly-integrated military ranks, racial discrimination continued to reign supreme in the realms of education, residence, politics, transportation, lodging, dining services and other realms of public accommodation. Throughout the 1950s, several local, state and regional movements erupted to challenge the constitutionality and validity of such discrimination, particularly in regard to public education and transportation services. The two most notable campaigns of this period were the NAACP's successful legal challenge of public school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama,

³⁷ Cohen, 88; See also Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981/1993), 11.

³⁸ Cohen, 185, 216.

the latter of which not only forced integration of the city's municipal transportation system, but also established Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the SCLC as prominent figures in the budding Civil Rights Movement.³⁹ Throughout the decade which followed, the SCLC and other organizations of its kind would agitate for expanded equality in not only public accommodations, but in the southern electorate, private employment, in residence, and in public schools as well.

To this end, members of CORE and SNCC tackled racial segregation of southern lunch-counters and segregation in interstate travel in 1960 and 1961 (respectively) through their use of sit-in demonstrations at segregated dining facilities as well as through their participation in the now famous Freedom Rides. While both types of activism often led to reactionary violence and arrest, such demonstrations garnered significant public exposure to the growing movement, which, in turn, drew the attention of federal authorities in Washington, D.C.⁴⁰ At the same time, Martin Luther King and the SCLC also garnered the movement considerable public attention, as non-violent demonstrations in places such as Albany, Georgia (1961-1962) and Birmingham, Alabama (1963) provoked considerable police violence against peaceful black protesters.⁴¹ In August of 1963, the movement gained even more public notoriety with the March on Washington, which led between 200,000 and 300,000 black and white Americans on a pilgrimage to the nation's capital in support of civil rights legislation.

³⁹ Cohen, 172, 185; McAdam, *Political Process*, 137-138; Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 27-29, 51-63; See also James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapters One-Three.

⁴⁰ See Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981/1995), Chapters One-Three; Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴¹ See Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Morris, Chapter Ten.

Coupled with media portrayals of brutal oppression of Civil Rights activists, the highly successful march, which featured King's now famous "I Have a Dream" speech, played a crucial role in forcing federal intervention on behalf of the African American community.⁴² This intervention resulted in passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed racial discrimination in public accommodations, in employment, mandated free and fair access to the ballot, and reinforced the federal government's commitment to integrated public education. Just one year later, the movement would again force federal intervention, as continued southern repression of voting rights necessitated the 1965 Voting Rights Act.⁴³

As mentioned above, however, racial discrimination was not unique to southern states alone as racial segregation and the anti-black attitudes of which it was grounded were evident in cities, suburbs, and rural areas in both southern *and* northern regions of the United States. While much less depraved and overt than southern states' adherence to Jim Crow social customs, race relations in the north remained far from cordial, particularly in regard to suburban residence and integrated education. Throughout the postwar years, countless African American families faced staunch resistance when attempting to freely traverse the urban-suburban divide in search of a suburban home. While millions of white Americans were granted easy access to affordable mortgages in newly developed suburban tract communities, similarly situated African Americans were routinely barred from home ownership in such neighborhoods. With hopes of crushing such glaring inequality in the housing market, local CORE affiliates held impromptu sit-

⁴² McAdam, *Political Process*, 178.

⁴³ Cohen, 167; Patterson, 124; See Carson, 153-174; Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 358-430; Sitkoff, 174-183.

in demonstrations at various suburban developments throughout the nation “to force discrimination into public view.”⁴⁴ At the same time, while members of local CORE branches led marches through racially-homogenous, segregated suburban neighborhoods, the organization’s national leadership actively lobbied federal legislators for nation-wide legislation against racial discrimination in housing.⁴⁵

Despite the racially-biased housing market, the postwar suburban experience was not exclusively white, as some African American families *did* manage to settle upon this contested American landscape. While millions of black Americans were certainly barred from several racially-homogenous neighborhoods such as the archetypical Levittown, many settled in historically-black suburban enclaves in communities such as Lakeview, New York on Long Island or in newly developed, racially-inclusive neighborhoods such as Long Island’s Ronck Park in Suffolk County. Interestingly enough, however, others made their way onto the suburban landscape through their engagement of the racially-biased real estate market, having purchased or rented their first suburban home from “block-busting” real estate brokers or other unethical real estate representatives, many of whom routinely demanded inflated rents and sales prices from black clients. On Long Island, these latter methods of black suburbanization led to increased black settlement in numerous south shore communities, such as Roosevelt, Freeport, Hempstead, Lakeview, North Bellmore, North Bellport, and many others.⁴⁶

An unexpected caveat to life in such neighborhoods, however, were the many racial, ethnic, and socio-economic tensions which often emerged between neighboring

⁴⁴ Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 220.

⁴⁵ Wiese, 219-225.

⁴⁶ See Sellers, “Nature and Blackness in Suburban Passage,” 108-115; Baxandall and Ewen, 171-190; Wiese, 151-152.

black and white suburban communities – a spatial reality which more often than not resulted in segregated residential patterns within integrated public school districts. Throughout the postwar period, this connection between residential space and public education grounded much of the northern civil rights activism in suburbs *and* cities alike, as primary and secondary schools in both settings experienced de facto school segregation – a separation based not upon race per se, but based more upon residence in relation to educational facilities. On Long Island and upon other similarly situated suburban landscapes, school districts routinely educated young children in “neighborhood” elementary schools, which, by definition served the neighborhoods within which they were constructed. As the case studies herein will explore, such schools served local students based upon historically-fashioned patterns of residential segregation, with white children attending primarily white elementary schools in traditionally white neighborhoods, and black youth attending majority black elementary schools in adjacent black enclave communities. While such children may have been pupils in the same community school district, they were often time educated separately, until all students, regardless of race, finally integrated in their district’s one, shared junior high school facility. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, African American parents, along with many sympathetic white allies, engaged countless Boards of Education in the courts and on the picket-line with hopes of nullifying “neighborhood school” programs and fully integrating their local suburban school districts for students of all ages.⁴⁷ As the chapters on Bellport and Malverne herein highlight, such activism flourished in suburban communities throughout the early 1960s, ultimately establishing

⁴⁷ See Patterson, 160-162, 170-190; Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974/2000), 241, 246-247, 252-253, 293.

strong foundations for future teenaged civil rights activists to engage in political discourses of their own by decade's end.

De facto school segregation was not exclusive to suburban communities alone, however, as racial composition of public schools in American cities was also uniquely bound to the demographic realities of the neighborhoods in which they were operated. As noted above, while millions of white American families took advantage of FHA and VA mortgage loans and purchased newly-constructed homes in developing suburban communities, millions of African Americans faced several barriers to equal access to such places, particularly in the years prior to local, state, and federal open housing legislation. As a result, inner-city areas throughout the United States such as, among others, New York, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia remained heavily populated by black Americans, as the white population of suburban communities along their peripheries expanded throughout the postwar period.⁴⁸ While the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown*, had struck down de jure school segregation in 1954, the court had not accounted for such extreme demographic shifts from city to suburb; nor had the court considered patterns of current and future discrimination in housing and residential segregation, both of which proved integral to the educational experiences of public school students in both cities and suburbs alike. Akin to black students in neighborhood schools in the suburbs, millions of black youth in American cities also attended de facto segregated schools, whose student bodies were significantly, and in some cases, almost completely, composed of minority students alone. Such patterns of educational and, by

⁴⁸ For more information on mid-twentieth century demography of American cities, see Teaford, *The Twentieth Century American City*, Chapters Five and Six; Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*, Chapter Six.

extension, residential discrimination flew in the face of the judicial philosophies which had grounded *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁴⁹

The African American community did not quietly accept such discriminatory racial realities, however, as black parents in several urban areas challenged the legitimacy of such residentially-based school segregation, especially when majority black student populations were educated by primarily white and, allegedly, indifferent teaching faculties. Throughout the late 1950s, black parents and civil rights activists in northern cities challenged racial discrimination in public schools by way of school boycotts, sit-in demonstrations at district offices, and the establishment of community-based Freedom Schools in churches, community centers and private homes.⁵⁰ In addition, civil rights activists often urged local and state legislators to institute mandated school district busing programs through which school integration could be more adequately achieved. In many cities, including, among others, New York, Chicago, and Boston, compulsory, district-wide busing often met fierce opposition from white urban dwellers, many of whom had long-committed themselves to the maintenance of the neighborhood school model of education.⁵¹ This opposition only intensified as African Americans in cities such as Chicago, New York, and elsewhere – informed by the mid to late 1960s resurgence of Black Nationalism in the guise of Black Power – petitioned local and state legislators for

⁴⁹ Patterson, 160-162, 170-190.

⁵⁰ See Adina Back, “Exposing the ‘Whole Segregation Myth’: The Harlem Nine and New York City’s School Desegregation Battles,” in Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 65-91; Ravitch, 267-279; See Danns, Chapter Three; Seligman, Chapter Five.

⁵¹ Seligman, 145-148; Ravitch, 284, 289; Jeanne Theoharis, “‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” in Theoharis and Woodard, 125-152; See also Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 24-25, 28-30, 188-190.

decentralization of urban school districts and for black community-control of schools, particularly those that served a primarily African American student populace.⁵² While such local movements often failed to achieve sustained black control of schools in the black community, they did empower thousands of African American men and women to strengthen their individual and collective call for racial equality in urban centers. It was through movements such as these that high school student activists in New York City, as well as across Long Island, located their inspiration to lead their own social justice campaigns in the late 1960s.

Teenaged civil rights activists were uniquely inspired and informed by the successes and failures of the adult activists who had founded and led the Civil Rights Movement long before their births. In many cases, their own parents served as activist role models, having successfully opened residential neighborhoods for African American rental or home ownership, and played integral roles in closing discriminatory real estate firms in cities and suburbs alike. At the same time, parents and other adult activists had successfully challenged the efficacy of the “neighborhood school” model of education, while also forcing school districts to implement district-wide integration programs for the benefit of their children. For many youth activists, these precedents served as a foundation for late 1960s high school civil rights activism. For others, inspiration also hailed from their consumption of visual, auditory, and print media, through which they learned of civil rights leaders, their organizations, their tactics, and their many achievements. Following in the footsteps of such activists – which included many of their parents, relatives, and neighbors – late 1960s high school student civil rights activists

⁵² See Podair, Chapter Four-Chapter Six; Danns, Chapter Four; Ravitch, 329-378; Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), Chapter Eight.

continued the integrationist struggle in their own circles and on their own level by organizing in-school and community-wide movements to dismantle the various remnants of racial bias within their own recently integrated suburban and urban school districts. Nevertheless, civil rights activism was not the lone form of high school student social and political activity to manifest in post-World War II America. As the 1960s came to a close and the 1970s began, millions of Americans – including teenagers, college students, and their adult counterparts throughout the nation – began to involve themselves in a newly-popularized and budding movement on behalf of the natural environment.

Landscapes of Environmentalism

Akin to Civil Rights in its scope as well as its reach, the modern Environmental Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s can be understood as a heavily middle-class and suburban movement with national proportions. While this is certainly not to say that only suburban-dwelling, middle-class Americans developed an environmental ethos during this period, there is little doubt that the various creature comforts of the postwar “American Dream” allowed millions the time and wherewithal to become environmentally active. In her 1972 analysis of various regional and national polling data on Americans’ collective thoughts on pollution, social researcher Hazel Erskine noted that “suburban dwellers seem[ed] to be more aroused over the environment than big city residents.” Citing a “higher average education” and a generalized “commuter” identity as possible reasons, Erskine laid out a host of previously published data sets and statistics, all of which indicated that suburbanites shared a much greater concern for the natural environment than their counterparts in cities, towns or rural areas.⁵³ This included not

⁵³ Hazel Erskine, “The Polls: Pollution and Its Costs,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1, (Spring, 1972), 120.

only greater percentages for those who believed the federal government should adopt more legislation and allocate more resources for environmental protection, but also greater percentages for those who claimed they would willingly pay more in taxes for this stated purpose.⁵⁴ To be sure, postwar middle class standing, and the desire for a more leisurely and recreational “quality of life” it typically promised, allowed for such beliefs to be held.

As noted above, however, not all Americans enjoyed equal access to the postwar American Dream, as millions of black and Latino citizens were long denied admittance to developing suburban hinterlands along the rural frontier. Moreover, these same individuals also encountered bias in employment and education – both of which were vital for one to more easily ascend to middle-class positioning within postwar American Society. Due to racial and ethnic inequality in all three of these realms, the burgeoning Environmental Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s would quickly become a predominantly white and middle-class movement, particularly in its early years.⁵⁵ Indeed, as the case studies herein highlight, black and Latino Americans – young and old alike – routinely recognized local, state, and national campaigns for social justice as much more personally and collectively necessary than active participation in urban or suburban environmental pursuits. Having long benefitted from unfettered access to the homes, schools and jobs of their choice, then, millions of white, middle-class Americans led

⁵⁴ See Erskine, 120-135.

⁵⁵ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 98; Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 125; Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 269, While Hays does not specifically mention race, he does assert that “environmental action seemed to require affluence, interest, awareness, and knowledge that rest on values and skills not widely present in low-income urban areas.”

environmental action campaigns in cities, suburbs and rural areas throughout the United States from the late 1960s onward.

These contested landscapes and their structural development, however, ironically became center-stage for hundreds, if not thousands, of environmental action campaigns and served as many Americans' initial impetus for choosing to *become* environmentally active as urban and suburban dwellers. While postwar residential, commercial and industrial developers imbedded both terrains with racial, ethnic, and socio-economic identities through exclusionary practices, they also altered local environments and devastated fragile ecosystems in cities and rural areas alike. Through the use of modern, assembly-line construction processes, postwar suburban developers riddled the American countryside with standardized home units, often de-foresting or plowing-over rural landscapes, including farmland and other formerly open and green spaces. As historian Adam Rome explained in *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, "the adoption of mass production techniques greatly intensified the environmental impact of homebuilding." He continued.

For the first time, builders put hundreds of thousands of homes in environmentally sensitive areas, including wetlands, steep hillsides, and floodplains. Builders also began to use new earth-moving equipment to level hills, fill creeks, and clear vegetation from vast tracts. The result was more frequent flooding, costly soil erosion, and drastic changes in wildlife populations. The postwar subdivisions typically had little open space.

At the same time, developers' reliance on septic tank waste disposal led to "outbreaks of disease, groundwater contamination, and eutrophication of lakes," especially when such systems failed, as they often would over time.⁵⁶ While suburban tract communities such

⁵⁶ Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3; See also Richard N. L. Andrews,

as Long Island's Levittown appeared to many as the future of American residence, particularly for white Americans, the ecological costs of this new residential experience proved exorbitant throughout the postwar years. Indeed, throughout the era, such costs served as significant impetus for environmental activism, spearheading various local, state and national discourses over the maintenance of open and green spaces, preservation of endangered flora and fauna, and the hidden dangers of wanton residential development upon fragile terrains.⁵⁷

Long before postwar suburbanization first inspired environmental activism, however, ecological concerns in American cities were also stimulating local, state, and national movements for environmental health. As the work of historians Robert Gottlieb and Samuel Hays has illustrated, late nineteenth and early twentieth century progressives were significant in forcing urban pollution to the forefront of popular debate on environmental and human health. Having historically served as manufacturing and industrial centers, American cityscapes were routinely congested, unsanitary, and plagued with contaminated air and water – the latter of which were “considered to be an essential price to pay for material progress.”⁵⁸ Throughout the early twentieth century, however, urban dwellers, health and research professionals, and local government agencies began to question the efficacy of this belief, recognizing the negative impact of unregulated manufacturing processes. Such concerns spearheaded a variety of local, state, and national movements for stricter regulation of industry, urban zoning ordinances and land-use regulations, clean air and water, expanded sanitation services, waste removal, as well

Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves: A History of American Environmental Policy, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 196-199.

⁵⁷ See Rome, 119-219.

⁵⁸ Hays, 71.

as recycling and, when appropriate, reduction of unnecessary production. With fresh eyes upon communal needs and the public good, urban municipalities also focused their attention upon recreation, through the creation and/or maintenance of inner-city open and green spaces such as public parks, municipal beaches, nature trails, wildlife preserves, and other natural, undeveloped urban areas.⁵⁹ Upon both landscapes, then, progress and modernity proved costly to environmental health, fueling Americans' first entry into environmental activism in the early to mid-twentieth century.

The roots of modern environmentalism were much more subterranean, however, than targeted responses and reactions to tangible stimuli in cities, developing suburbs, and rural America. As Hays and Rome have noted, mass dissemination of ecological awareness and environmental concern skyrocketed in the years following World War II, as educational, employment, and financial opportunities expanded for average American citizens. As access to such opportunities increased, so did Americans' desire for the new "conveniences" and "amenities" which their new-found, postwar affluence could provide. This included easy access to newly-developed suburban tract communities along the urban periphery, leisurely pursuits such as family vacations and outdoor recreation, as well as the ability to purchase an automobile to experience all three. Most importantly, expansion of postwar affluence also fueled American desires for "environmental quality" which, as Hays argued, was "an integral part of this new search for a higher standard of living." Rome has similarly attributed the beginning of the modern movement to

⁵⁹ See Hays, 71-98; Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 47-80; Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002); Andrews, 109-153.

Americans' quest for a better "quality of life," which, by the late 1960s, millions had found through the suburbanizing experience.⁶⁰

Still, for the majority of Americans – then and now – the beginnings of late 1960s and early 1970s Environmental Movement can be traced to several popularized moments or events in U.S. History, including the first Earth Day celebration on April 22, 1970, and the publication of famed Marine Biologist Rachel Carson's 1962 work on synthetic chemicals, *Silent Spring*. While it is clear that neither Carson nor Earth Day truly "began" the Environmental Movement, it is also clear that both provided significant motivation for millions of Americans to begin their own personal and collective trajectories from bystander to environmental activist. To this end, environmentalist Kirkpatrick Sale, in *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992*, designates the eight year period between both events as "sixties seedtime" for the movement phenomenon which would explode in the years following Earth Day. From 1962 onward, Carson-inspired public awareness led to increased membership in local, state, and national environmental organizations such as the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Wilderness Society. At the same time, the years between 1962 and 1970 also witnessed the founding of new organizations, such as the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), as well as expanded, albeit still limited, federal intervention on behalf of the natural environment, leading to legislation for wilderness preservation, clean water, and highway beautification.⁶¹ While such growth and achievements were certainly part and parcel of a movement which, on many levels, had been in existence for several decades, the publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962

⁶⁰ Hays, 3-4; Rome, 1-6.

⁶¹ See Sale, 11-28; Rothman, 48-55, 83-107.

“galvanized a constituency no one had realized was there” and inspired millions of average Americans to consider their local environments for the very first time.⁶² Just eight years later, Earth Day celebrations throughout the United States would do the same.

As the chapters on Bellport High School on Long Island and John Dewey High School in Brooklyn will highlight, both *Silent Spring* and Earth Day provided considerable motivation for Marine Biology students to engage in environmental activity through their schools and in their respective localities. These students, however, were not the first activists to engage ecological degradation in their local communities, as many of their adult neighbors and relatives had been active throughout the postwar period. In his article “Body, Place and the State: The Makings of an ‘Environmentalist’ Imaginary in the Post-World War II U.S.,” historian Christopher Sellers illustrates this point, as he traces not only the late 1950s and early 1960s social construction of the “environmentalist” identifier, but also details the rise of the Long Island-based anti-synthetics movement and birth of the Environmental Defense Fund. Long before Earth Day would inspire Bellport teenagers to organize Students for Environmental Quality, adult environmental activists, including their Marine Biology teacher and EDF co-founder, Arthur Cooley, successfully organized in opposition to widespread use of the dangerous synthetic pesticide DDT.⁶³ At the same time, 1960s Long Islanders also organized in defense of fragile marine eco-systems in wetlands and salt marshes, both of which were routinely jeopardized or destroyed by residential development throughout the postwar suburban boom.⁶⁴

⁶² Sale, 4.

⁶³ See Christopher Sellers, “Body, Place and the State: The Makings of an ‘Environmentalist’ Imaginary in the Post-World War II U.S.,” *Radical History Review* 74, (1999), P. 31-64; Hays, 175.

⁶⁴ Rome, 162-165.

Urban landscapes were no different, as ecologically-aware adults had also engaged in environmental activity long before high school students first entered the social and political debates over environmental preservation. As mentioned above, urban centers had witnessed localized movements for clean air, clean water, and human health since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar movements also manifested in the years following World War II, as environmental awareness spread with Americans' rising standard of living and desires for a better quality of life. Indeed, as Andrew Hurley's examination of Gary, Indiana reveals, black, white, working-class and middle-class residents organized in opposition to industrial pollution and its negative impact on not only human health, but on recreation and the city's natural aesthetic as well.⁶⁵ Several other U.S. cities also experienced environmental activity in the postwar period, including, among others, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington, Detroit, Baltimore, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Denver, many of which witnessed local campaigns for clean air and water, preservation of open space, and the eradication of nuclear power.⁶⁶ In New York City, black and Latino residents routinely organized protest demonstrations which shed light on long-hidden "environmental inequalities" in and around their communities. This included "garbage offensive[s]" and "clean sweep[s]," both of which cleared trash from neighborhood streets and called attention to

⁶⁵ See Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ See Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 90, No. 2, <http://www.historycooperative.org/cgi-bin/printpage.cgi>; J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 67-74; George A. Gonzalez, "Urban Growth and the Politics of Air Pollution: The Establishment of California's Automobile Emissions Standards," *Polity*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter, 2002), 213-236.

government neglect of minority areas.⁶⁷ At the same time, many of these same activists also organized around issues of urban poverty, focusing on how substandard housing opportunities, unemployment, and unequal access to adequate healthcare “had combined to produce high rates of tuberculosis, lead poisoning, and a variety of other ‘diseases of oppression’” in their neighborhoods.⁶⁸

Despite the significance of such locally-based Environmental Justice campaigns in the late 1960s, however, the majority of them would be overshadowed by the mass environmental fervor which exploded in the months leading to, and the years following, the first Earth Day in 1970. Recognizing the popularity of what was considered a “consensus movement” in the aftermath of sixties rebellion, the federal government, along with countless local and state governments enacted a plethora of regulatory statutes and created a variety of bureaucratic agencies designed to protect the natural environment. In 1969, the Nixon Administration firmly committed the federal government to environmental health, signing the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act which not only established the Environmental Protection Agency (1970), but also created the President’s Council on Environmental Quality, and mandated the use of Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for any federally-funded construction project.⁶⁹ At the same time, Nixon expanded clean air and water legislation in 1970 and 1972 (respectively), signed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, and gave the first executive “environmental” speech to the assembled members of Congress.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See Gandy, 162-167; Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 49-50.

⁶⁸ Gandy, 171-173; See also Gottlieb, 235-269.

⁶⁹ Rothman, 115-121; Andrews, 284-294.

⁷⁰ Gottlieb, 126-128; Rothman, 117, 126-127;

Similarly, individual state governments, including New York, also enacted environmental legislation, much of which grounded the various Brooklyn and Long-Island-based preservationist campaigns that local activists – both old and young alike – waged throughout the early 1970s. With passage of the state’s Environmental Conservation Law in April, 1970, New York established the Department of Environmental Conservation to “carry out the environmental policy” adopted by the state legislature, to “develop policies, planning and programs related to the environment,” and to “assure the preservation and enhancement of natural beauty and man-made scenic qualities.” This included, among others, the preservation of endangered flora and fauna, pollution abatement, resource conservation, “restoration and reclamation of degraded and despoiled areas,” land-use regulation in regard to ecologically-hazardous development, and the protection of “marine and coastal resources and of wetlands, estuaries and shorelines.”⁷¹ In successive years, New York State routinely expanded its presence in local and statewide environmental preservation, adopting its own marine mammals legislation in 1972, increasing its power over Tidal Wetlands in 1973, and establishing its own Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act later that same year.⁷² As the chapters on Students for Environmental Quality in Bellport and the John Dewey Marine Biology Club in Brooklyn will make clear, such legislation proved essential to the local environmental movements which they waged throughout the early 1970s.

⁷¹ See “Chapter 140, Environmental Conservation Law” in *Laws of the State of New York, Passed at the One Hundred and Ninety-Third Session of the Legislature, Volume I*, (Albany: State of New York, 1970), 866-892.

⁷² Interview with Arthur Cooley by Neil P. Buffett, (8 September, 2006); Roy R. Silver, “The State’s Tidal Wetlands Act Goes Into Effect,” *New York Times*, (2 September, 1973), 34; See also “Tidal Wetlands Act” in *McKinney’s Consolidated Laws of New York, Annotated: Environmental Conservation Law*, (New York: Thomson-West, 2007), 5-51; “Titles 27, Environmental Conservation Law: Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System,” in *New York Consolidated Laws Service, Annotated Statutes with Forms: Environmental Conservation Law, Articles 15-22, Vol. 12A*, (Rochester: The Lawyers Co-operative, 1982), 206-224.

As noted above, however, these students were certainly not alone in their individual and collective quests for environmental quality in their respective urban and suburban neighborhoods. Many of them, like their civil rights counterparts, often located their inspiration to become active by working with, and learning from, the adult activists whom had preceded them on the landscapes of social movement. Upon both urban and suburban terrains, many of their parents, teachers, and neighbors had laid the foundations upon which their teenaged activism, be it civil rights or environmentalism, would flourish in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result of unequal and ecologically-destructive mass suburbanization, postwar American cities and suburbs both became fertile grounds for social and political activism in promotion of not only racial, ethnic and socio-economic equality, but for environmental preservation as well. In city and suburb alike, American citizens participated in both forms of activism which are analyzed throughout this study. While the case studies herein offer an analysis of both movements in the same locations while also maintaining their mutual exclusivity, this is not to imply that the two movements themselves were not sometimes connected. As Andrew Hurley's work on Gary, Indiana has illustrated, the goals of civil rights and environmentalism as movements were often times linked, as American citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status shared a vested interest in a cleaner environment.⁷³ The evolution of Environmental Justice Movements in the years following the explosion of mass environmentalism in the early 1970s re-enforces this strong connection between these two movements.

⁷³ For more on African American interest in the environment, see Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African American and Environmental History*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

As the case studies which follow illustrate, however, the goals of high school student civil rights and environmental activists in Bellport, Malverne, and Brooklyn were *not* the same, as students participated in one movement or the other – not both. While Bellport High School produced both movements within a span of only two academic years, student civil rights activists concentrated their efforts on racial, ethnic and socio-economic equality alone, leaving environmental activism to another cohort of politically-minded students. Similarly, students in Malverne and at Franklin K. Lane High School in Brooklyn also engaged in civil rights activism, although they did so in the absence of a similarly situated environmental organization such as Students for Environmental Quality. The same can be said of Brooklyn’s John Dewey High School, which only witnessed the rise of a school-based environmental organization. While the reasons behind these choices are varied and, sometimes, not clear, each of the following chapters analyze not only the manifestation of either form of activism, but also the possible factors which ultimately led to their absence in specific urban or suburban high schools. In the chapter which follows, the evolution of both movements in the Long Island community of Bellport, New York will be explored.

Chapter Two: Civil Rights and Environmental Activism in Bellport, New York

On the evening of Wednesday, January 21, 1970, senior student Littie Rau from Bellport High School on Long Island, New York, stood before members of her Board of Education as well as a captive audience of students, parents, and teachers from throughout her community, and admonished them for their long-standing inability to communicate across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines. Rau, having recently aligned herself with the civil rights aims of her African American and Latino peers from neighboring North Bellport, urged adult attendees to do the same, noting that their teenaged children could not alleviate community tensions and rampant inequality on their own. As one of the founding members of the student-led Better Relations Committee for Constructive Action, Rau, a white student, found it unconscionable that local parents, both white *and* black, had saddled their children with the awesome responsibility of fomenting in-school racial unity when parents themselves had long refused to do so in their neighborhoods of residence. By evening's end, community leaders and members of Bellport's Board of Education concurred with the teenager's summation of neighborhood disunity, promising to seek out viable community-wide solutions to local racial, ethnic and socio-economic tensions.⁷⁴

Nearly three months later, on the evening of April 15th, Rau once again addressed community residents as a participant in Bellport High School's celebration of the first Earth Day, which was slated for the following week on April 22nd. In what was billed to the public as an "Environmental Evening," Rau, along with several of her peers in the school's Advanced Senior Biology program, performed a variety of student-scripted skits

⁷⁴ Littie Rau, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 1, P. 5, (21 January 21, 1970), in possession of author; See also, *Race or Reason: The Bellport Dilemma*, Directed by Betty Puleston and Lynne Jackson, (2000), video-cassette.

and presentations on the myriad dangers posed by organic and inorganic pollutants upon the natural environment. With roughly six hundred local residents in attendance, Rau, in the guise of a future newscaster, delivered a hypothetical traffic report for Brooklyn's Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, which, she noted with rather bleak, yet poignant, imagery, "decreased sharply...when it was discovered that the sludge in the Hudson River had hardened sufficiently to support the traffic flow." Rau concluded her report matter-of-factly, noting that in light of this change, "the Hudson River ha[d] been declared Route 244." Under the direction Biology instructor Arthur Cooley, Rau and her colleagues planned, scripted and directed almost the entire three hour pre-Earth Day event, which included not only student-led skits and performances, but professional lectures by local ecologists and conservation specialists as well.⁷⁵ While Rau and her Advanced Senior Biology classmates would graduate from Bellport High School just two months later, several of their younger, science-oriented peers would return to school the following fall and organize a youth-led environmental action organization.

Beginning in the fall of 1969, politically-conscious teenagers in Bellport, New York actively engaged in social and political activism in their high school and throughout their suburban Long Island community. While black and Latino students first initiated this political trend in September with the formation of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Union (BPRSU) and a local movement for racial, ethnic and socioeconomic equality, a small contingent of their white peers followed in their footsteps by organizing the Better Relations Committee for Constructive Action (BRCCA) for the same purpose just four months later. Motivated by a wholly different political awakening, another

⁷⁵ Ed Lowe, "School Gets Into the Pollution Act," *Newsday*, (16, April 1970); See also Alice Quatrochi, "Seniors Present 'Environmental Evening,'" *The Long Island Advance*, (23 April, 1970).

cohort of Bellport teenagers would then go on to found Students for Environmental Quality (SEQ) in the fall of 1970, as an organizational body through which they actively lobbied for environmental preservation in their local community. While all three activist bodies manifested upon the same suburban landscape and in the same Long Island school district, the spheres of high school student civil rights and environmental activism developed in politically diverging and mutually exclusive domains. Unlike Little Rau, who traversed both as a co-founder of the Better Relations Committee for Constructive Action and, later, as a minor participant in the school's Earth Day-inspired "Environmental Evening," teenaged civil rights and environmental activists in Bellport did not share similar social concerns or political agendas. Nor did they share similar social worlds as members of the greater Bellport community.

As the this chapter illuminates, the roots of either form of high school student political activism in Bellport can be traced in large part to students' lived realities and social experiences as residents of the school district's two diverging suburban neighborhoods: the primarily white, middle to upper-class Village of Bellport and the less affluent, primarily African American and Latino hamlet of North Bellport. Separated by the tracks of the Long Island Railroad as well as the local east-west artery, Montauk Highway, the two neighborhoods symbolized two halves of a postwar consumer society whose economy had benefited some and left others behind. By the late 1960s, while Bellport Village had come to be identified with privilege, prosperity and prestige, its neighbor to the north had become stigmatized as unkempt, impoverished and structurally unsound.⁷⁶ To this end, residence in either neighborhood had proffered inhabitants a unique set of social, cultural, economic and recreational experiences and amenities which

⁷⁶ For more on place stigmatization of minority neighborhoods, see Sze, *Noxious New York*, 38, 54-55, 91.

were ultimately influential to student choice in which movement activities they would engage.

For black and Latino students from North Bellport, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparity between the two diverging neighborhoods grounded the civil rights campaign they waged throughout the first half of the 1969-1970 school year. By extension, these students were similarly inspired by their personal and collective experiences with racial, ethnic and class bias in their high school, which, like most public school facilities then and now, represented a microcosm of the greater community which it served. While African American and Latino youth together represented roughly twenty-five percent of Bellport High School's student body of 1,150, the school's faculty, staff and administrative rosters were almost exclusively white.⁷⁷ Similarly, district-wide Social Studies and History curriculums only proffered students a Eurocentric view of the past, which minimized the various contributions of both the African American and Latino communities. Hoping to alleviate such bias, black and Latino students challenged school district officials to diversify faculty rosters, expand historically-biased school curriculums, officially recognize black and Latino pride week, declare school holidays in honor of Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X, and to lower lunch prices for lower-income students.⁷⁸ As the pages which follow illustrate, these desires for change were uniquely bred from the social realities they experienced in a divided suburban community and its similarly divided high school.

⁷⁷ Kent Smith and Patricia Burstein, "Bellport Shuts Schools After Scuffle," *Newsday*, (28, October 1969), P.4; Kent Smith and Christopher Weber, "'Bellport High Remains Closed," *Newsday*, (19 January, 1970).

⁷⁸ Black and Puerto Rican Student Union, "Demands of the Black and Puerto Rican Students," (3 October, 1969), from packet distributed to teachers on October 26, 1969, from private collection of Jeanne R. Paisley, in possession of the author.

Students from Bellport Village, however, were also inspired to become socially and politically active by their varied experiences at home and in school. While some sympathized and joined forces with black and Latino students' movement for racial, ethnic and socioeconomic equality, others worked with environmental activist and Biology instructor, Arthur Cooley, laying the foundation for what, by following fall term, would become the Students for Environmental Quality (SEQ). For both cohorts of primarily white students, their middle to upper-class, suburban lifestyles in the waterfront village were integral to the social movement choices they made throughout the 1969-1970 and 1970-1971 school years. For those who lent their support to black and Latino students in 1969 and the first half of 1970, the clear contrasts between their privileged backgrounds in Bellport Village and that of their less affluent counterparts in North Bellport informed their civil rights activism, leading many to question the validity of an "American Dream" that only some could fully realize. While many of these students largely defined their activism in opposition to such inequality, those who organized SEQ in the fall of 1970 did not, as their eventual environmental activism was more an outgrowth of middle and upper-class affluence rather than a philosophical challenge of its merits. To be sure, these latter students' access to an abundance of academic, financial, and recreational resources paved the way for their eventual forays into local environmental preservation. This chapter analyzes the emergence of both social movements in light of these diverging motivational forces in school and in the greater Bellport community.

At the same time, however, this chapter focuses on the uniqueness of high school student activism in suburban Bellport, a community which witnessed the emergence of

both forms of high school student political activity. As later chapters will reveal, the manifestation of both social movements in the same high school was rare, even upon similarly situated suburban landscapes on Long Island, and most certainly so in nearby New York City. What then allowed for this one place to serve as the staging ground for such an unlikely occurrence? As the pages which follow highlight, Bellport itself, as a place, played a significant role in this evolutionary process. As a shared, yet divided, community on rural Long Island, mid-twentieth century Bellport attracted a wide variety of families to the area – families that represented a host of diverging racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Over time, such diversity manifested geographically, ultimately splitting the suburban school district in half, a division which birthed two competing social worlds that inspired would-be student activists differently. Still, while place itself would certainly prove fundamental to student activism in Bellport, students’ experiential relationships with their respective neighborhoods as well as the fruits that each provided were just as significant.⁷⁹ This chapter sheds light upon that significance as it relates to the emergence of both forms of high school student activism in Bellport, New York.

Suburban Microcosm; Divided Community

In their January, 1970 analysis of the Bellport Public School District, representatives of New York State’s Department of Education labeled the area a “microcosm of American society.” Noting how “many communities are so homogenous that they cannot truly epitomize the democratic dream,” the department’s Intercultural

⁷⁹ For a treatment of place experience, see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977/2002).

Relations staff concluded that late 1960s Bellport had “a great opportunity to reflect American society as it ought to exist.” They explained the variation further.

The area includes several racial, ethnic and religious groups; included in its population is a broad spectrum of socio-economic and social class components; every sentiment from the most fundamentally conservative to the most far out liberal is represented here. No single element exists in such disproportionate numbers of percentages that it need be a threat to the security and well-being of any other segment.⁸⁰

While state analysts concluded that such demographic balance had made Bellport “a good place in which to live” and offered “a unique opportunity to prepare...students for life in this country,” the area had not always been as racially, ethnically, or socio-economically diverse as it was in the fall of 1969. Nor had long-standing residents celebrated the diversification of a school district which had only ten to twenty years earlier been primarily white in composition. To be sure, the same state representatives would have characterized the late 1940s and early 1950s Bellport community as much more “homogeneous” than a “microcosm of the nation.”⁸¹

Located roughly sixty miles east of New York City on the south shore of Long Island, Bellport was first incorporated as a village in 1908. Despite this early twentieth century designation, however, the Bellport area had served local inhabitants for at least 250 years prior. Originally occupied by local Native American tribes who utilized the waterfront as a staging ground for a local fishery, the Bellport area was purchased and settled by white European immigrants beginning in 1664. In successive decades, these early residents followed in their predecessor’s footsteps and capitalized on Bellport’s

⁸⁰ Wilbur R. Nordos and Morton J. Sobel, “Report on Central School District #4” by New York State Department of Education, Division of Intercultural Relations, (5, January 1970), P. 24, private collection of Nancy Marr, Patchogue, New York; private collection of Jeanne R. Paisley, Richford, New York

⁸¹ Nordos and Sobel, P. 24; Ed Lowe, “State Education Report Finds Bellport Still Divided by Bias,” *Newsday*, (6 January, 1970), 3.

prime location through their participation in dozens of marine-based trades and industries which included, among others, fishing, whaling, and ship-building. These early residents also farmed the local landscape for sustenance and sold cord-wood to supplement their marine-based incomes. By the mid-nineteenth century, Bellport had evolved into a rural vacation resort area for New York City's upper-class elites, which included "some of the most prominent people in the social, business and artistic world." By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area's eclectic past, resort-like atmosphere, and proximity to "nature" had drawn many of these same individuals to take up permanent residence in Bellport, which, over time, resulted in the expansion of upper-class amenities. This included not only a public beach for bathing, but a country club, a yacht club, and a public dock for private vessels as well.⁸²

Throughout the post-World War II era, this luxurious past inspired a variety of middle to upper-class professionals to seek out Bellport Village as a residential haven in the suburbs, especially the employees of the nearby Brookhaven National Laboratory, which opened in 1947.⁸³ The majority of these employees represented the educated elite, having been trained as research scientists at prestigious universities in the United States and throughout the world. Coupled with Bellport's illustrious past as a picturesque, vacation resort area, the presence of such middle to upper-class professionals made Bellport a highly desirable community, one which increased in value throughout the postwar period and beyond. Indeed, from 1960 to 1970, the average home value in the village increased from \$16,500 to \$23,090. At the same time, the primarily white

⁸²Osborn Shaw, "Historical Sketch of Bellport," in Village of Bellport, *The Charm of Bellport, Long Island*, (Circa 1960s), P 1-2, from the Private Collection of Jeanne R. Paisley, Richford, New York.

⁸³ Brookhaven National Lab, "About Brookhaven National Lab," http://www.bnl.gov/bnlweb/about_bnl.asp, (November 16, 2005); Interview with Littie Rau by Neil P. Buffett, (17 September, 2005); Interview with Jeanne R. Paisley by Neil P. Buffett, (15 October, 2005).

neighborhood's average household income in 1970 was the second highest in the surrounding area at approximately \$12,500 – a figure which exceeded the average family income of the entire Brookhaven Township by roughly \$1,350.⁸⁴ While Bellport Village would certainly attract would-be suburbanites representing a host of other professions, including, among others, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and businessmen, the presence of such prominent research scientists and the tranquil past of the area they inhabited would, on many levels, come to define Bellport Village throughout the postwar period. The neighborhood would also come to be defined by, and valued for, its rural placement and natural wonders, the latter of which included not only the Great South Bay but the Carmans River Corridor as well.

By the early 1950s, however, Bellport Village no longer defined the entire Bellport community, as the larger suburban locale expanded to include the developing hamlet of North Bellport. Located just north of the incorporated village, North Bellport was not founded as a coastal resort area, but as a white, working-class neighborhood for blue-collar aeronautical employees, many of whom worked for the Long Island-based Republic Aviation Corporation. Like many postwar suburban neighborhoods, the hamlet was originally devised from a conglomeration of disparate postwar subdivisions that had been built in and around the area, which included Pace Park, Pace Estates, Hagerman Heights, Matson Ridge, Matson Homes, Sylmar Homes, Courtside Homes, and Chapel Hill. In 1954, these housing developments were officially named North Bellport, based upon their proximity to the nearby waterfront village. From very early on, the hamlet was

⁸⁴ “How Land Values Have Changed,” *Newsday*, February 18, 1972, p. 2; The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 2 – Color and Race*, 1972, Ps 38-41, 51-52; The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board Vol. 6 – Income*, 1973, P. 13.

generally recognized by village residents and other Long Islanders as the less affluent of the two neighborhoods, since homes had been built small, and had only been sold for between \$7,000 and \$8,000. Moreover, unlike Bellport Village, which had, for generations, maintained a natural beauty with “broad streets, large shade trees, an abundance of shrubs and flowers, attractive homes set amid well-kept lawns that slope[d] gently to the sparkling waters of the Bay,” North Bellport had been constructed without similar “landscaping” or “street and drainage improvements,” all of which led to the neighborhood’s local stigmatization as an eye-sore and, as many locals noted, a “white slum.”⁸⁵

This stigmatization only intensified as the 1950s came to a close and North Bellport slowly began to integrate, as several of the neighborhood’s original white homeowners were forced to sell their properties and relocate elsewhere in the wake of widespread layoffs at Republic Aviation.⁸⁶ While many of these outgoing residents sold their homes back to lien holders, others either lost them through bank foreclosure or simply abandoned them before such action could be taken. In turn, many of these homes were purchased by local real estate speculators, who sold or rented them to other would-be suburbanites, including many of the neighborhood’s first African American and Latino residents. In the early 1960s, many of these black and Latino pioneers fell victim to

⁸⁵ Village of Bellport, *The Charm of Bellport, Long Island*, P.4; Edwin S. Voorhis & Son, Inc., Consulting Engineers and Planners, *Housing and Neighborhood Conditions in the Hagerman-North Bellport Area*. (March, 1965), p. 2. found in League of Women Voters of Brookhaven South/Bellport (N.Y.) Collection 245. State University of New York at Stony Brook. Special Collections Department; For more on Bellport Villager’s stigmatization of North Bellport, see Art Beltrone and Mike Unger, “School Order Cuts Into a ‘Split’ Bellport,” *Newsday*, (27 January, 1967), P. 11. For discussion of place stigmatization, see Sze, *Noxious New York*, 38, 54-55, 91.

⁸⁶ “Fewer Jobs in the Aircraft Industry. That’s the long term prospect,” *The Wall Street Journal*, (28 February 1957), p. 1, col. 5; “Republic Aviation Shuts 2 Branch Plants, Part of Scheduled Cut-Back,” *The Wall Street Journal*, (6 March 1957), p. 2, col. 3; “Republic to Shut 2 Branch Plants,” *Newsday*, (6 March 1957). p. 19.

Gerald Kulter, a local Long Island real estate agent who openly employed “blockbusting,” racial steering, and discriminatory price inflation throughout the North Bellport area. Despite the loss of his realtor’s license in 1962, Kutler’s blockbusting techniques and their lasting effects panicked countless white homeowners into selling their properties in the face of possible racial and ethnic integration.⁸⁷

In the eight years which followed, North Bellport’s racial, ethnic and socio-economic composition radically shifted, as the once predominantly white, working-class hamlet witnessed an 856% jump in its African American and Latino population. Indeed, while North Bellport’s white population only decreased from 4,154 in 1960 to 3,417 in 1970, its minority population ballooned by a staggering 2,149, from 265 to 2,486. This ten year increase proved to be the most significant in the surrounding area, as Bellport Village only witnessed an in-migration of fifty-seven black and Latino residents, rising from a meager thirteen to seventy. Similarly, the black and Latino populations of nearby East Patchogue and Patchogue only increased from twelve to fourteen and from 222 to 299 in the same ten year period. The only comparable increase in the local African American and Latino population occurred in nearby Yaphank, a community which witnessed an in-migration of 194 minority residents, rising from 157 in 1960 to just 351 in 1970.⁸⁸

Late 1960s North Bellport also differed from Bellport Village and other surrounding communities in regard to average home values and average household

⁸⁷ Harriet Mellis, *Report from the North Bellport Taxpayer’s Association on Community Problems in the North Bellport-Hagerman Area*, (May, 1964), Pages 1-2, found in League of Women Voters of Brookhaven South/Bellport (N.Y.) Collection 245. State University of New York at Stony Brook. Special Collections Department; *New York Department of State v. Joseph J. Feleccia, Captree Realty Enterprises by Joseph Feleccia, Representative Broker, Gerald Kutler, John J. Flynn.*, September, 1962. Record number 99187, found in Suffolk County Clerk’s Office, Riverhead, New York.

⁸⁸ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census ’70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 2 – Color and Race*, 1972, Ps 38-41, 51-52.

incomes. While the integrated neighborhood was designated the least valuable in Brookhaven Township with an average home value of \$12,095 in 1970, its average family income the same year was third lowest in all of Long Island at \$8,429. Moreover, North Bellport's average home value crested at just half the average home value in Bellport Village, and well below the average home value of \$18,805 in Patchogue and \$19,280 in East Patchogue. Similarly, average family incomes in all three neighborhoods surpassed North Bellport's \$8,429 with village residents averaging \$12,514 and Patchogue, East Patchogue and Yaphank residents averaging \$9,547, \$10,868, and \$9,972 respectively.⁸⁹ While such numbers clearly indicated that North Bellport was by far the area's least affluent residential space, they also contributed to the local perception that North Bellport had become a much more blighted residential neighborhood in the years since its founding in the early 1950s. Having never been fully accepted by residents of Bellport Village, the neighborhood was only further stigmatized and shunned in the years following racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic transition.⁹⁰

It was within this matrix of unequal social realities that high school student civil rights and environmental activists located their unique and diverging impetus for engaging in social and political activism in Bellport Senior High School. For black and Latino students from North Bellport, their engagement of racial, ethnic and socioeconomic inequality was firmly grounded in not only the disparity they witnessed in their school, but also in the inequity they experienced as members of a divided suburban community. As young inhabitants of North Bellport, these students clearly understood the differences between their residential neighborhood and that of their classmates in

⁸⁹ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board Vol. 6 – Income*, 1973, P. 13; “How Land Values Have Changed,” *Newsday*, 18 February 1972), p.2.

⁹⁰ See Beltrone and Unger, “School Order Cuts Into a ‘Split’ Bellport,” *Newsday*, (27 January, 1967), P. 11.

Bellport Village, the latter of whom enjoyed easy access to a variety of social, cultural, and recreational amenities that were unavailable north of Montauk Highway. This included common areas such as, among others, Bellport's downtown and mini-shopping district, a community library and local post office, a village marina, the village beach, as well as easy access to the Carmans River, the latter three of which were often used recreationally by village youth. While black and Latino activists would partially coalesce around their neighborhood's lack of such venues and opportunities, later teen environmentalists would locate much of their motivation for political activism through their personal and collective usage of them.

To be sure, members of Students for Environmental Quality (SEQ) were uniquely inspired to engage in local environmental activism by the relationships they had fomented with the natural environment throughout their young lives. While some of these relationships had developed through recreational pursuits along the Carmans River and in the Great South Bay, others were generated in the classroom through students' participation in advanced programs of scientific study. Under the direction of Biology teacher and environmental activist, Arthur Cooley, future SEQ members, many of whose parents were employed at Brookhaven National Lab, studied Advanced Biology and an ecologically-based Marine Biology curriculum which not only expanded their horizons in the classroom, but also put them in direct contact with the natural environment through routine, course-related field work as well. Through the experiential nature of such activities, students who organized SEQ in the fall of 1970 located a desire to preserve endangered flora and fauna in the midst of their developing suburban neighborhood.

As mentioned above, however, minority students from North Bellport did not share the same suburban experience as their counterparts from Bellport Village, a fact which stifled the emergence of a locally-based African American and Latino environmentalism. While black and Latino students had certainly played outdoors as young children, and later, as adolescents, had become peripherally cognizant of ecological hazards and environmental racism, they did not tailor their in-school or community-wide civil rights activism to engage such issues. For these students, their lived realities in the stigmatized and less affluent neighborhood of North Bellport placed racial, ethnic and socio-economic equality atop their list of movement priorities.⁹¹ Unhindered by such issues, teenagers who organized SEQ were allowed to fully concentrate their political activity in the realm of environmental preservation. While both movements manifested locally upon the same suburban landscape, they emerged as mutually exclusive student-led activities, with only limited crossover, as a small contingent of white village youth embarked upon civil rights activism alongside BPRSU members in the spring of 1970. The following analysis highlights the evolution of both social movement activities in Bellport Senior High School in the 1969-1970 and 1970-1971 school years.

High School Student Civil Rights Activism, 1969-1970

On the evening of Monday, September 22, 1969, members of the recently established Black and Puerto Rican Student Union (BPRSU) attended the regularly scheduled meeting of Bellport's Board of Education to submit a list of desired school curriculum revisions and district-wide policy amendments. As the BPRSU's two

⁹¹ Interview with Zoilo Torres by Neil P. Buffett, (21 February, 2010); Interview with Paulette Samuels (Brooks) by Neil P. Buffett, (22 February, 2010).

principal founders, sophomores Zoilo “Pete” Torres and Paulette Samuels urged board members to consider the union’s requests, which included: “a Black and Puerto Rican Studies Program; greater assistance from the Guidance Department for low income students desiring to qualify for college entrance; financial assistance to help low income students pay for school lunches” and the “elimination of a [school] tracking system.” Recognizing the sensitivity of the students’ concerns, board members tabled the issue, promising to meet with union representatives and high school administrators one week later. In the interim, the governing body asked that black and Latino students submit an official draft of their “grievances” to their school principal and the district superintendent for administrative review and commentary.⁹²

Despite revisiting the issue on October 2nd, however, the Board of Education once again failed to act upon the students’ concerns, opting instead to “reserve decision” until their next scheduled public hearing on October 6th.⁹³ Perturbed by the board’s inaction, BPRSU members dispersed and quickly drafted several copies of their listed requests – now nonnegotiable demands – for distribution to all faculty, staff and students the following morning. Consisting of nine demands, the new list included the students’ initial four as well as the acquisition of more black and Latino literature and materials for the high school library; the hiring of five minority teachers; a black and Latino student advisor to the Board of Education; recognition and celebration of Black History Week; and, “that the holiday of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X be declared.”⁹⁴ While

⁹² *Meeting Minutes of the Board of Education: Central School District #4*, (22, September 1969,) P. 271, found at South Country School District Office, East Patchogue, New York.

⁹³ See “14 Suspended in Racial Tiffs,” *Newsday*, (3 October, 1969).

⁹⁴ “Black and Puerto Rican Student Demands,” (3 October, 1969), *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 32, P. 35-36, in possession of the author; “Demands of the Black and Puerto Rican Students,” (3 October, 1969) from packet distributed to faculty by administration on October 26, 1969, found in private collection of Jeanne R. Paisley, Richford, New York.

widespread distribution of the list had been peaceful and non-disruptive, the BPRSU's action did prompt the Board of Education to finally engage the students' concerns at its next scheduled meeting later that week. For Torres, Samuels and members of BPRSU, however, the meeting proved less than fruitful, as only one of their demands was officially adopted.

While board members authorized high school administrators to offer students an elective, year-long African American and Latino history course, they reserved debate and decision on a similar district-wide Black Studies Program, promising to revisit the issue again at its next public meeting in November. At the same time, board members congratulated and recognized "the work already done in the assembly of library materials pertaining to the culture of American Black People," but approved the library staff's continued "compilation of this material with the students of the high school participating in this collection." Offering to consider the remaining "'demands' and related items" in a private "work session" on October 21st, board members did issue an official statement expressing their "desire...that appropriate attention be given by teachers at all grade levels to the special needs of pupils of minority attachment as regards [to] the background and accomplishments of groups and individuals, past and present, who share their heritage."⁹⁵ Despite these words and the board's limited action on their demands, however, BPRSU members left the October 6th hearing displeased with its overall outcome. In the days and weeks which followed, black and Latino students would demonstrate this discontent in their classrooms and in the corridors of their high school,

⁹⁵ *Meeting Minutes of the Board of Education: Central School District #4*, (6 October), 1969, P. 275-276; Wilbur R. Nordos and Morton J. Sobel, "Report on Central School District #4" by New York State Department of Education, Division of Intercultural Relations, January 5, 1970, P.3.

laying the foundation for a much larger in-school and community-wide discussion on racial, ethnic and socio-economic inequality.

For Paulette Samuels and Pete Torres, however, this dialogue had begun much earlier than their sophomore year at Bellport Senior High School. As natives of New York City, both teenagers quickly realized the dual nature of their new suburban community when they moved to the area with their families in the early 1960s. While suburbanization had seemingly promised fulfillment of the “American Dream” through the procurement of a privately-owned home, North Bellport had introduced both of their families, and many of their black and Latino neighbors, to an illusory suburban experience based upon racial, ethnic and socioeconomic inequality. For Samuels, this experience first materialized in 1961, when her mother purchased the family’s first suburban home from blockbusting real estate agent, Gerald Kutler, on MacDonald Avenue. As one of the first African American families on the block, Samuels and her five siblings witnessed the rapid transformation of their street and their neighborhood, as hundreds of white residents sold their homes in the months and years following their arrival.⁹⁶ For Torres and his family, this experience began with the realization that suburban North Bellport was not much different than the urban landscape they had left behind in New York City. As the BPRSU co-founder explained at a union meeting in 1970, “we lived in the slums of Brooklyn, and then all of a sudden finally we’re getting into the suburbs. We come into the suburbs, we come into North Bellport, [and its] another slum you know?” Referencing his father’s dismay with the new neighborhood, Torres noted how the man had “thought he was getting out of the slums when he really

⁹⁶ Samuels interview, 2005; Interview with Paulette Samuels in Betty Puleston and Lynne Jackson, dir., *Race or Reason: The Bellport Dilemma*, (2000), video-cassette.

wasn't." Echoing his younger brother's sentiments, Joe Torres confirmed the family's elation at having "made it" to the suburbs, only to learn later that their "side of the tracks" was "considered the slums" in the greater Bellport area.⁹⁷

While racial and ethnic change in North Bellport had certainly contributed to such local stigmatization of place, the hamlet's socioeconomic status proved much more detrimental to its locally-perceived worth as a neighborhood. As noted above, by 1970, North Bellport had been noted by the Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board as the third poorest residential area in all of Long Island with the lowest average home value in all of Brookhaven Township.⁹⁸ In large part, such administrative designations were based in socioeconomic reality, as North Bellport had been originally founded as a working-class suburban neighborhood; however, throughout the 1960s, it had increasingly become a residential haven for families who depended on social services for their monthly subsistence. In 1964, the number of families receiving public assistance in the North Bellport area totaled 126, while just three years later this number had increased to 161 in a neighborhood comprised of roughly 400 hundred privately-owned or tenant-occupied houses.⁹⁹ By the end of the 1960s, such numbers not only indicated the unequivocal inequality between North Bellport and its wealthier waterfront neighbor, but also fueled the continued stigmatization of North Bellport as a place and its people as its representatives.

⁹⁷ Pete Torres, (27 January, 1970), *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 21a, P. 32, in possession of the author; Interview with Zoilo Torres by Neil P. Buffett, (11 September, 2005).

⁹⁸ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board Vol. 6 – Income*, 1973, P. 13; "How Land Values Have Changed," *Newsday*, 18 February 1972), p.2.

⁹⁹ Beltrone & Unger, "School Order Cuts Into a 'Split' Bellport," *Newsday*, (27 January, 1967), 11; Harriet Mellis, *Report from the North Bellport Taxpayer's Association on Community Problems in the North Bellport-Hagerman Area*, (May, 1964), Pages 1-2; Edwin S. Voorhis & Son, Inc., Consulting Engineers and Planners, *Housing and Neighborhood Conditions in the Hagerman-North Bellport Area*. (March, 1965), p. 5.

Despite the neighborhood's relative impoverishment, however, its residents did benefit from the North Bellport Neighborhood Opportunity Center (NBNOC), which opened its doors in 1967 with federal funds provided through President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society initiatives. Founded as a community center and a neighborhood co-op, the NBNOC provided a variety of social services for low-income residents, including a food pantry, a clothing thrift depot, a limited transportation program, early childhood education programs, and a basic health clinic. At the same time, since North Bellport lacked its own downtown area or other such amenities enjoyed by Bellport Village residents, the NBNOC also served as a public meeting space and an unofficial lending library for hamlet residents. Moreover, the center offered locally unemployed adults the opportunity to volunteer their time in one or more of its cooperative programs. Throughout the late 1960s, Samuels' mother, Elaine Archer Thompson, who had played an integral role in making the NBNOC a reality for the neighborhood, routinely served in this capacity. As an unemployed mother of six, Thompson spent considerable time at the center, administering both its food pantry and its thrift depot. In the summer of 1969, her teenage daughter, Paulette Samuels, assisted in this venture as another family volunteer.¹⁰⁰

Thompson's daughter was not the lone teenaged volunteer, however, as Pete Torres had also agreed to work at the NBNOC throughout the summer of 1969. While both had known each other from previous encounters in school and in the community, their summertime experience at the neighborhood center would cement a camaraderie that would last throughout their remaining years in high school. As the young activists

¹⁰⁰ Samuels interview; Interview with Elaine Thompson McPherson by Neil P. Buffett, (21 October, 2005); Nancy Marr, email message to author, (16 September, 2005).

explained years later, their volunteer experience at the NBNOC was uniquely enhanced by their interaction with Elaine Frazier, a SUNY Old Westbury student who also spent her summer recess at the neighborhood center in North Bellport. Described as “fiery and articulate,” Frazier quickly became very influential to both Torres and Samuels, serving as their unofficial mentor and introducing them to a variety of revolutionary philosophies and a matured political lexicon. As the three students, young and younger, worked together they held, what Torres called, “little rap sessions,” through which Samuels and he began to more adroitly question their lives in North Bellport and the many differences between their neighborhood and the waterfront village. These discussions focused upon various topics including the national Civil Rights Movement, the resurgence of Black Nationalism as Black Power, the history of western colonialism, the inequality of American Capitalism, as well as the Vietnam War.¹⁰¹ Through such conversations, Torres explained, “it became very clear to us that the conditions and discrimination that existed on television – the people dying in Vietnam – were from our communities as well...[and] that there was segregation where we lived.”¹⁰² This realization and the political awakening it inspired in both students’ lives would prove integral to the civil rights movement they would begin just three months later.

Elaine Frazier also served as an intermediary between Torres, Samuels and the political radicalism of the Young Lords Organization (YLO), a Puerto Rican youth movement similar to the Black Panthers, whose New York affiliate was initially based out of various campus chapters, including SUNY College at Old Westbury on Long Island. Beginning on the streets of Chicago as a gang in 1959, the Young Lords first

¹⁰¹ Torres interview, 2005; Samuels interview, 2005.

¹⁰² Torres interview, 2005.

became a political organization in 1968, calling for the liberation of Puerto Rico; the elimination of racism, sexism, militarism, and all forms of colonialism; equality for women; and, the replacement of capitalism with socialism. Moreover, the organization also called for community control of public services, stressing the need for “people’s control of police, health services, churches, schools, housing, transportation, and welfare.”¹⁰³ Through Frazier’s personal relationship with YLO members at Old Westbury, Torres and Samuels were afforded a unique opportunity to spend time with the group as its leadership planned various protest activities in New York City. In the summer of 1969, this placed both students in direct contact with YLO leaders, such as Miguel “Mickey” Melendez, as they planned one of their more widely known protest demonstrations: the December, 1969 community take-over of the First Spanish Methodist Church in East Harlem.¹⁰⁴ According to Torres, the experience of sitting in on the YLO’s strategy sessions provided both he and Samuels key insight as to how a protest movement should be planned and operated.¹⁰⁵

Inspired by what they had learned from Frazier and the YLO, the two NBNOC volunteers returned to Bellport High School in September as nascent political organizers, hoping to organize a protest movement of their own. To this end, Torres and Samuels spent the first few weeks of school politicizing their black and Latino peers and organizing them as the Black and Puerto Rican Student Union. In the group’s inaugural meetings, Torres and Samuels revisited many of the same issues they had discussed with

¹⁰³ Matthew Gandy, “Between Borinquen and the Barrio: Environmental Justice and New York City’s Puerto Rican Community, 1969-1970,” *Antipode*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (2002), 734; See also, Miguel “Mickey” Melendez, *We Took The Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁴ For treatment of the Young Lord’s community take-over of the East Harlem church in December, 1969, see Melendez, P. 114-116.

¹⁰⁵ Torres interview, 2005.

Frazier, focusing on the various forms of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequality that had shaped their lives as minority students in school as well as poor residents of North Bellport. Torres explained.

We noticed that all the white kids had all their nice books and they were very studious, and they looked like they were really benefiting from whatever they were getting from the school. They blacks [and Latinos] never had a book...[school] was more of a hangout. And the Guidance Counselor's advice to many of the blacks and Latinos was, you know, "you're not doing anything here, you might as well just quit. Go get a job, since you're not going to do anything here." That wasn't the same kind of advice that they were giving the whites, and we knew that.¹⁰⁶

Through such discussions, BPRSU members also came to the realization that most, if not all, of their high school's professional staff positions were held by whites. At the same time, the students began to question the efficacy of their school's Social Studies and History curriculums, both of which had minimized, and in some instances, virtually ignored the contributions of the African American and Latino communities.¹⁰⁷ Hoping to amend such clear bias, Torres, Samuels and their BPRSU colleagues aired their grievances with Board of Education members at three separate meetings between September 22nd and October 6th, the last of which produced only limited results.

Having been rebuffed by their district's governing body, black and Latino students continued to meet in the weeks following, what they perceived to be, the failed October 6th public hearing. With only one of their nine demands approved by the board, Torres and Samuels spent the next two and half weeks drumming up in-school support for the remaining eight. To do this, the students crafted a variety of posters proclaiming their commitment to black awareness, black pride, and educational equality, all of which

¹⁰⁶ Torres interview, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Torres interview, 2005; Samuels interview, 2005; Samuels interview in *Race or Reason: The Bellport Dilemma*, 2000.

they hung on bulletin boards and wall throughout the building. This included roughly fifty placards with maxims such as the benign “Black...Black...Black...History Time” and “Correct History” as well as the more inflammatory such as “[George] Wallace for Principal: At Least We’d Know.”¹⁰⁸ Some of the group’s other posters recognized the achievements of African American and Latino people, particularly Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, both of whom BPRSU members had come to admire as teenagers.¹⁰⁹

BPRSU posters were not the only placards to grace the walls of Bellport High School, however, as several white students mocked the union’s calls for black pride with banners proclaiming “white power” and “white is beautiful.”¹¹⁰ At the same time, some of these posters encouraged physical violence against black and Latinos, with one exclaiming “Let’s have peace; let’s kill the niggers.” Such inflammatory signs and placards only exacerbated already intense racial and ethnic tensions which had been developing between various groups of students and their respective neighborhoods for several years. On Thursday, October 23 the accumulated effect of both white and black students’ political displays erupted into physical violence as white, black and Latino students “brawled” when members of each group removed and defamed the others’ posters. Unable to restore order, school administrators called local police to assist in closing the building early. Despite this police presence, no students were arrested or charged, as the disturbance was understood by officers as an “internal matter” to be

¹⁰⁸ “L.I. School Closes Over Racial Tension,” *The New York Times*, (25 October, 1969), P.16; Patricia Burnstein, “Bellport School Shut After Scuffles,” *Newsday*, (24, October 1969), P.9

¹⁰⁹ Samuels interview, 2005; Samuels interview in *Race or Reason: The Bellport Dilemma*, 2000.

¹¹⁰ *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, (1970) Part 32, P.4.

handled by school officials. On that Friday and Saturday, as the building remained closed to student traffic, faculty and staff held private meetings for this purpose.¹¹¹

On the following Monday, classes resumed and professional staff members provided each returning student a revised list of school rules and regulations, as well as an updated disciplinary code which listed the various punishments they could receive for each infraction of that code. At the same time, school administrators informed students that a full-time security guard and four community aides were to be hired, two of which would be white, and two of which would be black or Latino. While the aides were to be primarily hired to assist with hall patrol, they were also was to be brought on board as resources for students who wished to discuss their concerns.¹¹² Almost immediately, Torres, Samuels, and BPRSU members interpreted the more stringent conduct code and enhanced security measures as only a means to stifle their in-school political organizing. As Torres later explained, “we said, ‘well, this isn’t right.’ We’re making very legitimate demands, and instead of answering our demands, they basically told us ‘don’t get out of line or else this is what is going to happen.’” Frustrated with this turn of events, BPRSU members staged a walk-out from their classrooms and marched to the main office to speak with school principal, Thomas Feeney.¹¹³

Once there, the assemblage of fifty-five students, which included several sympathetic whites, listened as Torres reminded all of them that what they were doing was a “black, Puerto Rican, and white thing,” and if anyone disagreed with it they should

¹¹¹ L.I. School Closes Over Racial Tension,” *The New York Times*, (25 October, 1969), P.16; Patricia Burnstein, “Bellport School Shut After Scuffles,” *Newsday*, (24, October 1969), P.9

¹¹² “School Troubles Discussed,” *Newsday*, (25 October, 1969), P.12; Patricia Burnstein, “Tense HS Reopens After Race Talks,” *Newsday*, (27 October, 1969), P.13; Bellport Senior High School, “Suggested Sequence of Actions for Disciplinary Infraction,” (26 October, 1969), found in private collection of Jeanne R. Paisley, Richford, New York.

¹¹³ Torres interview, 2005.

leave. When nobody left, the students clustered in the hallway outside Feeney's office and demanded a private meeting with him. Instead of heeding their request, however, the school administrator ordered the students to disperse and return to their respective classrooms. Believing they had a right to be heard and a right to air their grievances, the teenagers sat down on the floor and held an impromptu sit-in demonstration in front of the main office door. Despite repeated threats of police intervention, the young protestors refused to budge until their appeal for a hearing had been granted. Unmoved by the students' tenacity, Feeney and district Superintendent Dr. Irwin Dingman summoned Suffolk County Police Officers to the scene, requesting that they clear the hall and quell the student disturbance.¹¹⁴

When police arrived, Torres recalled, they "came rushing in as though they were going into a riot," arresting he and Samuels first, as the two had been identified as the protest organizers. Once they had been removed, police officers then focused their attention on the remaining students – black, white, and Latino – all of whom were chased out of the building or forcibly removed, arrested and placed in the police paddy-wagon. Soon, however, officers "realized they [had] over-packed the paddy wagon" and "started taking people out" most of whom "were the whites that they had put in." This allegedly left only the black and Latino students inside. Moreover, as Torres and Samuels noted, many of these students were manhandled and "clubbed" by police officers, including one black female who was "grabbed by her breasts and brought down."¹¹⁵ At this, students

¹¹⁴ Torres interview, 2005; Interview (out-takes) with Zoilo "Pete" Torres by Betty Puleston and Lynne Jackson, video-recording, in possession of author, (1996); Interview with Zoilo "Pete" Torres by Betty Puleston and Lynne Jackson, dir., *Race of Reason: The Bellport Dilemma* (2000), video-cassette; For media depictions of the demonstration, see Kent Smith and Patricia Burnstein, "Bellport Shuts School After Scuffle," *Newsday*, (28 October, 1969), sec. 1, P. 4; Agis Salpukas, "16 L.I. Students Seized at Sit-in: Bellport Youths Are Arrest at School," *The New York Times*, (28 October, 1969), P.44.

¹¹⁵ Torres interview, 1996; Torres interview, 2000; Samuels interview, *Race or Reason*, 2000.

and police “scuffled” in the school parking lot while students did whatever they could to hinder police action. To this end, one student even laid down in front of the police paddy-wagon wheels to prevent it from leaving the school with students inside. Described as a morning scene of “chaos and commotion,” Bellport High School was silent again by noon, as non-protesting students were dismissed early and sixteen others were held by police – none of whom were white.¹¹⁶ Excluding Wednesday, the high school would remain closed throughout the week, as school officials and Board of Education members contemplated their official response to the classroom walk-out and subsequent sit-in demonstration.¹¹⁷

At their next scheduled public hearing, just one week after the BPRSU protest, board members focused solely upon answering black and Latino students’ list of demands. Having only offered them cursory thought in the recent past, the October 27th student action necessitated a swift resolution before similar demonstrations could once again disrupt normal school operations. To this end, board members authorized a district-wide Black Studies Program through which “special programs shall be designed and held in each school to include student assemblies, school-wide observations, special days and classroom situations devoted to or closely indicative of the worth of minority groups, including those of differing social, racial, religious, and intellectual backgrounds.” In addition, the board also approved the expanded inclusion of black and Latino history and culture in Social Studies and History curriculums, the hiring of five additional minority

¹¹⁶ Samuels interview, *Race or Reason*, 2000; Smith and Burnstein, “Bellport Shuts School After Scuffle,” *Newsday*, (28 October, 1969); “16 L.I. Students Seized at Sit-in: Bellport Youths Are Arrested at School,” *The New York Times*, (28 October, 1969).

¹¹⁷ Kent Smith and Patricia Burnstein, “Bellport School Closed 2 More Days,” *Newsday*, (30 October, 1969), P.15; See also, Kent Smith and Patricia Burnstein, “Bellport Race Issue Denied,” *Newsday*, (31 October, 1969), P.7, 29.

faculty members, as well as the hiring of a minority or bi-lingual guidance counselor. While the lowering of lunch prices was tabled for future consideration, board members also authorized two student-faculty committees, one which would focus upon district-wide Equal Educational Opportunity and another which would handle diversification of high school library holdings and the coordination of Black History Week. This latter committee was charged with providing board members with information regarding the feasibility of school holidays in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X's birthdays.¹¹⁸ With these concessions, BPRSU members' movement for in-school racial and ethnic equality had proven successful with the majority of its goals having been met.

Despite their achievements, however, Bellport remained a geographically and demographically divided place, with one side of the Long Island Railroad tracks plagued by impoverishment and limited access to resources, and the other which was much more affluent and comfortable. The maintenance of these two diverging realities did not disrupt the relative calm which characterized Bellport High School throughout the remainder of 1969. State analysts from New York State's Department of Education warned local residents that this lull would only prove temporary if North and South Bellport did not actively pursue remedies to acknowledge and alleviate the disparities which had historically set them apart from one another. To do this, state officials suggested a variety of methods to foster dialogue between black, white, and Latino residents regardless of age or socioeconomic background. This included, among others: the establishment of "an Office of School-Community Relations" the staff of which "should serve in an ombudsman or liaison capacity between community and school;" the use of "parlor

¹¹⁸*Meeting Minutes of the Board of Education: Central School District #4*, (3 November, 1969), 3-6; "Bellport OKs Most Student Demands," *Newsday*, (4 November, 1969), P.6.

meetings in the homes of residents” in which local adults could discuss in-school and community-wide issues and concerns with faculty and administrators; and, the development of a “community school” to be used as a “community center for continuing education” and other “leisure activities.” While the analysts’ report recognized that the majority of Bellport’s social issues were “beyond the scope of the school to solve,” as a shared space, the school “was a salient, vulnerable and an overt[ly] interracial agent of society.” In this role, it was noted, Bellport High School could serve as a “positive” force and unbiased arbiter between the two suburban neighborhoods and their residents.¹¹⁹

By the end of December, however, the high school had not yet flowered in this regard, as many of the approved BPRSU demands had still not been fully implemented to the students’ satisfaction. In a letter to the Board of Education dated December 29th, Torres, Samuels and several BPRSU members lamented the lethargic-nature of the student-faculty advisory committee that district officials had authorized in November, noting how it had accomplished little except “keep people busy and quiet.” In the same letter, BPRSU members also noted their frustration in regard to the board’s December 15th decision to declare Martin Luther King’s birthday an elective “religious” holiday for interested students. The authors explained their disenchantment with the decision.

If we judge Dr. King like that then [we] think that we should also judge Columbus, Washington and Lincoln like that also. Dr. King contributed as much and even more to society than Lincoln could ever have. He gave people – all people – something that Washington never could. It is only right that Dr. King’s birthday be declared a legal holiday and that all schools be closed in his honor on that day January 15.

¹¹⁹ Nordos and Sobel, “Report – Central School District #4 Study,” P. 18-22; Ed Lowe, “State Education Report Finds Bellport Still Divided by Bias,” *Newsday*, (6 January 1970), P. 3, 27.

Citing that roughly ten other Long Island high schools had already taken the lead in this regard, the letter's signatories noted that they were fully aware that board members had the power to close Bellport schools and the power to declare a district holiday.¹²⁰

Despite BPRSU members' displeasure, however, the Board of Education did not alter its decision, giving students the option of remaining home or attending school on January 15th. In preparation of the holiday, BPRSU members crafted a variety of poster displays in honor of Martin Luther King as well as Malcolm X and Stokeley Carmichael and posted them on bulletin boards throughout the school building. On Friday, January 16th, the presence of such banners and placards once again incited violence among students, as roughly one hundred whites, blacks and Latinos "scuffled" in school lavatories and school hallways throughout the early morning period. Just as they had in October, school administrators requested police assistance with closing the school and dismissing students for the remainder of the day.¹²¹ While the brawl resulted in no student arrests, its size and significance led district officials to close building for a full week of public hearings and administrative conferences to work out a solution to the apparent breakdown of in-school discipline.¹²²

While community adults debated such issues amongst themselves, a group of black, white and Latino teenagers began to meet separately at the home of Dennis and Betty Puleston, a local white couple whose property and guidance proved fundamental to high school student civil rights and environmental activism throughout the late 1960s and

¹²⁰ Pete Torres, Eric Le Sassier, Paulette Samuels, and Peggy Person, "Letter(s) to Dr. Dingman and the Board of Education," (29 December, 1969), found in private collection of Jeanne R. Paisley, Richford, New York.

¹²¹ Knut Royce and Brad O'Hearn, "Blacks, Whites Scuffle at Bellport HS," *Newsday*, (16 January, 1970); Ed Lowe and Don Smith, "Parents Meet on Bellport Fights," *Newsday*, (17 January, 1970), P. 5.

¹²² Lowe and Smith, "Parents Meet on Bellport Fights," *Newsday*, (17 January, 1970), P. 5; Kent Smith and Christopher Weber, "Bellport High Remains Closed," *Newsday*, (19 January, 1969), 3, 26;

early 1970s. Located along the Carmans River in the nearby hamlet of Brookhaven, the Puleston Farm, which was within walking distance of the high school, quickly became a uniquely shared space for high school students of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Similar to the local high school, Betty and Dennis Puleston's riverfront landscape served as one of the only places where youth from both neighborhoods came in contact with one another. At the same time, the property also served as a partial staging ground for both forms of high school student political activism which manifested in Bellport, with Dennis Puleston involving himself with Arthur Cooley and SEQ and Betty Puleston associating herself with the local student movement for racial equality. In large part, this was due to the varied and contrasting personal and political interests of both husband and wife. While the former had established himself as an expert naturalist, research scientist and environmental activist, the latter had been, as Little Rau characterized, "a hippie before there were hippies...who didn't care about what anyone else in the community thought about her [or] her family."¹²³ For Betty Puleston, whose own children were enrolled in Bellport High School in the 1969-1970 school year, the opening of her family farm to black, white and Latino youths as a safe and common space for cross-cultural communication, then, was an obvious choice.¹²⁴ The same can be said of her decision to invite her friend and political activist, Stan Hamilton, into her home as the protesting students' unofficial advisor that same year.

Based out of Jamaica, Queens, Hamilton first met Puleston through their mutual friend, the documentary film-maker George Stoney from New York University, who had

¹²³ Interview with Little Rau by Neil P. Buffett, (17 September, 2005); Interview with Arthur Cooley by Neil P. Buffett, (8 September 2006); Follow-up interview with Zoilo Torres by Neil P. Buffett, (21 February, 2010).

¹²⁴ William Nack and Maurice Swift, "Students Try to Lead the Way in Bellport," *Newsday*, (22 January, 1970), P.12.

worked with the black political organizer earlier in the decade on an independent film focusing on police and minority relations in New York City. As Stoney explained, Hamilton and Puleston quickly became life-long friends, having “got along like a train of cars” during the early sixties film project. In the aftermath of the mid-January racial tensions, Puleston invited the experienced community organizer to the area, hoping he could serve as an outside arbiter with whom local teens could identify and connect.¹²⁵ As Torres explained in 1996, however, many of “the black kids didn’t trust Stan at first...they thought he was going to possibly manipulate them.” Despite seeming “too good to be true” with “all the right answers,” Hamilton quickly won the students’ respect and admiration, regardless of their earlier apprehension.¹²⁶

This did not only include students members of the BPRSU, however, as a large number of white youth from North and South Bellport also congregated at the Puleston home in the weeks and months following the January 16th student brawl and subsequent school closings. Organized as the Better Relations Committee for Constructive Action (BRCCA), these students, the majority of which hailed from the more affluent Bellport Village, pledged to work alongside BPRSU members to alleviate racial, ethnic and socioeconomic bias in their school and in the greater community. At the same time, the principally white BRCCA also committed itself to bridging the two neighborhoods and fomenting constructive communication between all Bellport residents. To this end, both student groups hosted a variety of co-sponsored community meetings, coffee houses and press conferences with hopes of fomenting cross-cultural and cross-community dialogue. The youths also employed documentary film techniques they learned from Stoney,

¹²⁵ Interview with George Stoney by Neil P. Buffett, (21 September, 2005).

¹²⁶ Torres interview, 1996; Stoney interview, 2005.

Puleston and Hamilton, the three of whom sent students throughout the community with hand-held video cameras to film residents' differing positions on local tensions and neighborhood disunity.¹²⁷

Despite their coalition, however, members of the BPRSU and the newly formed BRCCA had experienced diverging social realities as residents of two extremely different Bellport neighborhoods. At various points throughout January, these differences bred contention between both student organizations, as BRCCA members focused their activism on fostering communication between the two neighborhoods, and BPRSU members rallied for a much more direct assault on local poverty and racial bias. On the evening of Wednesday, January 21st these tensions were caught on film as both groups held their first joint press conference with local news reporters at the Puleston farm. Having recently returned from studies at the State University of New York at Albany, Torres' older brother, Joseph, who had also attended the beleaguered suburban high school, opened the meeting with a prepared statement on behalf of the BPRSU and the larger black community.

We feel that the problem in Bellport High School goes far beyond the racial problems. The school administration does not make any provisions and refuses to recognize that there are poor students in the school. Most of the programs in the school are run by middle class people who have no idea of how to run a school properly for a school that has lower income students also. We want to change this oppressive system and we will not stand for anything less than the recognition of the poor and the solving of their problems.¹²⁸

Illustrating Torres' point, Paulette Samuels noted that she and many of her impoverished peers did not have the financial resources to compete academically in school, including home encyclopedias, dictionaries and other necessary reference materials. For these

¹²⁷ Stony interview, 2005; See Chuck Anderson, *Video Power: Grass Roots Television*, (New York: Praeger, 1975); Puleston and Jackson, *Race or Reason*, 2000.

¹²⁸ Joseph Torres, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 18, P. 13, (21 January, 1970).

students, many of whom held part-time jobs to help their families pay their bills, staying after school for extra help or to use library resources was virtually impossible in light of their other responsibilities.¹²⁹

Pete Torres further illustrated the level of class bias that black and Latino students faced in school, particularly in regard to the academic advice they received from Guidance Counselors and other faculty advisors. He explained.

I will go into the Guidance Department and I will say, 'I want to go to college.' They'll say "what college would you want to go to?" And I'll say something like Albany or Westbury, and they they'll look at my so-called economic background and say, 'well, I don't think that's so good for you, why don't you try Suffolk Community? You know what I mean? And you wind up going to Suffolk Community.

In Torres' estimation, the Guidance Department did not have his or his peers' best academic interests at heart. In many instances, he argued, black and Latino students were not even encouraged to apply to college; rather, he asserted, vocational programs or athletic scholarships were all the counselors would recommend to such youths. In these cases, he noted, those who were able to go to college on such scholarships rarely performed well academic due to the poor primary and secondary education they had received in a biased Bellport.¹³⁰

While BRCCA members sat quietly in support of the BPRSU leaders' comments, tensions between the students rose to the surface when Karen Dahl, a white youth from Bellport Village, noted that bringing local residents together and the re-opening of school were the committee's ultimate goals.¹³¹ Flustered, Torres interjected, explaining that

¹²⁹ Paulette Samuels, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 13, P. 13, (21 January, 1970).

¹³⁰ Pete Torres, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 13, P. 10, (21 January, 1969).

¹³¹ Karen Dahl, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 13, P. 5/ Part 14, P. 4-5, (21 January, 1969).

such a belief was the exact reason why he had not yet joined the BRCCA and why there were two separate student organizations and not just one. He continued.

Like I said before, I'm not going to answer any questions. Nor am I going to start a debate with anybody. I'm just going to state this clear. We're doing the same thing we've done before. Everybody talks about getting people together and you know, cooling things down, and that's a whole lot of shit. It really is a whole lot of shit. Because, if you're going to cool things down – the situation – then you might as well chalk it up and throw it away, because let me tell you, you chalk it up now and three weeks from now, they school is going to be burned down.¹³²

To Torres, who had been one of the principal initiators of the original student movement, his white counterparts had focused too much of their attention on touting community-wide “togetherness” and not enough time working on poverty in North Bellport. In his estimation, attempting to spread awareness in Bellport Village was of no import, since poverty and inequality would still exist in the northern hamlet despite village acknowledgement of its pervasiveness. To truly make a difference, he would later explain to BPRSU members privately, white students needed to “be working [with]in the poor community for the simple reason that the poor are the people who are going to carry out any change” in the Bellport area.¹³³

Regardless of any disagreements, however, members of both student groups presented a united front at their January 21st community meeting, which drew an eclectic crowd of roughly 250 residents, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, the Board of Education, and other displeased local residents. Scheduled to begin at 7pm, Stan Hamilton opened the meeting by reminding all attendees that they had “to agree to have the right to disagree” with one another if any progress was to be made in such a forum. Once in session, community members openly debated a variety of issues, including

¹³² Pete Torres, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 14, P. 7, (21 January, 1969).

¹³³ Pete Torres, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 5, P-5-7, (27 January, 1970).

school discipline, student safety, the efficacy of lower lunch prices, racial and ethnic relations between North and South Bellport, the inadequacy of several faculty and administrative staff members, and the breakdown of the educational process in the high school. While many of these issues had been discussed throughout the week in various Board of Education meetings and faculty and staff conferences, the students' community meeting offered residents – regardless of age, race or social station – a neutral site for each to air their grievances before one another.¹³⁴

Throughout the evening, the majority of those who spoke represented North and South Bellport's adult population, be they parents, teachers, school administrators or other frustrated community residents. As hosts of the event, however, several BPRSU and BRCCA members also took the opportunity to voice their thoughts and concerns, including senior student Littie Rau, who offered one of the more provocative statements of the evening. Responding to adult comments suggesting that white and minority students needed to find ways of getting along in school, Rau chastised everyone in the room for not doing enough to enhance neighborhood relations, stressing that students could not solve community problems by themselves. Standing before her parents and other adults, she explained her position.

I agree [that] we have to live together, but I don't want to go to school for five hours and learn how to live with Paulette [Samuels]. I want to learn how to live with her out of school. That's not what we're supposed to be learning – how to live with each other. You're throwing the whole burden of this on the white kids. You know, you're saying to me that I'm supposed to understand Paulette when she comes into school and she's speaking jive and this kind of stuff. Well, I don't want to know that in school. I want to know that when I am out on that street. I want to see her walking on that street. And that's a part of this whole problem in this community. You're throwing it in the school and expecting your kids to learn how to live with each other when you can't even live together in this town. And I

¹³⁴ William Nack and Maurice Swift, "Students Try to Lead the Way in Bellport," *Newsday*, (22 January, 1970), P.12; *Race or Reason*, 2000; *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 1, (21 January, 1970).

say that's the wrong approach to this whole problem. I've had it with trying to live with people in school. I want to learn how to live with people when I get out of school at 2:15. I don't see Paulette after 2:15, and you expect me to come in for five hours and learn to live with Paulette when my parents and the rest of the parents sitting around here, black and white, can't even live with each other? That's the wrong approach. I'm sorry, but that's the wrong approach.¹³⁵

By evening's end, Board of Education members agreed with Rau's summation of the divisiveness of their suburban school district as well as its feeder neighborhoods.

Characterizing Montauk Highway as a "brick wall" which separated North and South Bellport, Board President Charles Gould argued that divisions between both neighborhoods had to be dismantled if the community was to successfully move forward and become one.¹³⁶

On this front, board members promised to do what they could in the hopes of pacifying community youth and bridging the divide between the two neighborhoods. While Bellport High School remained closed for another full week following the community meeting, board members and school officials utilized the time to implement several of the original BPRSU demands. Indeed, when classes resumed on Wednesday, January 28th, five new African American faculty members were counted among Bellport's professional staff – four of whom were to serve as academic instructors, and one of whom was to serve as a Guidance Counselor for disaffected black and Latino youth. At the same time, school officials had devised a new elective course in Black and Latino Studies, which was to begin that morning and run for the duration of the spring semester. Faculty and staff had also been asked by the Board of Education to evaluate any and all possibilities of officially recognizing Black History Week in February, and

¹³⁵ Little Rau, *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 1, P. 9-10, (21 January, 1970); *Race or Reason*, 2000.

¹³⁶ *Race or Reason*, 2000.

any other upcoming holidays that were deemed relevant to African American and Latino students.¹³⁷ With the relatively quick implementation of these new initiatives the majority of the BPRSU's original list of demands had been satisfied by high school administrators and the school district's governing body.

Unfortunately, however, similar changes in inter-neighborhood relations would be less forthcoming than those in the high school, despite Charles Gould's public denunciation of the divided-nature of his community. While school board members certainly had the power to hire new faculty, appropriate additional funds for newly devised programs, and mandate a more diversified district curriculum and school holiday schedule, they could not amend the myriad structural inequalities which had long separated North and South Bellport. Neither could they weaken negative perceptions of the stigmatized hamlet or, for that matter, compel local residents to unite across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. Recognizing this unfortunate reality, BPRSU and BRCCA members continued to hold regular meetings at the Puleston Farm throughout the remainder of the 1969-1970 school year, with hopes of locating viable solutions to the problems of local poverty, racial bias, ethnic tension, and neighborhood disunity.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the numerous social, cultural and economic disparities between the two suburban neighborhoods ultimately proved too pervasive for the young activists to resolve on their own - without the willing participation of the entire community. Therefore, with the Board of Education's final approval of the BPRSU's

¹³⁷ Letter from Wallace F. Davidow (Board Member) to Neil P. Buffett, (13 June, 2005), in possession of the author; *Meeting of the Board of Education*, (26 January, 1970), P.3-4; Bellport Senior High School, *The Log: Yearbook*, 1970, P. 21; Rau interview, 2005.

¹³⁸ See *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, in possession of the author; *Race or Reason*, 2000.

demands in late January, interest in, and the efficacy of, high school student civil rights activism in Bellport High School slowly began to wane as the spring semester resumed.

Although, this reality did not signal the end of high school student social and political activity in Bellport, as the spring of 1970 slowly ushered in a new wave of teenaged political consciousness with the emergence of a heightened environmental awareness among members of the student body. While organized environmental activism would not fully manifest at Bellport High School until the following fall term, as the spring of 1970 progressed, students began to actively debate a host of ecologically-related issues in anticipation of the nation's first Earth Day, scheduled for April 22 of that year. Much of these conversations and debates took place between student members of teacher and environmentalist Arthur Cooley's Advanced Senior Biology class. As pupils of one of the principal founders of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Cooley's twenty-two graduating seniors were uniquely situated to be the first Bellport students to spread local awareness of not only the new holiday, but the various ecological hazards which had necessitated its founding. Interestingly enough and unbeknownst to them, much of these students' senior year activities in the spring of 1970 would ultimately prove significant to the later preservationist activities of Students for Environmental Quality.

Civil Rights, Earth Day, and the Seeds of Environmental Action

Having spent the first half of the 1969-1970 school year organizing the BRCCA, student leaders Littie Rau and Karen Dahl, along with twenty of their senior peers, spent the second half coordinating Bellport's first celebratory program in honor of Earth Day. Intended as a community-wide event, what was billed as an "Environmental Evening"

was scheduled for the evening of Wednesday, April 15th and held in various areas of the high school, including the cafeteria, auditorium, gymnasium and classrooms. Attended by more than six hundred local residents, the student-initiated event once more provided Bellport youth an opportunity to reverse roles and serve as community educators with an important message for their adult neighbors. This time, however, rather than Rau and her classmates focusing on local disunity and racial relations, they focused on society's misuse and disrespect for the natural world. With many of their teachers and parents in the audience, the students – the majority of whom hailed from science-oriented families in Bellport Village – performed a variety of ecologically-based satires and scenarios, all of which focused upon probable future outcomes of unchecked, manmade pollution as well as excessive use of vital natural resources. Many of these student-scripted acts were also reinforced by a host of professional lectures given by members of the school's science faculty, and other local ecologists and conservationists, many of whom were familiar with Long Island's natural environment and the various organic and inorganic threats posed to its most fragile locations.¹³⁹ As students in Art Cooley's advanced science program, all twenty two graduating seniors had become more than familiar with several such places – particularly the nearby Carmans River, which flowed through the Bellport community and out into Long Island's Great South Bay.

Located within walking distance of the high school, the relatively placid, estuarine waterway had, for several years, served as a unique “outdoor laboratory” for Art Cooley's pupils to acquire first hand knowledge of the various flora and fauna they discussed in his Biology and Marine Biology courses. At the same time, given its close

¹³⁹ Ed Lowe, “School Gets Into Pollution Act,” *Newsday*, (16 April, 1970); Alice Quatrochi, “Seniors Present ‘Environmental Evening,’” *The Long Island Advance*, (23 April, 1970).

proximity to Bellport Village, the river had also routinely served as a recreational space for local teenagers, many of whom had spent their youth swimming, fishing and canoeing upon its waters. In the spring of 1970, as Cooley's Advanced Senior Biology students planned their Earth Day-inspired educational event, they also conducted field research analyses of the river's diverse marine and land-based ecosystem as the basis of their individual and collective final projects for the year. To this end, each student spent the term studying one particular characteristic of the river basin, focusing on either a plant or animal species, or some other facet of the waterway's chemical or biological composition. With this research, each student then detailed their findings in a lab report, which included not only their analyses, but a variety of hand-drawn maps and diagrams as well. Upon submission, each of these final papers were then compiled together in one binder as the group's final class project – comprised of twenty-two separate, yet related, accounts of the Carmans' rich bio-diversity. As the semester came to a close that June, each senior class participant graduated from Bellport High School, thus leaving their amassed findings in their science teacher's possession.¹⁴⁰

Despite these senior students' ecologically-based activities in their final semester of high school, however, students such as Littie Rau and Karen Dahl had not considered themselves environmental activists or their school work an outgrowth of high school student environmentalism. Unlike future students who would choose to organize and, later, join Students for Environmental Quality (SEQ) as an optional and politically-inspired extra-curricular activity, students in Cooley's Advanced Senior Biology course were simply that: graduating seniors in an advanced science course completing class

¹⁴⁰ See Bellport High School Advanced Biology Class, "A Study of the Carmans River Basin," (1970), found in SEQ Files, held by Daniel O'Connor, SEQ Advisor, Bellport Senior High School, Long Island.

assignments for a grade. While future cohorts of science-oriented youth would elect to engage in environmental activism beginning in the following fall term, students in the 1969-1970 school year, as well as in years prior, had not. As Rau noted in 2010, “the issues of the day were not environmental – they were social all the way” such as racial, ethnic and socioeconomic discrimination. When asked if she or fellow BRCCA member Karen Dahl would have joined an environmental group such as SEQ, the former student leader dismissed the possibility, noting that such activism was “not where it was at” socially or politically in Bellport at the time.¹⁴¹ For these students and their classmates, their, class-based activities and assignments throughout the spring of 1970 were not performed by intentional teenaged environmentalists.

This does not mean, however, that the fruit of their labor was not uniquely instrumental to the environmental campaigns waged by Students for Environmental Quality in the academic school years which followed. Indeed, as the next section explores in detail, in the years after SEQ formed in the fall of 1970, preservation of the Carmans River corridor became the group’s most significant agenda item in the first half of the new decade. Similar to their predecessors, members of SEQ had also spent their adolescent years along the banks of the local waterway, having developed academic and personal relationships with its environs through class-related field research and youthful recreation. As a relatively undeveloped area, the Carmans River corridor, like any post-World War II rural and suburban area, faced the possibility of future residential and/or commercial development. Fearful of the consequences such tangible change could yield ecologically and aesthetically, SEQ members would spend the early 1970s lobbying state

¹⁴¹ Email communication between Neil P. Buffett and Littie Rau, (27 June, 2006); Interview with Littie Rau by Neil P. Buffett, (18 May, 2010); Email communication between Neil P. Buffett and Littie Rau, (9 July, 2010).

legislators to preserve the river basin under New York State Environmental Law. To this end, SEQ members routinely utilized the river-based research performed by Rau, Dahl and their classmates in Advanced Senior Biology as a partial basis for their campaign to preserve the Caramans' fragile marine and land-based ecosystem.

While both sets of local teenagers certainly shared similar, yet also varying academic and personal experiences along the Carmans River corridor, they also shared similar social worlds as residents of the more affluent neighborhood in Bellport. As the following analysis of SEQ and its preservationist accomplishments reveals, nearly all of the students who claimed membership in the environmentalist group had also spent time in Art Cooley's advanced Biology and Marine Biology courses, and hailed from white, middle to upper-class families from Bellport Village.¹⁴² As Cooley has routinely explained, the majority of these science-oriented students were "bright" and "college-bound" - many of whom were locally known as "lab kids," due to their parents' prestigious positions as university-trained research scientists at Brookhaven National Laboratory. While not every environmentally-engaged student in SEQ or in Cooley's advanced science courses could lay claim to these social roots, the vast majority of Bellport's youth who participated in environmental activism throughout the early 1970s could, in fact, do so.¹⁴³ In contrast with student-led civil rights movement, then, high school-based environmentalism in Bellport would evolve as a much less socially diverse form of youth political activism.

¹⁴² See *The Log: The Bellport High School Yearbook (1971-Present)* for pictures of SEQ and its membership composition over the years – housed at Bellport High School, Bellport, New York.

¹⁴³ Interview with Arthur Cooley by Christopher C. Sellers, (7 April, 1997); Interview with Arthur Cooley by Neil P. Buffett, (8 September, 2006); Email communication between Neil P. Buffett and Arthur Cooley, (16 July, 2010).

In many ways, while this movement's exclusivity did not necessarily result from intentional discrimination at Bellport High School or within the wider Bellport community, it can certainly be interpreted as a fruit of structural inequality between North and South Bellport. As Black and Puerto Rican Student Union founder Pete Torres noted, while minority students were aware of local, state and national environmentalism as a growing concept, working to alleviate racial prejudice and socioeconomic disparity in school and in North Bellport drove his and his fellow BPRSU members' political activism during their tenure at Bellport High School.¹⁴⁴ For these students, their daily lives in school and at home were too consumed by their commitment to advancing social justice for them to also cultivate an interest in local ecology or the budding environmental movement.¹⁴⁵ This general lack of interest was also fueled by the students' limited exposure to the very natural places that "Cooley Kids" and SEQ members researched and, later, labored to protect throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Paulette Samuels explained, black and Latino youths did not spend time along the Carmans River or other such natural places, noting how "the [Bellport] Marina and the river were the other side of the tracks," a fact which prevented many black and Latino youths from experiencing them first hand.¹⁴⁶

At the same time, few, if any, of these students spent time in Art Cooley's field-based, advanced Biology and Marine Biology Courses, which also limited their exposure to the natural environment in and around Bellport. While in some cases this lack of registration may have been based upon student choice, in others, it was surely based upon students' placement upon Bellport's alleged "tracking" system, which placed pupils in

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Zoilo "Pete" Torres by Neil P. Buffett, (21 February, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ Email exchange between Littie Rau and Neil P. Buffett, (27 June, 2006); Torres interview, 2010.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Paulette Samuels (Brooks) by Neil P. Buffett, (22 February, 2010).

either an academic, college-bound program or a non-academic, vocational program. Throughout the 1969-1970 school year, BPRSU members had argued against the maintenance of this unequal system, noting how one had typically been reserved for white students while the other had been typically reserved for non-white minorities from North Bellport.¹⁴⁷ If true, such a system would certainly have limited minority access to the types of advanced science courses which, beginning in the fall of 1970, inspired students to join SEQ and become environmentally active on behalf of the fragile ecosystems they discussed in class.

As the next section illustrates, then, the high school student environmental movement which manifested in Bellport throughout the early 1970s was not nearly as diverse as the Civil Rights Movement which had preceded it. High school student environmentalists were, however, just as successful as BPRSU members in achieving their stated goals. In many ways, as an analysis of SEQ's first four years highlights, student environmentalism in Bellport was granted much more in-school credibility and community-wide respect than its social justice predecessor. Unlike the BPRSU, Students for Environmental Quality was officially recognized by school and district administrators as a legitimate, high school student club, which was assigned an official faculty advisor and was celebrated for the preservationist work it conducted. While this dissimilar treatment can certainly be attributed to the benign-nature of SEQ's non-disruptive activities, it can also be attributed to these students' social standing in the local community as well as the backing they received from Cooley, who fully endorsed their cause. At the same time, the budding environmental movement had, by the late 1960s, also been generally accepted by most Americans as a consensus issue which –

¹⁴⁷ See *Bellport Senior High School Transcripts*, Part 13, P. 8-13, (21 January, 1970).

unlike previous movements centered on race, ethnicity, class, gender, or war – was, at least in theory, less likely to threaten the status quo.¹⁴⁸ Coupled with SEQ members' individual and collective identity as beneficiaries of postwar affluence, the moderate-nature of their activism proffered their local movement the leeway their civil rights counterparts would have never been granted.

Beginning in the fall of 1970, this relative latitude allowed members of SEQ to involve themselves in a variety of environmentally-related issues on the local, regional and state level. To this end, student preservationists hosted eco-friendly information sessions for students and other community residents, advocated for the reduction and recycling of waste, conducted activism-related scientific research during normal school hours, and, lobbied local and state representatives for environmental protection bills. In its first four years as an official organ, SEQ successfully challenged local businesses to limit contamination of their natural surroundings, supported and witnessed passage of legislation in defense of Marine Mammals in New York waterways, and, served as the principal leaders in the roughly three year campaign to stifle residential development along the Carmans River. As the following pages illustrate in detail, the latter of these three issues proved the most significant and successful of the organization's early years as an environmental group.

In that time, group members spent countless hours laboring on various activities pertaining to the river, including: conducting studies of its unique plant and animal communities; drafting their findings into environmental reports for use by state agencies; publishing histories of the river for local readership; hosting canoe races and other recreational activities to draw attention to the river; and, meeting with local residents in

¹⁴⁸ Rothman, 85.

order to gather signatures on petitions which they sent to Albany. The goal of SEQ members and their local support system, which included adult members of organizations such as, among others, the League of Women Voters and the Environmental Defense Fund, was to compel New York State legislators to include the Carmans River corridor under the state's Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act (WSRRA). Enacted in 1972 as an amendment to New York's 1970 Environmental Conservation Law, the WSRRA had been originally intended as a means to prevent residential, commercial or industrial development along waterways deemed worthy of preservation. Written with the express purpose of preserving rivers in New York's upstate Adirondack Park and the Catskill Mountains, the question at hand from 1973 to 1974 was whether this particular estuary on Long Island met the specifications that would allow for its inclusion, as a river, under the 1972 law.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, in addition to analyzing the emergence of SEQ in the 1970-1971 school year, the pages which follow will also examine the group's multi-year campaign which led to the Carmans' protection under New York State Environmental Law.

High School Student Environmental Activism, 1970-1974

In order to fully appreciate the impetus which led to the founding of Students for Environmental Quality in the fall of 1970, it is important that one understand the preceding fourteen year period, which began with Art Cooley's first year teaching at Bellport High School in 1956. It was in this first year as an educator that Cooley met and become close friends with Dennis Puleston, another local naturalist and scientist who was thirty years his senior. An avid bird watcher in his free time, Cooley quickly learned from colleagues that the esteemed Puleston was also a devoted bird enthusiast. Just weeks into his tenure, Cooley introduced himself to the elder scientist, and the two quickly became

¹⁴⁹ Cooley interview, Buffett.

very close friends. Soon thereafter, the two were “birding” together regularly on the weekends. While on one of these early bird-watching trips, Cooley remembers Puleston asking whether it would be feasible to invite some students to accompany them: “he said, ‘it’s kind of a shame, we have all this room in the car, we should take some kids along.’” Cooley agreed, made the offer to his classes, and found that he “didn’t have any trouble filling a car.” Within a few weeks, the two men were chaperoning “two or three cars filled with students every weekend for about a half a day.” In the years which followed, the sites visited included several local Long Island favorites, including Montauk Point, Jones Beach, Yaphank Woods, the Carmans River, and Moriches Inlet.¹⁵⁰

Such trips were not restricted to destinations on Long Island, however. Cooley and Puleston also took students on several trips to Canada, as well as to various places in the U.S., including the properties they co-owned in New Hampshire and Florida. These adventures almost always included some type of educational component, including bird-watching, bird-banding, and ecological studies of the area’s flora and fauna, which students would chart, map, and detail in scientific reports and journals. Students who typically went on these trips tended to be those who had expressed some sort of interest in nature, had a forte for the physical sciences, excelled academically, and hailed from families associated with Brookhaven National Laboratory. To be sure, the vast majority

¹⁵⁰ Cooley interview, Buffett; Arthur Cooley, interview with Christopher Sellers, 7 April 1997; All SEQ members interviewed distinctly remember participating in the bird-watching expeditions, see Interview with Elizabeth Shreeve by Neil P. Buffett, (14 September, 2006); Interview with Nancy Shellabarger by Neil P. Buffett, (28, August 2006); Interview with Nancy Sailor-Phillips by Neil P. Buffett, (31 August, 2006); Interview with Ronald Rozsa by Neil P. Buffett, (1 September 2006); Interview with Linda Jensen by Neil P. Buffett, (5 September 2006); Interview with Nina Herrera by Neil P. Buffett, (13 September 2006); Interview with John Jensen by Neil P. Buffett,(15 September 2006); and, Interview with Pamela Borg/Carista Rosen by Neil P. Buffett,(19 September 2006).

of these youth were from Bellport Village, sharing the same social standing and relative affluence enjoyed by their successors who would organize and join SEQ years later.¹⁵¹

In many ways, these students who, from 1956 onward, became known as the “Cooley Kids,” were some of the best and the brightest that Bellport High School had to offer. In fact, most, if not all of them, had worked with Cooley in the classroom, taking various courses such as Advanced Biology, and, after he participated in a National Science Foundation Marine Science program in 1962, Marine Biology.¹⁵² Through their interaction in the classroom, which was reinforced with Cooley and Dennis Puleston in the field, relationships that would one day lead to the formation of the SEQ began to form. When Bellport High School closed for summer vacation each year, most “Cooley Kids” opted to spend their time in the teacher’s Summer Maine Biology program, which entailed morning in-class lectures and field work in the afternoons.¹⁵³ As former student and SEQ member Nancy Sailor recalled, “it was very hands on...you know, I’ll never forget this...we would wade out into the bay and you know grab a mussel or grab a scallop and eat it, whatever.” Such experiences, according to Sailor, were “inspiring,” as Cooley “just inspired the kids around him to, you know, love nature and to want to do something about protecting the environment.”¹⁵⁴ This inspiration to protect the environment, not only stemmed from their experiences with Cooley as a teacher, but also from Cooley and Puleston’s positions as environmentalists and co-founders of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).

¹⁵¹ Cooley interview, Buffett; Cooley interview, Sellers; Shreeve interview; Shellabarger interview; Sailor-Phillips interview; Rozsa interview; Jensen interview; Herrera interview; Jensen interview; and, Borg interview.

¹⁵² Cooley interview, Buffett.

¹⁵³ Sailor-Phillips interview; Shreeve interview; Rozsa interview; Cooley interview, Buffett; Shellabarger interview.

¹⁵⁴ Sailor-Phillips interview.

Throughout the late 1960s, students knew that the two men were key figures in the budding environmental movement, both on the local and on the national levels. It was no secret that their two mentors were key participants in the founding of and the projects undertaken by the Brookhaven Town Natural Resources Committee (BTNRC), a local environmental organization founded in 1965, composed of community members, students, and academics. By 1967, the BTNRC evolved into the EDF, which eventually grew in size and significance, becoming what many scholars have labeled one of the “group of ten” mainstream environmental organizations. Throughout the 1960s, however, both incarnations of the organization worked on various environmental projects across Long Island, including (among others) wetlands protection, reduction of duck farm pollutants, and forcing a successful ban on the use of DDT.¹⁵⁵ For the students, the realization that Cooley and Puleston had been involved in such activities fueled their own desires to become active as well. As one SEQ founder noted, “it was exciting for the high school kids to read that stuff in the paper and realize that someone who was standing in front of your class was actually involved in it.”¹⁵⁶ For many, including Nancy Shellabarger, this realization was one of the catalysts which inspired them to begin thinking about what they could do for the environment in their own lives as citizens and students.

The students, however, were not only influenced by what they learned in school, on bird-watching expeditions, or by what they learned about the BTNRC and the EDF from Cooley and Puleston. Those who were in high school in 1970 had lived through the

¹⁵⁵ Cooley interview, Buffett; Cooley interview, Sellers; Dennis Puleston, interview with Christopher Sellers, 23 September 1996; Sellers, “Body, Place and the State,” 1999; Myra Gelband, *Brookhaven Town Natural Resources Committee, A Call For Action* unpublished paper, 16 May 1969, Environmental Defense Archive: Arthur Cooley Papers, Special Collections Department, SUNY Stony Brook.

¹⁵⁶ Shellabarger interview.

1960s – a period which has been characterized by sociologist Todd Gitlin as *years of hope* and *days of rage*.¹⁵⁷ They had witnessed the anti-war movement unfold on television and in nearby New York City. They had encountered issues of race, ethnicity and class in their own divided community, while at the same time they had all heard and read stories of similar rights-based movements elsewhere. In addition, they had also experienced the first Earth Day in April, 1970, with many of them participating in local garbage clean-ups while others attended their school’s first “Environmental Evening” with family, friends, and other local residents. As former student and SEQ member Linda Jensen noted, “we all got interested in the environment and also in the greater world at the same time...and there was a lot going on in the world at that time.”¹⁵⁸ Coupled with their academic and personal experiences with Cooley and Puleston, the students who would form SEQ in the fall of 1970 were certainly inspired by the changing social and political world in which they were raised.

Depending on who is asked, however, the genesis story of SEQ varies, from students who remember an informal organizing meeting in the back of a school bus in the summer of 1970, to those, including Cooley, who remember it as one of his suggestions. To the impartial observer, it would not be unreasonable to believe that both recollections could in some way be true. Ronald Rozsa, SEQ’s founding chairman, recalled discussing the possibility of an environmental group while on a field trip in Cooley’s summer Marine Biology course. As Rozsa explained, their “very last trip was to Montauk Point and on the return trip a small group of us sitting in the back of the bus devised the concept for the Students for Environmental Quality.” He continued.

¹⁵⁷ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).

¹⁵⁸ Linda Jensen interview; Shreeve interview.

So its origins lie in that return trip, probably August of 1970. So, when classes resumed in September, and I was a senior then, I set up the first meeting and I guess by default I became the first president. Not that we had elections or any such back then, you know, it was the initial organization. So, that was the first time that SEQ ever met.¹⁵⁹

Cooley remembers the group's beginnings, however, springing from Rozsa's concern for Swan Lake in East Patchogue, which he had noticed was being polluted by oil draining from a nearby Dodge dealership. Hoping to stop the pollution, Cooley, Rozsa and other interested students decided to write a letter in which they relayed what they had discovered to the dealership's management team. For both Cooley and his students, forming an organization for this purpose seemed obvious, as both parties believed that it would give their argument and their letter much more credibility. As Cooley noted, "one student didn't like to be just one student, so we thought, okay, we'll make an organization." In some sense, the teacher envisioned that SEQ would mirror his own environmental action committee – as a sort of unofficial youth-based affiliate of the EDF.¹⁶⁰ From the 1970 forward then, the "Cooley Kids" were organized as a genuine environmental action group within which they were able to employ what they learned in class on behalf of local places such as Swan Lake in Patchogue. By the end of their first term as a group, the students had successfully convinced Dodge representatives to "clean up their act" and halt their pollution of the local waterway.¹⁶¹

It wasn't that long before SEQ members were once again lobbying for environmental preservation in the local Long Island area, as student members focused their efforts on marine mammals protection in the spring of 1971. Having learned of several harbor seals which had been shot and killed by fishermen in the waters off

¹⁵⁹ Rozsa interview.

¹⁶⁰ Cooley interview, Buffett; Cooley interview, Sellers; Rozsa interview.

¹⁶¹ Cooley interview, Buffett; Cooley interview, Sellers.

Moriches' Inlet, students in Cooley's Advanced Biology class broached the subject several times before it was relegated to SEQ as an extra-curricular activity so as to not politicize the classroom. In this way, interested students could decide, as Cooley explained, "what ought to be done about it" in a forum in which "they had their own agenda, and they discussed what issues they wanted to work on."¹⁶² Throughout the spring of 1971, SEQ members sought ways to lobby their state representatives to protect seals and other marine mammals in all New York State waterways. After some initial investigating, the students learned that a bill intended to protect marine life had been introduced in the state legislature in 1965, but ultimately failed due to a lack of support. Six years later, New York State Senate Member Bernard Smith introduced a similar bill, and SEQ members pledged their support for the new piece of legislation.

To ensure enough support, SEQ members prepared informational packets to be sent to over one hundred organizations throughout the state. In a cover letter signed by Rozsa and fellow founding member, John Jensen, SEQ asserted the sensibility of protecting harbor seals, noting that they posed "no threat to commercial fishing industry since their numbers are low" and "there is no sport in hunting them since they may be approached easily within close shooting range." Moreover, they explained, "the harbor seal cannot damage or be caught in modern fish traps since the mouths of the traps are too small."¹⁶³ Along with the letter, SEQ members enclosed several petitions for target organizations to distribute to their registrants, local residents, and other interested

¹⁶² Cooley interview, Buffett.

¹⁶³ Ronald Rozsa and John H. Jensen. Letter to Senator Bernard Smith and Assemblyman Peter J. Costigan, et al, 17 March 1971. Arthur Cooley Collection, SEQ, Bellport Senior High School.

parties.¹⁶⁴ These efforts ultimately paid off, leading to the 1971 passage of Senator Smith's bill in the New York State Senate.

The State Assembly's version of the bill, however, failed to survive the 1971 legislative session. Undeterred, SEQ members, Smith, and newly elected Democratic Assemblyman William Bianchi applied more political pressure the following year, leading to passage of a state law banning the killing of harbor seals and other endangered marine mammals as well. As Cooley explained, "that was the first time that students had largely recognized [a] problem, proposed a piece of legislation and got it signed." The federal government passed the Marine Mammals Protection Act later that same year, possibly in response to similar actions on the state level. By 1972, SEQ had successfully lobbied for state legislation, and quite possibly influenced the federal government's environmental agenda as well.¹⁶⁵ Most importantly, as their advisor noted, SEQ members "learned a hell of a lot about government" on the local, state, and regional levels.¹⁶⁶ Throughout the two year period which followed, these political lessons would prove useful in their quest to enact similar protective legislation in defense of the Carmans River corridor.

To this end, SEQ members and their eager advisor turned to existing New York State Environmental Law in order to preserve the local waterway they had come to know and revere as science students and as local adolescents. While New York State legislators had already approved an extensive Environmental Conservation Law in the spring of 1970, their 1972 session witnessed its expansion to include not only Marine Mammals,

¹⁶⁴ Paul M. Kelsey, "Youth and the Environment," *The Conservationist* (August-September, 1971), 32-33, Arthur Cooley Collection, SEQ, Bellport Senior High School; Cooley interview, Buffett; Cooley interview, Sellers.

¹⁶⁵ Cooley interview, Buffett; Cooley interview, Sellers; and, Kelsey, 1971.

¹⁶⁶ Cooley interview, Sellers.

but also endangered river systems which possessed “outstanding natural, scenic, historic, ecological and recreational values.” Under what became known as the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act (WSRRA) of 1972, such rivers were to be kept in their natural state, free from unnecessary human manipulation as well as residential, commercial and industrial development. Without approval of New York State’s Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), created in 1970, homeowners would no longer be free to improve or develop those properties that ran along river corridors deemed worthy of preservation.¹⁶⁷ While some rivers were included in the bill upon its passage, the new legislation also allowed for the inclusion of other rivers not yet protected, especially if they were in a free flowing condition, in a natural state, met specific length and water quality requirements and were located within a certain distance from public thoroughfares. Believing the Carmans River to be a perfect candidate for preservation under the law, Cooley and his students were eager to lobby for its inclusion.

As humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argued, “what begins as undifferentiated space *becomes* place [emphasis added] as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”¹⁶⁸ Over the years, the ten-mile long river, which flowed past many of their homes and through many of their neighborhoods, had become an important place for Cooley and his students. Certainly, their proximity to the Carmans allowed easy access for them to ascribe value upon it and to develop a relationship with its environs. Throughout their youth, SEQ members and their friends had used the waterway recreationally, for boating,

¹⁶⁷ *Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System* Title 27, New York State Environmental Conservation Law, 15-2701 - 15-2723 found in *New York Consolidated Law Service: Annotated Statutes with Forms, Environmental Conservation Law, Articles 15 to 22* Vol. 12A, (Rochester: The Lawyers Co-operative, 1982), 206.

¹⁶⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6, quoted in Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 8.

canoeing, and fishing. Moreover, Cooley and Dennis Puleston had routinely “used the Carmans as an outdoor laboratory,” having brought students on field trips to watch birds, band birds, and to study the unique flora and fauna. At the same time, it was not uncommon for the “Cooley Kids” to assist Puleston with his annual bird count that charted bird migration patterns. This usually took place on his riverside property along the Carmans, where he had overseen a bird banding station for several years.¹⁶⁹ As former SEQ member Pamela Borg noted, “Elizabeth [Shreeve] and I would get up, pre-dawn, during most of eleventh and mostly twelfth grade, and go to Dennis’ house, and he had these big nets out to catch the birds in the marshes, and we were very devoted.”¹⁷⁰ Through their work on Puleston’s farm, and by studying the river’s ecology with Cooley during school hours and on the weekends, students came to understand the Carmans River as a natural place which needed to be protected from future development.

By the early 1970s, the students’ fear of development along the river was well-founded. In the years following World War II, the population of American suburbs had grown significantly, from 27 million in 1940 to over 76 million by 1970. Locally, in Suffolk County, the population had risen to over one million, while the population in Yaphank, Patchogue, North Patchogue, East Patchogue, Bellport Village, and North Bellport, villages and hamlets near the river, had increased by roughly 6,000, 3,000, 3,000, 2,000, 600, 1,500 (respectively) between 1960 and 1970.¹⁷¹ Yet, despite this

¹⁶⁹ Cooley interview, Buffett; Linda Jensen interview; Borg interview; Shreeve interview; Arnold Rubin, “Lifeways, Quality of Life: How to Save a River,” *Senior Scholastic* (16 January 1975), 4-7.

¹⁷⁰ Borg interview, Buffett.

¹⁷¹ Arnold Rubin, “Lifeways, Quality of Life: How to Save a River,” *Senior Scholastic* (16 January 1975), 5; *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board*, Vol. 1, “Number of Inhabitants,” (1971), 20-21; See also: Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), P. 4. Jackson notes that by 1980, 40% or over 100 million Americans lived in suburban communities; In *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New

phenomenal growth, by the early 1970s, the lands bordering the river had only experienced sporadic and small-scale development, and were still considered to be in their natural, un-manipulated state. Still, speculative interest in riverside property was allegedly growing around the same time that New York passed the WSRRA. According to an article in *Senior Scholastic*, the threat of private and commercial growth was grave, given that land speculators had begun lobbying town supervisors to allow for more expansive construction throughout the area.¹⁷² After roughly twenty-five years of suburban growth and development on Long Island, there was no guarantee that the Carmans River corridor would be spared without some form of state intervention.

Movements for state intervention, however, were not limited to SEQ, the Carmans River, or to suburban Long Island. On the state and national levels, environmentally-conscious organizations had been lobbying for government-mandated land-use regulations throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Environmental Historian Adam Rome has argued, “land-use programs were responses to a variety of concerns” including “the far-reaching environmental effects of power plants, airports, strip mines, and oil refineries.” Yet, the most destructive force upon the natural environment had been suburban sprawl with its “construction of subdivisions and shopping centers” which had replaced the natural vegetation that had once blanketed rural America. By the early 1970s, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, California, Vermont, Maine, Florida, Oregon and New York had all passed legislation which gave state governments more authority in controlling state and local land-uses. From 1968 to 1973, U.S Congress members debated the importance of and possibilities for a federal land-use law, but failed to pass any such

York: Basic Books, 1987), Robert Fishman notes that between 1950 and 1970 American suburbs grew by 85 million people (182).

¹⁷² Rubin, 5.

legislation. Nevertheless, during various Senate hearings on the subject, witnesses repeatedly warned legislators “about the impact of uncontrolled suburban development.”¹⁷³ Living in suburban Long Island, SEQ members were cognizant of the danger that future development would pose to the Carmans River as well as the marine and land-based ecosystem it had fostered.

Intent on saving the river, SEQ members enthusiastically researched the WSRRA, though they realized rather quickly that that their goal would not be easily achieved. According to the law, for a new river to be considered for inclusion, new state legislation had to be passed which designated them “study” rivers. SEQ members realized they would need bi-partisan support in the state legislature to force passage of such a bill, and once again turned to Democratic Assemblyman William “Bill” Bianchi, who, like them, lived in close proximity to the Carmans River.¹⁷⁴ Unlike with the Marine Mammals Protection Act, however, Bianchi did not believe that enough popular support existed for the students’ new cause. Without it, he knew his best efforts in the Republican-controlled State Assembly would fail, especially since protection of the Carmans River would certainly infringe upon property rights in the local area. SEQ members did not have to wait very long, however, before the South Brookhaven chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV) learned of their new project and offered some tips on how to attract local attention and public support.¹⁷⁵

To this end, members of the LWV offered a twofold plan of action. First, chapter president Regina David publicly challenged SEQ to a canoe race which was to take place

¹⁷³ Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 164-170, 450-457; Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 225-230, 236-247.

¹⁷⁴ I. William Bianchi, interview with Neil P. Buffett, 29 September 2006; Cooley interview, Buffett;

¹⁷⁵ Rubin, 6.

on the river itself. Second, a public meeting was scheduled for the following week, at which time Puleston, and members of both the SEQ and the LWV were to inform the community of the river's ecological importance as well as the threat posed by possible development along its shoreline. Both organizations hoped for a large local turn-out.¹⁷⁶ As they had expected, the March 18th canoe race garnered significant public attention, drawing hundreds of local residents who stood along the banks to view the event through a light snow. As the spectators cheered, SEQ members Mike Butler, Elizabeth Shreeve and Gail Miller crossed the finish line first, beating their LWV competitors, and garnering the necessary public support Bianchi had requested.

Even with public support, however, Bianchi was repeatedly stonewalled in his attempts to have the Carmans defined as a "study river." Upon reflection, the retired Assemblyman attributed this to partisan politics on the part of the Assembly's Republican Majority of the early 1970s, particularly that of Assembly Speaker Perry Duryea.

According to Bianchi:

The Republicans ran a very tight ship and they didn't let any Democratic bills get out, and they didn't let us do anything at all. And it was my first time doing all of this. So, I put in the bill, and it went to the Environmental Committee, and the Chairman of the Environmental Committee, a good friend of Duryea, that's why he was there, and I knew I'd have a hard time getting the bill out of committee.¹⁷⁷

In early April, however, Republican Clarence D. Lane, Chairman of the Environmental Conservation Committee (ECC), offered Bianchi the chance to present his case to fellow committee members, with the understanding that if voted upon, his bill would surely go down in defeat. As Bianchi recalled, the chairman noted that since the Carmans bill was sponsored by the Democratic Party, it could not be passed by the Republicans. Hoping to

¹⁷⁶ "Public Meeting Mar. 22 On Scenic River Bill," *The Long Island Advance*, 15 March 1973, P. 1, Sec. 1.

¹⁷⁷ Bianchi interview.

once again sway public opinion in his, as well as SEQ's favor, Bianchi invited reporters from *Newsday* to one of his presentations on the Carmans River, in which, as he explained, the Republicans allowed him to "get up, show my map of the river, tell everybody why they should vote for it, [and] do my little pitch" before it was disavowed by the Majority.¹⁷⁸ In the related *Newsday* article the following morning, Bianchi and fellow legislator Peter Berle were quoted as labeling the full Assembly's failure to support Carmans River bill an example of "'unabashed politics,'" which they asserted was "'consistent with Republican attempts to politicize the environment.'" Before the legislative meeting had adjourned, the two assemblymen had urged an up or down vote, but Republican Party leadership had "adamantly refused." For the Republicans, denial of the bill, regardless of its merit, had been a foregone conclusion, and by curbing a final vote they were simply "'trying to be nice'" to the bill's sponsors.¹⁷⁹

On April 19th, just three days before the nation's third Earth Day celebration, Bianchi relayed this information to the students, noting that if the legislation was not passed by May, he would need to reintroduce the bill in following legislative session.¹⁸⁰ SEQ members immediately recognized the implications of such a delay. In a 1975 interview with *Senior Scholastic*, SEQ member John Sailor recalled that the organization was aware that something drastic needed to be done "'before land developers had a chance to build.'"¹⁸¹ It was also clear that the students would need to dramatize their cause once again to force the legislature to act. Bianchi suggested that an SEQ bicycle trip from Long Island to the state capital in Albany might draw just enough media

¹⁷⁸ Bianchi interview.

¹⁷⁹ Jon Margolis, "Bill to Save a Scenic River is Sinking," *Newsday*, 11 April 1973.

¹⁸⁰ "Bianchi Discusses Conservation Bills with SEQ Students at BHS," *The Long Island Advance*, 19 April 1973, P. 1, 6.

¹⁸¹ Rubin, 5.

attention to force his Republican colleagues to act in favor of the river. Recognizing that the students needed to “embarrass [the opposition] into doing something,” Bianchi urged Sailor and Mike Butler to “take a bottle of water from the river and...bike it all the way to Albany,” a venture which, he knew, would garner significant press coverage at both ends of the unique journey.¹⁸² As predicted, early on the morning of Saturday, April 21, 1973, members of the local press met Sailor and Butler at Squassux Landing on the Carmans River to photograph them collecting the river water which they planned to present to the Republican leadership when they reached their destination.¹⁸³

Over the next four days, the two teenagers traveled primarily on side roads, taking Long Island’s Orient Point Ferry to New London, Connecticut, biking north through Massachusetts and then back into New York.¹⁸⁴ Once in Albany, the two youths met Bianchi on the steps of the Capitol Building, and while handing him the bottle of river water, posed for yet another round of photographs. During their visit, Sailor and Butler discussed the importance of the Carmans River with Assembly Speaker Duryea, representatives from the Conservation Committee and the Environmental Conservation Committee, as well as other key Republicans and Democrats. More importantly, their trip, along with the LWV/SEQ canoe race and their other media successes, attracted enough attention to the issue, that Duryea and the Republicans could no longer ignore the Carmans River.¹⁸⁵ In May, Assemblyman John Cochrane, a Republican from the Long

¹⁸² Bianchi interview.

¹⁸³ Robin Young Roe, “Two BHS Students Take The Long Way to Albany,” *The Long Island Advance*, 26 April 1973, P. 1,7.

¹⁸⁴ Roe, 7; Cooley interview, Buffett; Interview with Michael Butler by Neil P. Buffett, 21 September, 2006. .

¹⁸⁵ “Travelers Rained Out But Sun May Shine on River,” *The Long Island Advance* 3 May 1973, P. 1,15; Bianchi interview.

Island community of Bay Shore, reintroduced the legislation as a Republican-sponsored bill, which Governor Nelson Rockefeller signed into law the following month.¹⁸⁶

With the Governor's signature, the local waterway was designated a "study river," meaning that the state DEC could begin the required ecological studies necessary to preserve the river corridor under the WSRRA. The DEC, however, did not have the resources or man-power to conduct the study. As Anthony Taormina, the DEC's Regional Supervisor of Fish and Wildlife on Long Island, explained to Cooley and SEQ members, he would need them to shoulder the bulk of the responsibility. As Cooley noted, "Tony came and asked us to get some students together and we met at Dennis' ... and Tony explained what the law did, and said, 'I don't have enough staff to do the study that is required, are your students interested?'" The students *were* interested, having already gained an intimate knowledge of the river and its surroundings through their own research along the waterway, as well as their familiarity with the compiled analyses of Cooley's Spring, 1970 Advanced Senior Biology Class.¹⁸⁷ With these earlier studies serving as a solid foundation, SEQ members spent the next six months conducting additional field-research analyses, which neatly complemented the findings of their pre-SEQ predecessors. Condensed into one report, both sets of student findings would ground the DEC's official "river study" and final submission for the State Legislature.¹⁸⁸

In January 1974, SEQ sent their amassed research, *The Carmans River Study: Recommendations for the Inclusion of the River in the New York State Wild, Scenic, and*

¹⁸⁶ "Carmans River Bill Signed by Governor," *The Long Island Advance* 21 June 1973, P. 7; Bianchi interview.

¹⁸⁷ Cooley interview, Buffett; Rubin, 6.

¹⁸⁸ Bellport Senior High School Advanced Biology Students, *A Study of the Carmans River Basin* unpublished study, 1970, Post Morrell Foundation, Brookhaven, New York and Arthur Cooley Collection, SEQ, Bellport Senior High School; Cooley interview, Buffett.

Recreational Rivers Act, to Taormina and to Democratic State Senator, Leon E. Giuffreda, who was sponsoring the bill in that chamber. The nearly thirty page report included a detailed description of the river, the properties that bordered it, and its flora and fauna. The summary also included detailed species lists which highlighted the various types of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, mollusks, and plants whose ecosystem would be jeopardized, if not eliminated, with commercial or residential development. In its concluding remarks, SEQ noted that by 1974, little if any of the natural ecosystem had been surrendered for subdivisions or strip malls; however, they stressed that preservation *was* “vital to provide permanent protection to the entire riverine ecosystem.” For SEQ, the threat of future development, “with its resultant pollution and destruction of wildlife habitat,” was “looming” in sections of the river which, by that time, were not protected by local statute. With their report, SEQ hoped to influence legislation “to improve [these] important resources for the benefit of future generations in terms of recreation, aesthetics, and wildlife.”¹⁸⁹

Just six months later, New York State Governor Malcolm Wilson expressed his agreement with SEQ members’ sentiment by signing the Republican-sponsored Carmans River Protection Act on June 10, 1974. For the student environmentalist, their movement to protect the river had finally come full circle, which was cause for community-wide celebration. To “complete the cycle,” members of SEQ along with Cooley, Puleston, Bianchi and several local residents, met at Squassux Landing to witness John Sailor and Mike Butler return the river water they had escorted to Albany the spring before. Keeping

¹⁸⁹ Bellport Senior High School Students for Environmental Quality, *The Carmans River Study: Recommendations for the Inclusion of the River in the New York State Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act*, unpublished report prepared by BSHS SEQ for the New York State Department of Conservation, (January 1974), Frank Melville Jr. Memorial Library, SUNY Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York.

with the celebratory mood, LWV president Regina David paddled by in her kayak with a bottle of champagne, as Bianchi waived a New York State flag, noting that the Carmans had finally become “a state-protected river.”¹⁹⁰

The river’s inclusion under the WSRRA, however, would alter land-owners’ relationships with the waterway as well as their properties which ran along its shoreline. According to state-wide river act, once a body of water was protected, “existing land uses within the respective classified river areas may continue, but may not be altered or expanded except as permitted by the respective classifications, unless the commissioner or agency orders the discontinuance of such existing land use.” In other words, property rights under the WSRRA could be circumvented by the DEC if existing or future land use projects were harmful to the Carmans River. For sections designated as “scenic” or “recreational,” clustered residences were permissible under the law, albeit with restrictions, while sections deemed “wild” were to be maintained in their natural state, with “no new structures or improvements, no development of any kind and no access by motor vehicles other than forest management.” By 1974, there were too many residential properties along the Carmans for any part of it to be designated “wild,” which limited its inclusion within the system to only scenic and recreational.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, these designations would certainly limit the autonomy of homeowners who had previously enjoyed unregulated property rights along the river bank.

¹⁹⁰ Pranay Gupte, “L.I. Students Rejoice in Signing Of Bill to Protect Carmans River,” *The New York Times*, 12 June 1974; Warrick, 17; “Carman’s River Now Protected by State,” *The Long Island Advance*, 13 June 1974, 1, 23.

¹⁹¹ *Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System* Title 27, New York State Environmental Conservation Law, 15-2701 - 15-2723 found in *New York Consolidated Law Service: Annotated Statutes with Forms, Environmental Conservation Law, Articles 15 to 22* Vol. 12A, (Rochester: The Lawyers Co-operative, 1982), 211; Cooley interview, Buffett.

Local residents such as Nora Mize and James Gamaldi, both of whom owned homes along the northern region of the river in Yaphank, recognized the need for environmental conservation, but feared what that would mean for them as property owners. In a 1974 interview, Mize explained that she believed most homeowners did “want to preserve the area” but, at the same time queried why she should “have to petition Albany to put up a shed in my back yard?” Mize’s teenage daughter, Joy, echoed her mother’s concern, arguing that she did not “think it’s right for the state to come in and tell us we can’t do something.”¹⁹² For millions of Americans who, like Mize and her family, lived in suburbia in the postwar era, home ownership and unfettered property rights had become the bedrock of the “American Dream,” and a physical manifestation of their economic success and independence.¹⁹³ For these individuals, an unchecked activist state government could jeopardize the very rights which they had moved to the suburbs to obtain.

Yaphank residents, such as James Gamaldi, had certainly not purchased their homes along the Carmans with the knowledge that one day it would become a state-protected river. In 2006, Gamaldi, a life-long Yaphank resident recalled the neighborhood reaction to the state’s initial survey of the riverbank, which followed the 1974 act:

The only thing that was happening back then was they had people come in and survey the whole area and they put up stakes and all they were saying [was] they were going to fence off the lake to the residents. Now, we had owned [all the way back] to the lake and so those people were very upset. I know of everyone that had property that bordered the lake, they tore up the stakes and said ‘this is ridiculous,’ and that kind of thing. [*sic*]

Paralleling Mize’s assessment of land restrictions, Gamaldi recognized the need for the river’s preservation but, at the same time, was also opposed to the construction of a fence

¹⁹² Rubin, 7.

¹⁹³ Baxandall and Ewen; Cohen.

across his backyard. He asserted, “You just can’t do that to me, or the rest of the people.”¹⁹⁴

Interestingly enough, though unbeknownst to Gamaldi, by removing the stakes, he and his neighbors were engaging in a form of civil disobedience which had been all too common throughout the history of American Conservation. As environmental historian Karl Jacoby has illustrated in his research on the Adirondack Park in northern New York, area residents sought “vengeance” for their state-sponsored “displacement and disempowerment” from the forests they had traditionally farmed, hunted, and logged. In retaliation, locals not only continued these activities, which were redefined by the state as poaching and theft, but also set forest fires which symbolized their displeasure with the state’s interference in their lives. Similarly, in Yellowstone National Park, locals continued to use parkland and its natural bounty, in what they had always believed to be a “natural right to subsistence.” This belief not only offered locals the rationalization they needed to continue hunting on state lands, but led to other forms of resistance as well, which included random fence-cutting and the killing of animals that park authorities had placed in pens. In the case of Yellowstone, fences and animal pens were physical manifestations of the state’s newly asserted authority in the region. For Mize, Gamaldi and their neighbors, the river’s protection and the possibility of a fence across their backyards represented a similar form of state authority.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Interview with James Gamaldi, by Neil P. Buffett, 26 October, 2006.

¹⁹⁵ Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 64-65, 73, 76-77, 141-146; See also, Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Chapter 4; Richard W. Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Press, 1997).

With the stroke of his pen, however, Governor Wilson *had* given Tony Taormina the authority to do what was necessary to preserve the Carmans River corridor and protect its fragile ecosystem from the threat of further development. Despite the fact that no fence was ever constructed, waterfront property rights were restricted by the 1974 legislation. Now under the purview of state law, the Carmans River would be mapped, charted, and debated within the offices of DEC officials in Albany – far removed from the Long Island communities that such debates would ultimately impact. In essence, the Carmans was, in the words of political theorist James C. Scott, “simplified” and made “legible” by state authorities from above.¹⁹⁶ Unlike the populations which Scott focuses upon in *Seeing Like a State*, however, Brookhaven Town residents were not unwillingly acted upon by a high modernist state. As the grassroots activism of SEQ members, their mentors, and their fellow community residents illustrate, not only was state action invited, but local knowledge and experiences were both appreciated throughout the process. While the principal instigators of this process were yet-to-be franchised local youth and not members of the traditionally-recognized, voting public speaks to the significance of high school student involvement in the budding environmental movement of late 1960s and early 1970s.

* * *

With the successful passage of the 1974 Carmans River Protection Act, the first period of high school student social and political activism in suburban Bellport came to a close. Having experienced both civil rights and environmental activity, Bellport High

¹⁹⁶Rubin, 7; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); See Scott’s theory applied to conservation in Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*.

School had served as the staging ground for significant change in racial, ethnic and socioeconomic relations among its patrons as well as between them and their natural environment. While members of the Black and Puerto Rican Student Union and the Better Relations Committee for Constructive Action had successfully challenged school district officials to more adequately serve and recognize the needs of minority students from North Bellport, members of Students for Environmental Quality had similarly forced local residents to recognize the frailty of the natural environment within their midst. Uniquely, both manifestations of high school student activism evolved in this same suburban high school – a place which was shared by pupils from two vastly different neighborhoods. As the above analyses of both residential spaces illustrates, student activists from North and South Bellport experienced contrasting social realities, as the suburban landscape they inhabited had historically divided residents by race, ethnicity and class.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, these demarcations and what they meant for youth on both sides of Montauk Highway, influenced and inspired black, white and Latino students to engage in either civil rights or environmental activism. Having been a predominantly white and affluent enclave community throughout most of its modern history, Bellport rapidly integrated and geographically expanded from the mid-1950s onward, becoming a suburban “microcosm” of American Society. By the beginning of the 1969-1970 school year, the ways in which local residents – new and old – had either reconciled, engaged, or denied these social, cultural and economic shifts, set the stage for the emergence of both manifestations of high school student political activism. With relative impoverishment and upper-class affluence serving as a discordant

and polarizing force in community life, both halves of Bellport yielded the means for both a social justice and a preservationist campaign to take shape. As the next three case studies illustrate, however, civil rights and environmental activity rarely emerged simultaneously in the same urban or suburban high schools. It is this difference which makes youth activism in Bellport, New York stand out as unique and worthy of study.

Chapter 3: Civil Rights Activism in Suburban Community of Malverne

As noted in the preceding chapter, student-led civil rights and environmental activity rarely emerged in the same suburban and urban high schools, a fact which, on many levels, gave Bellport an anomalistic quality not found in similarly-situated Long Island communities or upon the urban expanse of New York City. While Bellport had evolved into a place which allowed for both forms of political protest to take shape, the other school districts examined throughout the remainder of this study did not. In suburban Malverne, located roughly forty-five miles west of Bellport in Nassau County, Long Island, local youth – black and white – pursued racial and educational equality in their high school while neglecting to engage in any form of teen-led environmental action. The same can be said of student activists at John Dewey High School and Franklin K. Lane High School in Brooklyn, all of whom led their own, urban-based political campaigns with the former laboring as quasi-environmentalists and the latter engaging in civil rights activity alone. While all three of these settings experienced either civil rights or environmental activism, each experienced them differently; in all three settings, place-specific realities such as racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition, geographic location along the urban-suburban divide, and varying levels of ecological consciousness led to these differences. In the pages which follow, high school student civil rights activism in Malverne is examined in light of these distinctive realities, as is the lack of student interest in organized environmental action.

As an analysis of the Malverne School District reveals, despite the suburban characteristics it shared with rural Bellport, its social matrix and demographic strata both resembled *and* diverged from its Suffolk County counterpart. To be sure, minority

residents in both suburban areas had fallen victim to racial and ethnic discrimination in housing as well as in education – two realities which, throughout the 1960s fueled local campaigns against blockbusting, de facto elementary school segregation, as well as in-school racial bias. Moreover, both communities were geographically divided and carved into various racial, ethnic, and class-based neighborhoods – residents of which sent their children to neighborhood-based, de facto segregated elementary schools and community-wide junior and senior high schools. By the late 1960s, local histories of racial injustice as well as in-school racial and ethnic bias led African American youth in both suburban settings to organize in support of more diversified high school curriculums, more adequately-integrated faculty and staff rosters, and more relevant programming and event-planning in honor of minority culture and social customs.

Despite these similarities, however, Malverne and Bellport (and the suburban experiences they proffered their inhabitants) also significantly differed from one another, a fact which bred two very distinct civil rights movements upon only somewhat comparable terrains. While one had been settled as a rural, waterfront community over an hour east of New York City, the other had flowered into an attractive commuter-suburb just fifteen miles east of the bustling metropolis. To be sure, this close proximity to the urban center allowed the Malverne area to racially, ethnically and socio-economically integrate much sooner than Bellport, the latter of which had remained relatively homogeneous until the late 1950s and early 1960s. In contrast to its Suffolk County counterpart, Malverne had diversified much earlier in the century, a demographic reality which, by the early postwar period, had yielded an expansive and vibrant African American community in the unincorporated hamlet of Lakeview. Lakeview, which

bordered Malverne Proper as well as neighboring Lynbrook Village, had long been home to a diverse population of college-educated, black professionals and their families, making it a much more affluent neighborhood than North Bellport. This striking difference bred two very distinct social worlds and, by extension, two relatively dissimilar civil rights agendas.

As the pages which follow illustrate, while African American and Latino students from North Bellport led a three-pronged assault upon racial, ethnic *and* socio-economic inequality, student civil rights activists from Lakeview focused their attention upon racial and ethnic injustice alone. As the children of middle to upper-class black professionals, their relatively comfortable lifestyles in the Malverne School District did not necessitate a protracted engagement of structural economic inequality, class division, and/or socio-economic disparity – issues which had fully grounded the civil rights agenda of black and Latino students in Bellport. For these latter students, class separation between them and their white allies in Bellport Village necessitated the organization of two separate student groups: the Black and Puerto Rican Student Union and the Better Relations Committee for Constructive Action. Believing that white student activists from Bellport Village were privileged and thus unable to comprehend the plight of impoverished minority students, leaders such as Pete Torres and Paulette Samuels only forged a loose, and often times guarded, coalition with their white peers. In Malverne, such notions of class and class difference did not factor into high school students' organizational structures, leading to the emergence of only one, unified student civil rights group composed of middle and upper-class blacks and whites all of whom desired racial and ethnic equality. Ultimately,

for these students, the alleviation of local poverty was a non-issue in their school and community-based campaign for racial equality.

In addition to impacting the nature of high school student civil rights activism in Malverne, the relative affluence of Lakeview's African American population also benefited student activists and their white peers organizationally, as many of their parents – black and white – had served as leaders and members of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As the pages which follow highlight, student civil rights activists who, in the spring of 1969, formed Students Acting Now (S.A.N) in promotion of in-school racial equality, had witnessed their parents and adult neighbors rally against real estate discrimination and de facto segregated elementary schools throughout the early to mid-1960s. As young children, many of these eventual teen activists had strolled alongside their parents in local civil rights marches, stood upon picket-lines with friends and neighbors, boycotted elementary schools with their siblings, and distributed social justice leaflets throughout the local community. Interestingly enough, many of the same S.A.N leaders who would, in 1969, rally for a holiday in honor of the slain Martin Luther King Jr., had, as children, stood alongside their parents and neighbors as King locally preached against racial intolerance just four years prior. These organizational experiences – as children of socially and politically-engaged black elites – laid a unique foundation upon which Lakeview's African American youth would build their own high school-based civil rights campaign at the tail-end of the 1960s.

As the previous chapter indicates, however, high school student civil rights activists in North Bellport had not benefited from such a well-entrenched, adult-led civil rights struggle originating from within their community. While black youth from

Lakeview needed only to look to their elders' organizational successes and social justice achievements as a guide, students such as Pete Torres and Paulette Samuels had been forced to look elsewhere, locating significant influence and inspiration from outside sources such as Elaine Frazier, the Young Lords Organization, and later, Stan Hamilton. Much of this difference can be traced to the timing of demographic fluctuation in both minority communities: while North Bellport racially and ethnically integrated only seven to eight years before students began to politically organize, Lakeview had been firmly established as an integrated, black enclave community much earlier in the postwar period. With deeper roots in their local community, Lakeview's adult population had, over time, established and maintained a strong local branch of the NAACP as a vehicle to advance social justice initiatives throughout the Malverne area. By the end of the 1960s, many of these earlier adult activists' teenaged children had been influenced and informed by a long legacy of NAACP battles, successes and compromises. Beginning in the 1968-1969 school year, these experiences proved significant to the high school student civil rights activism which manifested at Malverne Senior High School. While the pages which follow focus primarily upon the latter student movement, the implications of earlier social justice campaigns are highlighted as significant impetus for youth political action in the Nassau County community.

Still, this youth political action only encompassed high school student civil rights activity. Unlike in Bellport where both teenaged civil rights *and* environmental activism flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s, students at Malverne Senior High School focused their social and political energies on behalf of advancing in-school racial equality alone. As an analysis of Malverne and its student population indicates, this lack of a

youth environmental movement can be traced to a variety of inter-related factors, which includes questions of timing, limited student interest, the absence of an influential faculty mentor, as well as place-specific realities differentiating the more “urbanized” Malverne from its more rural counterpart in Suffolk County. Despite this absence of high school student environmental action, though, local youth still managed to develop personal and collective relationships with the natural environment through recreation. As the latter pages of this chapter highlight, both white and black youth spent considerable time frolicking in their backyards, playing catch in the street, climbing trees in wooded areas, as well as playing sports in nearby public parks and open fields. Many of these same youngsters also consumed “nature” on cross country camping trips with friends and family, as well as in more exotic settings such as on Martha’s Vineyard, Cape Cod or in Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁹⁷ While such recreational activities did not lead Malverne students to engage in youth environmental activism, they certainly indicate that local teens were cognizant of the natural wonders within their midst and not alienated from their charm.

In the pages which follow, then, Malverne, much like Bellport, is analyzed as a fragmented suburban landscape, composed of diverging, yet inter-related, neighborhoods – all of which shared one local high school ten months out of the year. While the high school setting served as a commonly-shared space for all, long-standing racial bias and cultural insensitivities were the harbingers of the in-school civil rights campaign which African American students and their sympathetic white allies organized throughout the spring semester of 1969. Organized as Students Acting Now (S.A.N), politically-

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Glenn Finley by Neil P. Buffett, (9 February, 2010); Interview with Marcia White by Neil P. Buffett, (17 February, 2010).

conscious teenagers from Malverne High School spent the 1968-1969 academic year petitioning their local Board of Education for black history and culture courses, more African American faculty and staff, an expanded library collection of black and minority literature, Swahili as a foreign language option, as well as school recess for the slain Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in January. Like their parents before them, student leaders such as Glenn Finley, Robin Delany and Marcia White employed a variety of non-violent, direct-action techniques in order to force high school and school district administrators to implement such changes. This included, among others, a variety of student planned and organized sit-in demonstrations, morning and afternoon walk-outs, periodic classroom boycotts, as well as public demonstrations such as marches and rallies in front of and around their school building. With a keen eye focused upon the significance of Malverne as “place,” this chapter will highlight the evolution of this high school-based movement for educational equality as dissimilar than that which manifested in rural Bellport.

Malverne: The Place, The Communities

As a place, mid-twentieth century “Malverne” was both an incorporated suburban village as well as a geographically-expansive public school district, the latter of which served the three inter-related, yet diverging, communities of Malverne, Lynbrook, and Lakeview. Connected together by their shared usage of, and existence within, the Malverne Public School District, postwar residents of these three very distinct communities shared little else by the beginning of the 1960s. As Dan W. Dodson, Director of the Center for Human Relations and Community Studies at New York University, noted in 1967, area inhabitants’ “image of the community” was “blurred,”

particularly in regard to the greater Malverne area. To be sure, while some recognized themselves as members of one cohesive, district-wide “Malverne” community despite their legal residence in Malverne Proper, Lynbrook or Lakeview, many more only understood themselves as residents of one of these three separate neighborhoods. For these latter individuals, Dodson noted, greater “Malverne” was “not a community” but “just a school district” which they happened to share – willingly or not – with one another.¹⁹⁸ While not wholly inaccurate from a legal perspective, such local sentiment would serve as the foundation for a deeply-rooted neighborhood disunity which would come to characterize the Malverne area throughout the postwar period, particularly in the 1960s.

Much like its Suffolk County counterpart, the neighborhoods within the Malverne School District had, over time, become racially, ethnically, and socio-economically segmented, with each having taken on a different set of demographic qualities which became somewhat synonymous with their moniker. Indeed, just as North and South Bellport had been ascribed racial, ethnic and class identities throughout the postwar era, so too had Malverne, Lynbrook and Lakeview, with the latter having evolved into a primarily middle-class African American enclave community. In contrast, Malverne and Lynbrook had both been founded as principally white neighborhoods in the early twentieth century, with the former evolving over time into a primarily middle-class, ethnically Jewish residential space, and the latter becoming known for its working-class and Italian-American population by mid-century.¹⁹⁹ Despite these contrasting communal identities, however inhabitants of all three places still shared the one public school

¹⁹⁸ Dan W. Dodson, *Citizen Response to School Desegregation*, (Albany: Education Department Publications, 1967), 128.

¹⁹⁹ Dodson, 69, 128-129.

district, lived within its geographic confines, and were forced to negotiate their competing notions of community within that larger shared space. Bearing this in mind, only an analysis of each neighborhood's individual growth trajectory can begin to reveal the roots of such segmentation, competition and disunity.

Located just fifteen miles east of New York City in Nassau County, the Village of Malverne (or Malverne Proper) was first incorporated as a suburban Long Island residential space in 1921. Just ten years prior, the New York City-based Amsterdam Development and Sales Corporation had purchased the roughly 150 acre area, after which it spent the decade constructing single-family homes of various styles and sizes along railway transit lines that connected the newly subdivided landscape to the nearby metropolis.²⁰⁰ With hyperbolic language and vivid photography, Amsterdam's sales fliers and booster pamphlet's trumpeted the new, early twentieth century suburban ideal designed for those with the means to flee the city and suburbanize just beyond the urban periphery. Targeting a male audience, Amsterdam's publications touted the "attractive" country home in a community where ones "wife and child [could] enjoy the sunshine and flowers, and pure exhilarating air" while at the same time remain "protected by *careful restrictions*" [emphasis added].²⁰¹ In the years prior to the Supreme Court's 1948 decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which made racial covenants to property deeds unenforceable by law [see chapter one], such "careful restrictions" was clearly a reference to the racial demographic developers were hoping to attract in their new suburban paradise.

²⁰⁰ George R. Van Allen, *The Rise of Malverne* (Malverne, New York: Village of Malverne, 1955), 2; Amsterdam Development and Sales Co., *Malverne, Long Island* (New York: Press of Wales Advertising Co, 1900-1940), 2 From SUNY Stony Brook, Special Collections Department. Frank Melville Jr. Memorial Library. Stony Brook, New York.

²⁰¹ Amsterdam Development and Sales Co., *Malverne, Long Island*, 1.

By 1921, this glowing imagery of Malverne had proven fruitful, having enticed a primarily white populace of 800 to purchase private homes in the budding community.²⁰² Within nine years, the number of residents had increased to 2,256, doubled again by 1940, and by 1950 had surged to just over 8,000.²⁰³ Only thirty-three of these roughly 8,000 newly suburbanized residents were African American.²⁰⁴ By 1960, while the neighborhood's total population had increased by another 1,882 residents totaling 9,900, the community's non-white population had only increased by twenty-two to a total of just fifty-five. Over the next ten years Malverne's population once again increased, reaching 10,036 while the number of African American residents fell from fifty-five to seventeen.²⁰⁵ As such numbers suggest, Malverne Village had clearly been founded as a chiefly white suburban community, and was maintained as such throughout the succeeding fifty year period.

The neighboring Village of Lynbrook, which bordered both Malverne and Lakeview, chartered a similar course in the first half of the twentieth century. Incorporated as a village in 1911, Lynbrook, which was named in honor of Brooklyn, the New York City borough from which most of its early residents had migrated, surpassed its neighbor in sheer size and volume.²⁰⁶ Indeed, while Lynbrook was home to just 4,371 in 1920, its population nearly tripled to roughly 12,000 by 1930, increased again to

²⁰² Gerard J. Janeske, *Malverne: The Story of its Years with a Brief History of Long Island* (Malverne, New York: Village of Malverne, 1972), 20.

²⁰³ Barbara Shupe, Janet Steins, and Jyoti Pandit, eds., *New York State Population: A Compilation of Federal Census Data, 1790-1980* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc, 1987), 171.

²⁰⁴ United States Census Bureau, *Census of Population: 1950 Vol. II, Characteristics of the Population, Part 32: New York* (Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 32-122.

²⁰⁵ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 2 – Color and Race*, 1972, 32-33.

²⁰⁶ Dodson, 2; Arthur Mattson, "How Lynbrook Got Its Name," Lynbrook Historical and Preservation Society Web Page <http://members.aol.com/lynhistory/lhps/lyn-hs02.htm> (11 March, 2008).

14,557 by 1940, and just ten years later had increased yet again to 17,314.²⁰⁷ However, only .5% of this latter figure – roughly eighty-seven – were ‘non-white.’²⁰⁸ Moreover, while Lynbrook’s total population increased from 19,881 to 23,151 in 1960 and 1970 respectively, the African American population decreased in the same period from seventy-three to fifty-five.²⁰⁹ Much like Malverne, Lynbrook had been founded and ultimately remained an overwhelmingly white suburban neighborhood throughout the twentieth century. These racial characteristics, however, came to mean much more than simply a tangible reflection of who lived in the two neighborhoods. By the early 1960s, residents of Malverne, and to a greater extent, Lynbrook, had come to understand their neighborhoods as “their” communities, and understood them in juxtaposition and opposition to the unincorporated hamlet of Lakeview.

Arterially separated from their neighbors by Ocean Avenue, Lakeview residents have rhetorically referred to their excursions into both Malverne and Lynbrook as “crossing the ocean” from one world to another.²¹⁰ Much like in Bellport, where black and white residents were geographically separated by Montauk Highway and the tracks of the Long Island Railroad, Ocean Avenue represented a somewhat imaginary, yet very tangible, reminder of the racial and ethnic divide within the greater Malverne community. While both village neighborhoods had been founded and maintained as principally white suburban landscapes, Lakeview had evolved, throughout the post-World War II era, from a relatively integrated residential space in the 1950s and 1960s to a primarily African

²⁰⁷ Shupe, Steins, and Pandit, eds., 167.

²⁰⁸ United States Census Bureau, *Census of Population: 1950 Vol. II*, 32-53.

²⁰⁹ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 2 – Color and Race*, 1972, 32-33.

²¹⁰ Interview with Marcia White by Neil P. Buffett, (15 November, 2007).

American enclave by 1970.²¹¹ This is evidenced by the relatively extreme demographic fluctuation that took place in Lakeview from 1960 to 1970, as the hamlet's African American population increased from fifty-two percent of the whole to just over eighty. With a total population of 4,829 in 1960, only 2,509 were noted as African American. In 1970, while Lakeview's total population had only increased from 4,829 to 5,471, its African American population had increased from 2,509 to 4,495 in just ten years. Throughout that same decade, while the white populations of Malverne and Lynbrook had similarly increased, the white population in Lakeview fell from 2,305 to just 928. Having begun the 1960s as a racially integrated suburban hamlet with John F. Kennedy's ascendancy to the Presidency, Lakeview began the 1970s as a predominantly African American enclave alongside the primarily white villages of Malverne and Lynbrook.²¹²

Despite their similar racial characteristics, however, Malverne and Lynbrook were certainly not mirror images of one another, especially when it came to socioeconomic status and the level of relative affluence in each community. While the former was generally typified as a middle to upper-class, Jewish neighborhood of college-educated professionals, the latter was locally known for its principally working-class and blue-collar, Italian-American population.²¹³ In Malverne, such class difference manifested itself in a variety of ways, including an elevated median family income, a more impressive average property value, and a greater number of owner-occupied homes. While, on average, Malverne residents in 1969 earned \$16,254, residents in neighboring

²¹¹ Dodson, 122, 129; White interview; Interview with Glenn Finley by Neil P. Buffett, (1 November, 2007); Interview with Robin Delany-Shabazz by Neil P. Buffett, (8 November, 2007); Interview with Daniel and Elsie Silkiss by Neil P. Buffett, (17 December, 2007).

²¹² The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 2 – Color and Race*, 1972, 32-33.

²¹³ Dodson, 69, 128-129.

Lynbrook only earned an average of \$13,095.²¹⁴ At the same time, while the median home value in Malverne had increased from \$20,800 in 1960 to \$30,630 in 1970, in Lynbrook they rose from just \$17,900 to \$26,800 in the same ten year period.²¹⁵ Finally, and most intriguing, while only five percent of Malverne Village homes (165 of 3,032) were classified as “renter-occupied” structures in the 1970 census, just over thirty percent of Lynbrook homes (2,339 of 7,567) were similarly noted as such.²¹⁶ With this relatively high number of rental properties in late 1960s Lynbrook, it is clear that many more residents of nearby Malverne had realized the “American Dream” and purchased a suburban home of their own.

Throughout the 1960s, differences such as these would, interestingly enough, significantly impact racial and ethnic relations *not* between Lynbrook and Malverne, but between Lynbrook and Lakeview, especially since the latter’s African American populace shared a middle-class, affluent identity with residents of Malverne Village. On the one hand, a similar number of Lakeview residents owned their own suburban homes – a socioeconomic reality which differentiated them from their white neighbors in Lynbrook Village. On the other hand, a strong majority of Lakeview’s minority residents were college-educated men and women, many of whom had used that education to secure professional employment which had enabled them to purchase not only suburban homes in Lakeview, but, for some, family vacation homes and campsites elsewhere in the United States.²¹⁷ At home, in Lakeview, this middle-class wherewithal had led to ninety percent

²¹⁴ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 6 – Income*, 1973, 65.

²¹⁵ “How Home Values Have Changed,” *Newsday* (18 February, 1972), 2.

²¹⁶ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 4 – Housing Inventory*, 1972, 71-72.

²¹⁷ Finley interview, 2010; White interview, 2010.

of the local housing inventory being “owner-occupied” in both 1960 *and* 1970, totaling 1,202 homes out of 1,316 in the 1970 U.S. Census compilation. Such a number significantly trumped Lynbrook’s sixty-nine percent “owner-occupied” structures, which totaled roughly 5,200 out of 7,567 in 1970. In that same year, Malverne Village exceeded both of its neighbors’ percentages with a total of 2,867 “owner-occupied” homes, or ninety-five percent of an inventory of 3,032.²¹⁸ While these latter percentages and totals on their own could certainly be dismissed as irrelevant, when compared with Lakeview and Malverne’s much lower percentages of renter versus owner-occupied structures, they cannot, especially since private home-ownership has consistently been associated with postwar, middle-class consumption.²¹⁹

At the same time, however, even though Malverne and Lakeview did share an identity grounded by relative middle-class affluence, African American residents in Lakeview did not always trump Lynbrook or match Malverne in demographic strata. To be sure, Lakeview residents – similar to their African Americans contemporaries elsewhere – certainly faced racial discrimination in all sectors of American society, including the labor market, the educational system, and in real estate. Therefore, despite Lakeview’s middle-class nature, the community’s average home value and median family income both ranked less than either of its neighboring villages. While the 1970 average home values in Malverne and Lynbrook were \$30,630 and \$26,800 (respectively), Lakeview averaged at \$23,705.²²⁰ Similarly, Lakeview residents, on average, earned less

²¹⁸ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 4 – Housing Inventory*, 1972, 71; In North Bellport, 26% of the housing inventory (339/1,315) was “renter-occupied” in 1970, representing a thirteen percent increase from 1960 (133/1,032). P. 76.

²¹⁹ See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*; This is not to assume, however, that all American suburbs have been middle-class in nature, as the work of Becky M. Nicolaides on the working-class has indicated. For more, see Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*.

²²⁰ “How Home Values Have Changed,” *Newsday* (18 February, 1972), 2.

in wages than their village neighbors, earning just \$11,193 in 1969 while Malverne and Lynbrook averaged \$16,254 and \$13,095.²²¹ On the surface, such differentials between Lakeview and its neighbor's average home value and median household income would seem to contradict residents' assertion of middle-class, affluent standing. When considered in light of late 1960s racial inequality, however, such contradictions can be more easily understood and partially explained.

As the Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board noted in 1970, the median family income of African American households in Nassau County was only sixty-four percent of the median family income of their white contemporaries in 1969. While such a percentage is, on many levels, somewhat unreliable due to its expansive, county-wide significance – it does provide a plausible and, if true, a partial explanation for the income differential between whites and blacks in the Malverne area. At the same time, while Lakeview's median family income was certainly less than both Malverne and Lynbrook's, the black neighborhood was much more socio-economically diverse. This included a higher percentage of lower income residents, which, overall, decreased the median income level for the entire neighborhood (even though, in real numbers, Lynbrook actually exceeded Lakeview in this regard). For example, while roughly 18% percent of Lakeview's 5,471 residents (a total of 985) earned \$5,000 or less in 1969, only about 8% of Lynbrook's 23,151 residents (a total of 1,852) earned the same. Conversely, while nearly 6% of Lakeview's total population (328) earned \$25,000 or more, roughly 8% of Lynbrook's (1,852) earned or exceeded that same figure.²²² Given that Lynbrook's

²²¹ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70, Vol. 6, Income*, 65.

²²² The Nassau-Suffolk County Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70, Vol. 6, Income*, 90.

total population in 1969 was nearly five times that of its primarily non-white neighbor, such drastic differences in real numbers are not that surprising.

To account for the higher proportion of lower income residents in the Lakeview community – a place in which ninety-one percent of all dwellings were “owner-occupied” and whose residents generally self-identified as members of the middle-class – one must recognize the significance of racial and ethnic discrimination in the suburban housing market. As historian Andrew Wiese has explored in *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*, white resistance to suburban integration in the postwar era routinely led middle-class, African American suburbanites to purchase homes in traditionally black-populated and socio-economically diverse communities. While most upwardly mobile black families in this era had certainly acquired the means to settle beyond the geographic confines of black suburbia, many chose to remain in communities of color in order to avoid residential discrimination in middle-class, white suburban neighborhoods.²²³ For communities such as Lakeview, this led to the maintenance of black residential space populated by members of not only the middle and upper-classes, but members of the working-class and those with even lesser means as well.

Lakeview’s late 1960s characterization as a “black” community, however, had not always reflected the neighborhood’s racial and ethnic identity. To be sure, Lakeview had evolved, from a racially integrated residential space of whites *and* blacks in the 1950s, to a primarily African American community by the beginning of the 1970s. Just like in similarly-situated suburban spaces across Long Island and other suburban landscapes, such demographic change can be attributed to “white flight” and real estate bias,

²²³ See Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 9, 143-163, 214.

particularly “block-busting,” a tactic employed by real estate agents to turn a large profit from inciting racial fear in integrated residential areas. As noted in previous chapters, “block-busters” worked hard to convince white members of such communities that newly integrated neighborhoods typically “turned,” lost their value, and became primarily African American in nature. Hoping to secure the best return on their real estate, millions of white Americans sold their homes and fled such communities prior to minority immigration. In the aftermath of such flight, real estate firms were then able to list and resell the same suburban abodes to minority customers at inflated prices.²²⁴

By 1960, this real estate method had not yet been deemed illegal by New York State or the federal government, leading to rapid racial change in neighborhoods across the United States. Early that same year, Lakeview residents alleged that such activities were taking place within their community and altering its long-standing integrated character. According to Neighbors Unlimited, an interracial citizen’s council in Lakeview, at least eight realtors had employed block-busting tactics in their area.²²⁵ While no charges could be filed, complaints from neighborhood organizations from across the state led New York State’s Secretary of State Caroline K. Simon to introduce “Rule 17” to the Real Property Law in 1961, officially banning blockbusting practices across the state.²²⁶ Still, while such measures limited realtor’s ability to profit from racial fear, they could not prevent white families from choosing to sell their homes and flee the area on their own. As a result, Lakeview rapidly became a much more heavily-populated African American neighborhood as its two primarily white neighbors remained virtually

²²⁴ For more on blockbusting, see Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore*; Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, Chapter Fourteen; Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, Chapter Five.

²²⁵ “L.I. Town Fighting Bias Realty Drive,” *New York Times* (May 15, 1960), 70.

²²⁶ New York Department of State, *Service Through Action, Annual Report 1961* (Albany, Department of State, 1962), 7-8.

unchanged. By the fall of 1962, this demographic reality and its resulting racial divide in residence had clearly manifested itself in the racial and ethnic composition of Malverne's three neighborhood-based elementary schools, all of which had become racially and ethnically segregated. Throughout the four years which followed, adult members of the African American community would battle for an end to neighborhood-based schools and de facto school segregation on behalf of their children. Serving as inspirational civil rights role models for those who would, later in the decade, found Students Acting Now, these parents and members of the local NAACP would lay a strong foundation upon which high school student civil rights activists would later build upon.

Divided Communities; Segregated Schools

When the United States Supreme Court handed down its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (1954), school segregation, and the “separate but equal” doctrine set forth in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) which legitimized it, were both deemed illegal. According to the court's decision, penned by Chief Justice Earl Warren, the court unanimously agreed that “separate educational facilities [were] inherently unequal.” Just one year later, the Supreme Court once again addressed school desegregation, setting an open timetable for compliance while urging all school districts to desegregate “with all deliberate speed.”²²⁷ Nevertheless, while the court's decision in *Brown* did strike down legally mandated, de jure school segregation, it did not touch upon the issue of de facto segregation which, in most cases, manifested itself in “neighborhood schools” located within racially segregated residential communities. By the early 1960s, it had become apparent that residential separation in cities, suburbs, and

²²⁷ Quoted in James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67.

rural areas across the nation had led to countless instances of, what many argued was, “unintentional” school segregation based upon where students and their families lived.²²⁸

By 1962, such a situation had manifested itself in the school district serving the neighborhoods of Malverne, Lynbrook, and Lakeview, all of which had taken on competing racial and ethnic identities through demographic change.

While the Malverne Public School District was composed of five buildings, students only shared the one middle school and the one high school, both of which sat on either side of Ocean Avenue, the symbolic, yet legal, boundary between the communities. For the first six years of their education, the district’s youth attended one of three elementary schools, each of which was located in one of the three neighborhoods. By the 1961-1962 school year, two of these “neighborhood schools,” Lindner Place Elementary in Malverne and Davison Avenue Elementary in Lynbrook, had become almost entirely white in composition.²²⁹ While Lindner Place served a student body of 543, only sixty were African American. Likewise, with a total student population of 585, the Davison Avenue School served only fifty-three. The remaining African American youth spent their formative years at Woodfield Road Elementary School in Lakeview. Unlike Lindner Place and Davison, 74% of Woodfield’s student population was African American, totaling 466 of the school’s 630 students. Moreover, unlike Lindner Place and Davison, both of which enrolled fewer students than their maximum capacity would allow, Woodfield Road exceeded it by thirty.²³⁰ By 1962, no one could deny that the racially-defined neighborhoods had wrought a segregated educational system.

²²⁸ Patterson, 136, 142, 176, 197.

²²⁹ Delany-Shabazz Interview.

²³⁰ Memorandum from June Shagaloff to Robert L. Carter, Jawn Sandifer, and Barbara Morris, “*Public Schools in Malverne-Lakeview, Long Island; Union Free School District No. 12, Town of Hempstead,*

To counter this, several African American parents with students at the Woodfield Road facility petitioned New York State's Commissioner of Education, Dr. James E. Allen, in September of 1962, with hopes of alleviating the racial imbalance that had manifested itself in all of their elementary schools. Within days of receiving the complaint, Allen's office scheduled a hearing in Albany for November 7th, at which lawyers representing both the Board of Education and parents of Woodfield Road students argued their clients' cases. Recognizing the clear racial divide, Allen sent three members of his Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions to Malverne, hoping to understand the full extent of the problem, as well as any possible solutions the committee could uncover.

In their report, submitted to the commissioner on April 30, 1963, committee members confirmed that racial "imbalance" had, in fact, evolved in Malverne, and had been caused by the districts' neighborhood school program. While the committee recognized the benefits of such schools, particularly, "more effective participation by parents and other citizens...[and] communication between the school staff and the community the staff serve[d]," members warned against the potential dangers. The most detrimental, the committee warned, was exclusivity, in which schools could, over time, become "viewed as being reserved for certain community groups" and when they "create or continue a ghetto type situation." When either one occurs, "the purposes of democratic education" were ultimately nullified.²³¹ Indeed, by the early 1960s, the Woodfield Road School *had* been ascribed a racial identity, based upon not only the students it served, but

Nassau County," (15 June, 1962) with attached "Enrollment Data," Found in NAACP Administrative File: General Office File. New York (1996).

²³¹ *Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions Report to Dr. James E. Allen, Jr.*, (30 April, 1963), 8, Found in James E. Allen Personal Papers, 1955-1971, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Collection # SC20854 Box 7, Folder 7.

also by the racial identity of the community in which it had been built.²³² To alleviate the imbalance, the committee suggested four proposals for Allen to consider.

The first entailed district-wide “school-pairing,” popularly known as the “Princeton Plan,” by which children would be assigned to schools based upon grade level rather than residence. In the case of Malverne, the committee suggested reorganization “so that all pupils from kindergarten to grade 3, inclusive, [would] attend either the Davison Avenue or the Lindner Place elementary schools, [and] all pupils in grades 4 and 5 [would] attend the Woodfield Road School.” According to this plan, all students would then graduate to the junior and senior high schools, after having completed an integrated primary education. The drawbacks to such a plan, however, were the elimination of the traditional neighborhood school model, and a lengthened average commute to and from school each day.²³³ Both would, throughout the decade, become cause for concern among parents and students alike, particularly those in Malverne and, to a greater extent, Lynbrook.

In addition to the Princeton Plan, committee members proposed three other possible solutions to integrate the district. This included: rezoning attendance lines so as to maintain some semblance of the neighborhood school model; the adoption of an “open enrollment” policy for all three elementary schools; and, transferring roughly one hundred students from Woodfield Road to Lindner Place and Davison Avenue. While the committee believed that any one of the four proposals could be implemented in Malverne, members recognized school-pairing as the only option that could fully

²³² Dodson, 122.

²³³ *Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions Report to Dr. James E. Allen, Jr.*, (30 April, 1963), 8-9.

extinguish the racial stigma attached to the Lakeview facility.²³⁴ More importantly, it was the only solution that could integrate the district's three elementary schools by restructuring the schools and reassigning students based upon grade level rather than residence, and by extension, race. Nevertheless, while Allen agreed with the committee's recommendations, Malverne's Board of Education did not.²³⁵

In his order to desegregate, signed on June 17, 1963, the commissioner asserted that the racial imbalance in the Woodfield Road facility, and the district on the whole, constituted "a deprivation of equality of educational opportunity envisioned under the Education Law of New York State for the pupils compelled to attend that school." Moreover, the imbalance defied the spirit of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown*. Regardless of the Board of Education's initial rejection of the four proposals, Allen ordered the district to implement some form of the Princeton Plan by that September. As his Advisory Committee had reported, Allen recognized school-pairing as the only plausible option to equitably redistribute the district's student population.²³⁶ In August, however, rather than adopting a full-fledged school-pairing model, the Board of Education submitted its own hybridized plan which maintained some neighborhood-based classes. According to the board's plan, Woodfield Road was to serve fourth and fifth grade classes, while Davison Avenue and Lindner Place were to maintain one

²³⁴ *Advisory Committee on Human Relations and Community Tensions Report to Dr. James E. Allen, Jr.*, (30 April, 1963), 8-11.

²³⁵ James E. Allen, Jr., New York State Commissioner of Education, *Appeal of Patricia Ann Mitchell, et al. v. Board of Education of Union Free School District No. 12, Town of Hempstead, Nassau County*, "Order to Desegregate Schools of Union Free School District #12," *The University of the State of New York: The State Department of Education*, 17 June, 1963 Found in James E. Allen Personal Papers, 1955-1971, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Collection # SC20854 Box 7, Folder 7.

²³⁶ James E. Allen, Jr., New York State Commissioner of Education, *Appeal of Patricia Ann Mitchell, et al. v. Board of Education of Union Free School District No. 12, Town of Hempstead, Nassau County*, "Order to Desegregate Schools of Union Free School District #12," *The University of the State of New York: The State Department of Education*, (17 June, 1963).

“balanced class” of each. In addition, the plan required kindergarten students to attend traditional neighborhood schools, while grades 1-3 were to attend Lindner Place and Davison Avenue with one class for each remaining in the Lakeview facility.²³⁷ Since this plan did not, however, fully integrate the school district, and, in effect, gave parents the option of keeping their children in a neighborhood-based class structure, Allen summarily rejected it. With this, white parents from Malverne and Lynbrook, as well as the Board of Education, began a four year legal battle challenging Allen’s authority to place demands upon their local district. With the NAACP as their organizational front, black parents, along with many of their children who would just a few years later become activists themselves, continued to advocate for integrated elementary education each step of the way.

Appeals, A.C.T, and Generational Precedent

In his addendum to the Advisory Committee’s April 1963 report to Commissioner Allen, Fred Hook, President of Malverne’s Board of Education, graciously thanked committee members for their assistance and acknowledged his and the board’s willingness to actively seek out plausible solutions to curb the district’s racial imbalance. Hook noted, however, that the “board and many residents of the community” were “aware of the necessity for caution lest *unusual procedures* [emphasis added] in assignment of pupils lead to sudden and drastic community change.” While the Board of Education would continue to supply, he wrote, “leadership, information, and inspiration,” “the ultimate decision in many instances remains with the qualified voters.” Hook’s addendum suggests that even before Allen ordered the Board of Education to

²³⁷ “News Release: Board of Education School District #12,” 16 August 1963, Exhibit 3 in *Nicholas R. Scalice v. James E. Allen, Jr., Commissioner of Education*, Supreme Court of the State of New York, (September 9, 1963) Found in NAACP Administrative File: General Office File. New York (1996).

desegregate, Board members were aware that progressive or, in Hook's terms, "unusual procedures," would not sit well with his constituents. As he had predicted, they did not. In a school district that had historically defined itself and its three communities by racial and ethnic difference, Allen's state-mandated "legibility," especially since it challenged residents' sense and celebration of "localism," was recognized as nothing less than "tyrannical" and "unconstitutional."²³⁸

In September 1963, local parent Nicholas R. Scalice challenged the legality of Allen's order in New York State's Supreme Court, citing that the commissioner's decree violated his daughter's rights guaranteed by the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as well as New York State Education Law. According to Scalice's complaint, Allen's order "require[d] the exclusion, on the basis of their race, of pupils within the district, from schools which they would otherwise attend on the basis of rational educational factors." Such an order, Scalice asserted, was "illegal, unauthorized, arbitrary, capricious, tyrannical, and unreasonable" since it was not "based on any rational standard reasonably related to the powers of the Commissioner or purposes of [Allen's] office." In other words, if implemented, Allen's plan would violate white students' civil rights, since race was the only determinant by which the district would be reorganized. Attorneys for the NAACP emphatically disagreed.

In their rebuttal of *Vetere v. Allen*, another case brought by a white Malverne parent, the legal team from the NAACP, led by Attorney Robert L. Carter, argued that the Commissioner of Education did, in fact, have the right and the responsibility to integrate school districts when local boards of education failed to do so. Moreover, such actions, the brief explained, were not arbitrary or racially-biased.

²³⁸ For more on "legibility" see Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

Since racially imbalanced schools are legally and educationally unsound, methodology employed to reduce racial imbalance in the process of designating which schools shall be attended by a particular group of students adds a new and educationally sound factor to the administrative process. It is not an arbitrary factor of race as contemplated by Section 3201 of the Education law which prohibits the refusal of admission into or the exclusion from any public school in the State of New York of any person on account of race, creed, color, or national origin. The clear intention of that statute is to preclude discrimination based upon race, and it is the minority group discriminated against, which the law seeks to protect.²³⁹

While the NAACP urged the court to recognize that claims such as those made by local white parents were “untenable,” Supreme Court Justice Isadore Bookstein disagreed, summarily voiding Allen’s order believing that it excluded students from school facilities based on their race.²⁴⁰ Even though racially segregated neighborhoods had clearly led to racially imbalanced neighborhood schools, authorities were unable to use race as a determining factor in alleviating that imbalance.

Nevertheless, while the district’s adult population drew the proverbial line in the sand and turned to the courts for adjudication, in 1964, Malverne High School students organized the Action Committee for Teenagers (A.C.T). Composed of roughly sixty-five anti-racist teens, ACT was organized for the sole purpose of promoting more cross-cultural understanding among local youth. Led by white senior Shepard Sobel, A.C.T., whose membership included many whose younger siblings would later organize S.A.N, educated their teenaged peers on the value of integration through leaflet campaigns, mini-plays, and a revolving lecture series. Covered by the *New York Times* in February of 1964, Sobel explained that if an integrated group of high school students could work

²³⁹ *Brief of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Michael Vetere v. James E. Allen, Jr.*, Supreme Court of the State of New York, Index# 5217/1963 (1963), 15 Found in NAACP Administrative File: General Office File. New York (1996).

²⁴⁰ Fred M. Hechinger, “Court Says Allen Has the Power to Pair Schools: Appellate Division Reverses Ruling that Voided State Directive to Malverne,” *The New York Times* (23 July 1964), 1, 15;

together and “make integration work, [it] would be a step forward” for their divided community. While Sobel recognized that A.C.T. would probably not convince Malverne’s adult population to see beyond race and willingly desegregate, he explained that “among the high school kids there are a great many who are sitting on the borderline on the question of integration.” If they could influence their young peers, Sobel concluded, it would be “a great victory” for the fledgling organization and the community.²⁴¹

The students’ activities, however, did not go unnoticed by their opposition. While some students proudly and openly associated themselves with A.C.T, others did so in secret and without their parents’ permission. In addition, several faculty members and school administrators were displeased with the group’s activities, forbidding students from distributing fliers and other materials on campus. In one instance, Sobel recalled, one of his instructors pulled him aside and warned him of the repercussions such political activity could breed, explaining that it could inhibit his future academic plans and endanger any sort of “public life” as an adult. His involvement in A.C.T., however, had a much more direct impact on his middle-class family than it did on him as a teen activist and organizer. While Sobel’s father supported his civil rights activism, fellow Long Island Railroad commuters did not appreciate his son’s activities, choosing to ostracize and ignore Sobel’s father, turning his daily work commutes into routine “antagonistic events.” This antagonism also manifested itself between the elder Sobels and their neighborhood friends, many of whom chose to no longer associate with the couple.²⁴²

Throughout the decade, such dissolutions became commonplace as the legal battle over

²⁴¹ “L.I. Students Act for Integration: End of Malverne Imbalance Urged by 64 at School,” *New York Times* (23 February 1964), 58.

²⁴² Interview with Shepard Sobel by Neil P. Buffett, November 6, 2007.

school integration further divided residents within and between Malverne, Lynbrook, and Lakeview.

While Sobel and A.C.T concentrated their efforts within the high school, members of the adult black community did not sit idly by and accept Justice Isadore Bookstein's decision to overrule Commissioner Allen. In March of 1964, eight Lakeview parents filed suit in Brooklyn's Federal District Court challenging Bookstein's renunciation of Allen's school desegregation order. The group of eight, which included members of the local NAACP, petitioned the court for a "permanent injunction" against Malverne school official's continued segregationist policies. Like their white opposition, the plaintiffs cited the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, noting that maintenance of neighborhood schools inherently violated their children's civil rights. The federal appeals court agreed, and in its nine-page decision Associate Justice Herbert D. Hamm reaffirmed Allen's authority to require Malverne's Board of Education to eliminate de facto school segregation. Hamm also asserted that even though Allen's order "may evoke 'strong and emotional, negative reactions in persons of contrary views...[it] does not make his decision arbitrary.'" Most importantly, the court's decision stressed the Commissioner's role as the "final arbiter" in matters of state education. It was "not the court[']s." Throughout the year which followed, the New York State Court of Appeals and the United States Supreme Court both agreed, with the former again confirming Allen's power, and the latter refusing to review the case. With this, proponents of neighborhood schools had exhausted their legal options, and Allen's authority to integrate New York State's public schools was no longer legally questioned.²⁴³

²⁴³ Roy R. Silver, "8 Negro Parents in Malverne Sue: Assert Schools Knowingly Maintain Segregation," *The New York Times* (26 March 1964), 21; Hechinger, "Court Says Allen Has the Power to Pair Schools:

Nonetheless, while the courts agreed with Allen, the majority of local whites did not, illustrating its determination to defy the Department of Education through a variety of protests and boycotts throughout 1965 and 1966. During this period, the racial divide in the Malverne School District intensified. As Dodson explained in 1967, “the white group has assumed a proprietary attitude toward the schools in their area.”²⁴⁴

In Malverne, the Negro community, which is dominantly middle class, is severed from the remainder of the district by Ocean Avenue. This formidable traffic barrier has created a psychology of separatism. There has been the tendency for the white community to think of the neighborhood schools located on their side of the road as ‘our schools’ and the school in the Woodfield section, which is Negro, as ‘their school’ This difficulty of hurdling the topographical barriers which provide a psychological base for difference is considerable.²⁴⁵

Throughout the 1960s, such beliefs were not uncommon. As Becky Nicolaides’ research on South Gate in suburban Los Angeles illustrates, working-class homeowners often “defended” their homes and their neighborhoods from racial integration, which many perceived as a threat to home values. Due to the primacy of the detached suburban home in post WWII America, a family’s most important and costly investment, any threat – be it imagined, perceived or legitimate – was guarded against at all costs.²⁴⁶ This was particularly true of Lynbrook’s “Italo-American community” which, as Dodson reported, was “more nearly willing to stand and fight rather than run or accept mixing.”²⁴⁷ Indeed, rather than acquiesce to Allen and the courts, local whites did their best throughout 1965 and 1966 to maintain the established and long-standing color line.

Appellate Division Reverses Ruling that Voided State Directive to Malverne,” 1, 15; Fred M. Hechinger, “Racial Moderates Win: Appellate Ruling on School Integration Holds the Line Against Two Extremes,” *New York Times* (12 March 1964), 26; “Victory for Integration,” *New York Times* (27 July 1964), 30; R. W. Apple, Jr., “Allen is Upheld in Malverne Case: Court Rules He Has Right to Order Shifts of Pupils,” *New York Times* (19 March 1965), 1; “High Court Declines to Review School Integration in Malverne,” *New York Times* (12 October 1965), 37.

²⁴⁴ Dodson, 27.

²⁴⁵ Dodson, 122.

²⁴⁶ Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*.

²⁴⁷ Dodson, 71.

Tensions in the Malverne School district had become so pronounced as of May 1965, that Martin Luther King Jr. took notice and included Lakeview as a stop in his springtime tour of the northeastern United States. Unlike his prolonged activism in the city of Chicago, King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) spent only one day touring the black communities of Nassau County, Long Island.²⁴⁸ On May 12, King spoke to black audiences in Long Beach, Inwood, Rockville Center, and Lakeview, after which he addressed an assembly of 5,000 at the Island Garden Arena in West Hempstead along with Republican Senator Jacob K. Javits and John Lewis, the national director of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Touching on the early successes of the Civil Rights Movement, King assured his audience that they had much more to accomplish, noting that there was “‘still a long, long way to go before the problem [was] solved.’” Still, King confirmed that segregation was finally “‘on its deathbed and the only question...[was] how costly the segregationists [would] make the funeral.’”²⁴⁹ As community tensions heightened throughout 1966, the opposition in Malverne and Lynbrook were willing to pay any price to maintain “‘their” schools. As the events of early 1966 indicate, however, members of Lakeview’s African American community were willing to pay any price as well, as it ironically filed suit against Commissioner Allen and the Department of Education. At the same time, both parents and children alike would protest continued de facto school segregation on picket lines, in

²⁴⁸ For more on King in Chicago, see James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Perennial, 2004).

²⁴⁹ “Dr. King Plans Tour of L.I. Wednesday,” *New York Times* (9 May 1965), 47; “King Scores Senate at Rally in Nassau,” *New York Times* (13 May 1965), 7.

various school boycotts, as well as through community-wide leaflet campaigns in response to local white racism.

Protests, Boycotts and Parental Inspiration

After having been denied a hearing by the United States Supreme Court, white parents in Malverne and Lynbrook once again petitioned the Federal Court in Brooklyn. This time, rather than citing the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the plaintiffs alleged that Allen's order violated their children's rights guaranteed under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Acquiescing to a request by the presiding justice, Commissioner Allen postponed his original desegregation order's implementation until March 1, 1966 or until five days after the federal appeals court had delivered its decision in the new case. Disturbed by the postponement, Lakeview residents picketed the district's elementary schools at the same time that students, on their own volition or at the insistence of their parents, boycotted their classes, refusing to attend school. Throughout this period, many of the youths who would later form Students Acting Now joined their parents on the picket-line and assisted in their activism by delivering integrationist literature to Malverne and Lynbrook residences. It is in this earlier campaign, led by their parents, that S.A.N members became fully aware of the possibility for social and political change through united action. Upon reflection years later, former S.A.N members would cite these experiences as integral to their personal and collective decisions to become teenaged civil rights activists when they ultimately reached high school years later.²⁵⁰

In addition to school boycotts and picket-lines, the anti-segregationist camp once again enjoyed the support and legal services of the NAACP. Under the auspices of attorney Robert L. Carter, NAACP lawyers filed suit against James Allen in New York

²⁵⁰ Finley interview, 2007; White interview, 2007. Delany-Shabazz interview.

State's Supreme Court, requesting that the court instruct the Commissioner "to carry out the Malverne desegregation plan immediately."²⁵¹ In a telegram to Allen, Carter explained that his "refusal to invoke [his] authority" and "grant further delays [would] only convince the school board and the public that desegregation could be indefinitely delayed."

This action undermines your whole program of desegregation, and shakes the confidence of those who believe in the sincerity of your intention to take effective action to require all school boards in this state to accord equal educational opportunities to Negro children. Delays such as that just allowed can continue indefinitely.

In Carter's opinion, Allen's inaction not only lacked "procedural due process" but "constitute[ed] an effective denial to Negro children of rights to which they [were] entitled."²⁵²

Additionally, Carter also forwarded his telegram to Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller's office, hoping that Rockefeller would intercede if Allen refused to reconsider the contested March deadline.²⁵³ While neither Allen nor Rockefeller rescinded the postponement, Supreme Court Justice John H. Pennock agreed with Carter, ruling that implementation of the original desegregation order could only be rescheduled in the event of a "real educational purpose." With this decision, along with the federal court's dismissal of white residents' appeal, de facto segregation in the Malverne School District was soon to become a relic of the past. Indeed, on February 23, the Board of Education officially reorganized schools based upon the required Princeton Model,

²⁵¹ "Malverne Schools Boycotted for Day," *New York Times* (1 February 1966), 24; "Malverne Delay Brings New Suit," *New York Times* (3 February 1966), 23; See *Patricia Ann Mitchell v. Hon. James E. Allen, Jr* Supreme Court of the State of New York, Index# 674-66 (1966), Found in NAACP Administrative File: General Office File. New York (1996).

²⁵² *Telegram to James E. Allen, Jr from Robert L. Carter* (25 January 1966), Found in NAACP Administrative File: General Office File. New York (1996).

²⁵³ *Telegram to James E. Allen, Jr from Robert L. Carter* (25 January 1966).

except for the district's kindergarten classes, all of which, administrators hoped, would remain in the neighborhood schools.²⁵⁴ While this violated Allen's order, members of the black community were not alone in their contempt of the Board of Education's decision to dismantle the neighborhood school program.

While Lakeview residents denounced the board for maintaining segregated kindergarten classrooms, white residents resented the board for even acknowledging Allen and the courts' authority to force the adoption of an integration scheme in the first place. Their displeasure manifested itself in various protest efforts, the first of which resulted in the arrest of nine "long island mothers" and "housewives" who "climbed on a furniture van...to halt the movement of school desks and other equipment from the Davison Avenue School."²⁵⁵ Moreover, roughly one hundred district residents picketed Nassau County's Republican Party headquarters in Garden City hoping to garner political support for their cause.²⁵⁶ As an October 1965 Malverne's Taxpayers and Parents Association flier urged, without direct action, particularly an extensive letter-writing campaign, residents would "have no one else to blame but [themselves]" when they "end[ed] up with a segregated all-Negro Malverne School District #12."²⁵⁷ Such fears led hundreds of white parents to spearhead a three month school boycott and "private" domestic, home-based school program.

Organized by Neighbors United to Save Our Schools, the number of students kept home during the boycott grew steadily from 140 in late February to over 800 by mid-

²⁵⁴ *Memorandum to Henry Moon from Lewis M. Steel, "In the Matter of Patricia Ann Mitchell v. Hon. James E. Allen"* (2 March 1966), Found in NAACP Administrative File: General Office File. New York (1996).

²⁵⁵ "Some Long Island Mothers Take Exception to School Integration," *New York Times* (22 February 1966), 23.

²⁵⁶ "G.O.P. is Picketed Over School Plan," *New York Times* (23 February 1966), 77.

²⁵⁷ Taxpayers and Parents Association Flier, (27 October 1965) Found in NAACP Administrative File: General Office File. New York (1996).

March of 1966. Several parents opted to educate their children at home, individually, rather than send them to integrated elementary facilities. Others sent their children to “private secret schools” in neighbors’ homes, much like African American “freedom schools” that had been operated throughout the southern and northern United States as Civil Rights educational mechanism.²⁵⁸ Regardless of the similarities, however, Malverne’s secret school initiative was not employed in the spirit of racial diversity; rather, it clearly represented the lengths to which white parents would go to keep their children separate from their black peers. Despite the boycott, the Board of Education had been left, by the courts, with no other option than to comply with Allen’s desegregation order. Even with a new slate of anti-integration board members elected in May of 1966, by September it was clear that even the district’s kindergarten neighborhood school program could no longer be maintained and a full Princeton Plan would need to be implemented.²⁵⁹

Still, throughout the 1966-1967 academic year, Malverne’s Board of Education sought out any means possible to circumvent Allen’s order via legal loopholes such as the adoption of a “Free Choice Plan.” First introduced by board members in late October, this plan was to allow parents to request transfers on a student by student basis from one district elementary school to another. In the years following the *Brown* decision, administrators across the United States employed such measures to unofficially re-

²⁵⁸ “L.I. Pupils Continue Boycott of Schools,” *New York Times* (25 February 1966), 31; Roy R. Silver, “L.I. Parents Open Secret Schools for White Pupils,” *New York Times* (1 March 1966), 42; “Malverne Parents Press School Fight,” *New York Times* (2 March 1966), 29; “Protesting Pupils Listed in Malverne,” *New York Times* (3 March 1966), 34; “800 Pupils Boycott Malverne Schools,” *New York Times* (18 March 1966), 16; For more on Freedom Schools see Carson, *In Struggle*, 109-111, 119-121.

²⁵⁹ “Malverne Elects School Plan Foes,” *New York Times* (5 May 1966), 77; Ronald Maiorana, “Malverne School Board Votes to End Last Segregated Class,” *New York Times* (12 August 1966), 20; “Malverne is Told to Integrate Now,” *New York Times* (3 September 1966), 23; Roy R. Silver, “Malverne Obeys Order on Schools,” *New York Times* (7 September 1966), 38.

segregate students in newly integrated districts. As historian James Patterson explains in his work on *Brown*: “On paper these seemed fair, for they permitted parents to send their children to schools of their choice.”

In practice, however, virtually no white children applied to black schools. And black parents who considered sending their children to white schools had to initiate the transfer process individually, and then to combat a range of bureaucratic obstacles such as those in pupil placement laws.²⁶⁰

While such plans were successful in achieving segregationists’ goals in countless American school districts, the Malverne Public School District was not one of them. Within days of the board’s proposal for “Free Choice,” Commissioner Allen, the state’s Department of Education, and the African American community vociferously challenged its legality and its merits. To the chagrin of Malverne’s Board of Education, the plan was struck down in January of 1967, never having been fully established. With no further recourse, and no other legal loopholes left to employ, board members accepted and implemented Allen’s order to integrate.²⁶¹ This did not mean, however, that black students would be offered an equitable educational experience. Rather than reassign a contingent of white students to the Woodfield Road facility – the newest of the three school buildings – the Board of Education opted to close the facility and bus Lakeview children to Davison Avenue and Lindner Place.²⁶² As members of Students Acting Now would unearth a year and a half later, deep-seated racial inequalities were still manifest in their district, in their school, and in their racially divided community. Having witnessed

²⁶⁰ Patterson, 100.

²⁶¹ “Malverne School Board Alters State-Ordered Racial Program,” *New York Times* (20 October 1966), 43; Roy R. Silver, “Negroes Deplore Malverne Plan,” *New York Times* (21 October 1966), 32; “Malverne Awaits Order,” *New York Times* (29 October 1966), 60; Richard L. Madden, “Malverne Board Called to Albany,” *New York Times* (29 October 1966), 60; Richard L. Madden, “Malverne School Enemies Clash in Albany on ‘Free Choice Plan,’” *New York Times* (3 November 1966), 26; “Malverne Facing Study of Schools,” *New York Times* (9 January 1967), 1; “4-Year School Integration Fight Appears Over in Malverne Area,” *New York Times* (5 August 1967), 50.

²⁶² White interview; Marcie White, email message to author, 12 May, 2008.

and assisted in the long fight to dismantle de facto school segregation, the politically-conscious teens who would organize S.A.N in the spring of 1969 were well-prepared to engage such inequality in a movement to do the same within the confines of their high school.

Students Acting Now and High School Activism

In March of 1969, roughly a year and a half after Allen's order had been fully implemented in Malverne, the African American community once again began to tackle the inherent racial inequity that flourished within its school district. Although, by this time parents were on the sidelines, as their teenaged children took the lead in exposing and organizing against a biased academic curriculum and an overall unequal high school experience. As youngsters, many of these students had spent years watching and learning as their parents joined local civil rights organizations and battled against de facto school segregation. As a child, S.A.N leader Glenn Finley distinctly remembers protesting alongside his father, Ewell Finley, noting that his youthful participation "involved picketing at the local middle school and high school," when he was just "ten or eleven years old."²⁶³ Similarly, S.A.N. member Marcia White noted that children routinely assisted their parents in the local civil rights campaigns of the early to mid-sixties.

You know, we were the ones...the kids were the ones who jumped out of the cars and put the fliers in the [mail]boxes. And you saw all these things your parents were doing and you were a part of it.²⁶⁴

Still, while parents certainly influenced their children to become involved, they weren't the student activists' only influence.

²⁶³ Finley Interview.

²⁶⁴ White Interview.

The activities of older siblings were also quite inspirational. In the case of Janet Sobel, her older brother Shephard had served as the founder and teenaged leader of A.C.T just five years earlier. Sobel explained that her brother and many of his peers “absolutely” influenced younger students and their siblings to become politically engaged, relating that “a lot of the kids who were doing this [in 1969] had siblings who had done what Shep did.” Finley agreed, noting that even though S.A.N. members probably did not “consciously” mold their organization after A.C.T, Shepard Sobel was “many underclass-people’s role example,” acknowledging that he was “definitely sure A.C.T influenced us as junior high school folks.”²⁶⁵ Both Finley and friend Marcia White recall their older siblings joining A.C.T in the 1964-1965 school year.²⁶⁶ Clearly, social and political activism in Malverne became generational throughout the 1960s, with parents and children, of all ages, participating and becoming inspirational to one another as the local civil rights movement evolved over time.

To be sure, S.A.N members were also influenced by events that took place far from their divided community, many of which they learned of in newspapers and on the evening news. Retracing the evolution of S.A.N., several members recalled the 1968 Columbia University student strike as an impetus for creating their own student-led protest movement.²⁶⁷ As Finley explained, he was particularly moved by the “guys on the steps [of Columbia University] with these arm bands crossed across their chest, [who made] the point that education needed to represent everybody...and we got some ideas from it, that we felt that the education we were receiving wasn’t a broad perspective.”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Glenn Finley, email message to author, 16 November, 2007.

²⁶⁶ Finley interview; White interview; Marcie White, email message to author, 13 May, 2008

²⁶⁷ Finley Interview; Delany-Shabazz Interview.

²⁶⁸ Finley Interview.

This belief fueled black students' desire to organize themselves and their white peers to confront the educational inequities thrust upon the African American community. With countless student protests erupting across the United States, including several on Long Island and in New York City in the late 1960s, S.A.N members were not organizing within a vacuum. Rather, they were but one high school activist group in a tidal wave of civil rights, Black Power and student-led movements that demanded true equality for minorities in schools and neighborhoods across the nation. By early 1969, that true equality had not come to fruition in Malverne.

A clear racial double standard had been cultivated and sustained in Malverne throughout the 1960s, a fact which was clearly visible to anyone willing to acknowledge its presence. As Vicki Silkiss, a white S.A.N. member explained, "the injustices [and] the disparities were so obvious that I couldn't *not* act."²⁶⁹ This reality was, of course, most obvious to the African American students themselves. At the Board of Education's March 11, 1969 public hearing, Gary Cassis, a black member of S.A.N, accused the high school's Guidance Department of blatant racism, and unequal advising techniques. Cassis explained how, despite many of the students' middle-class backgrounds in college-educated families, counselors "tell us it's a waste of time and money to go to college, so [then] we end up in Vietnam."²⁷⁰ Another member, Janet Sobel, the A.C.T. founder's younger sister, recalled in a 2007 interview, "they were directing these kids to more technical schools and away from the college-bound programs; and these were perfectly bright, capable kids."²⁷¹ In addition, S.A.N members recognized that their school

²⁶⁹ Vicki Silkiss Interview.

²⁷⁰ Idan Simowitz, "Board Session on Student Demands Ends in Uproar, *Long Island Press*, 12 March, 1969, 2

²⁷¹ Sobel-Goldman Interview.

employed few, if any, African American faculty and staff, and did not adequately include minority studies in the school's official curriculum.

These deficiencies served as a foundation for S.A.N's list of twelve demands which the groups' leadership penned in early February of 1969, a list which included, among others, requests for a more racially diverse faculty, a more racially and ethnically inclusive social studies curriculum, more inclusive library holdings, recognition of black history and fallen black leaders, as well as Swahili as a foreign language elective.

Recognizing that the power to amend school policy rested with the Board of Education, S.A.N leaders bypassed school administrators completely, and brought their case directly to the school district's governing body at its February 11th public hearing, whereat twenty-five members presented their demands for consideration. While the roughly two-hour meeting remained cordial, district officials tabled the students' concerns, promising to put forth a "plan of action" at their next public hearing, scheduled for Tuesday, March 11th.

At that next meeting, however, with an even larger gathering of African American students, this time accompanied by their parents and local representatives of the NAACP and CORE, board members and school administrators argued that, while the students' "suggestions" had been considered, changes could not and would not be "made overnight." With this, "the meeting turned to pandemonium" and board president John W. Lewis was unable to re-establish order, as audience members "blurt[ed] out questions without being recognized." Expressing their displeasure, students and parents alike booed and shouted at the board, prompting Lewis to abruptly adjourn the hearing and lead his colleagues out of the meeting room. By the end of this second meeting, it had become

abundantly clear, to students and parents alike that board members were either going to dismiss the demands entirely or, at best, institute them at a much slower pace than the students had originally hoped.²⁷² Clearly, Malverne's Board of Education was unused to students not only "demanding" change, but disrupting the very meetings in which school officials had traditionally agreed upon curriculum and district-wide policies.

Recognizing that neither S.A.N nor its demands had been taken seriously, Glenn Finley and his peers responded with a week-long string of in-school student protests. The first such protest took place on Thursday, March 13th. Rather than reporting to class as they normally would have, roughly 350 students, mostly African American, staged a nine-hour sit-in demonstration in their school's central corridor, refusing to disband until granted a private hearing with the Board of Education. While board members agreed to meet with S.A.N leaders over the upcoming weekend, the students, including Finley, Pamela Corbin, Herbert Harrison, and Larry Morgan, refused to call off the protest until the board agreed to "immediate talks." As the school day came to a close, about 150 of the student protesters disbanded. The other two hundred students, however, remained in the building until they were finally threatened with arrest by local police who arrived at 4:30. Within the hour, S.A.N's first in-school protest came to a close after Finley had given the signal to disperse. While they had not met their goal, the student group had been able to organize a sizable crowd of their peers in just two days time.²⁷³

²⁷² Dennis Hevesi, "Blacks' Demands Given in Malverne," *Newsday*, 12 February 1969, 15; Idan Simowitz, "Board Session on Student Demands Ends in Uproar," *Long Island Press*, 12 March, 1969, 2; *Minutes of the Board of Education, Union Free School District #12*, February 11, 1969, Union Free School District #12 (Malverne School District), Malverne, New York.

²⁷³ "Malverne Students End Sit-In, Begin Boycott of Classes," *Long Island Press* (14 March 1969), 1,8; Brad O'Hearn, "300 Walk Out in Malverne Conflict," *Newsday* (14 March 1969), 4.

Early the next morning, S.A.N's leadership once again proved to school administrators that they could corral a sizable number of their peers, when over 300 black and white students boycotted classes for a second full day of protests. Before leaving for the day, S.A.N leaders led the group throughout the building "chanting 'black power' [with] their fists held high" for about twenty minutes. While they marched, another group of roughly fifty white students kept watch across Ocean Avenue, wearing white arm-bands, periodically chanting "'white is beautiful.'" Coupled with a school-yard cross-burning the night before, the white arm-bands vividly symbolized the deep-seeded racial animosity that had been brewing in the Malverne area for over a decade.²⁷⁴

While several white students and parents supported S.A.N's cause, just as many, if not more, did not, particularly in working-class Lynbrook. Vicki Silkiss' mother, Elsie, noted that, in her estimation, class envy fueled an ever-present racism in Lynbrook, whose "people resented the amount of education...and economics that the Lakeview people had."²⁷⁵ Indeed, several Lakeview residents were highly educated and held various professional positions in New York City and on Long Island, including, among others, Ewell Finley and Lloyd Delany who taught at City College and Queens College, respectively. S.A.N member Marcia White estimated that "about three quarters" of Lakeview residents were "educated black people who could afford homes in the middle class neighborhood."²⁷⁶ A comparison of the average 1970 income for all three communities illustrates that while Malverne's median income was higher than both Lynbrook and Lakeview at \$16,254, the difference between the latter two was only

²⁷⁴ O'Hearn, "300 Walk Out in Malverne Conflict," 4; "Malverne-Oyster Bay Boycott," *New York Times* (15 March 1969), 21; Pete Bowles, "Malverne Faces 3rd Protest," *Newsday* (17 March 1969), 4.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Elsie Silkiss by Neil P. Buffett. 17 December 2007.

²⁷⁶ White interview.

\$1,902, at \$13,095 and \$11,193, respectively.²⁷⁷ As noted above, however, these averages may be deceiving, as they do not account for the racial bias in employment and compensation that typified the post World War II era. Understandably, the students on both sides of “the Ocean,” S.A.N leaders in the school, and their white adversaries who diligently watched, had, by 1969, adopted the political and social philosophies that had been handed down to them by their parents and their communities. S.A.N members espoused those philosophies, specifically, the belief in racial and educational equality when they met with Board of Education members over the weekend following their first two in-school demonstrations. While Finley noted the board’s willingness to meet as a “victory,” in that the board had originally refused to meet with students under any circumstances, the meeting adjourned without resolution.

Prior to meeting with the Board of Education, S.A.N members had hosted a Saturday evening rally of parents and students, both black and white, at the Woodfield Road School to explain the group’s future plans. Recognizing the need for parental support, S.A.N members had distributed fliers publicizing the event stating, “Wanted: Black Parents,” which served not only as a call for their participation, but also as an acknowledgment of their own expertise in organizing as civil rights activists earlier in the decade. At the meeting of roughly 250, Finley urged students and parents alike to disregard administrators’ threats of across the board suspensions for protest participants. In his mind, it was “unconstitutional to punish students engaging in peaceful protests in their own schools.”²⁷⁸ To the students, it seemed unimaginable that their peaceful protest

²⁷⁷ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 6, Income* 1973, 65.

²⁷⁸ “Malverne Students Stage School Rally,” Found in the private collection of Glenn Finley; S.A.N Rally Poster found in the private collection of Glenn Finley.

activities could or would lead to suspension, dismissal, or even arrest. Unimaginable or not, however, District Superintendent James Carnrite did, in fact, begin suspending students for their participation in the protest movement in the days which followed.

Having failed to convince the Board of Education over the weekend, S.A.N leaders scheduled a third day of student demonstrations for Monday morning, which began with a brief cafeteria sit-in of roughly 150 students. As he had promised, Carnrite issued suspensions for all 150 demonstrators, all of whom quickly filtered out of the building. Rather than returning to their homes, however, the newly suspended students joined with another 150 students, and small group of parents, who had congregated outside the school building, in “huddle” formation, to plan their next move.²⁷⁹ Dan Silkess, Vicki’s father, happened to be in the area that Monday morning and stopped by to observe his daughter, as well as the other students’ activities. He explained: “I came up and sort of joined them and one of them looked over at me and said, ‘what’s whitey doing here?’”

And I think it was Lloyd [Delany] who said, ‘Oh, it’s Dan, he’s okay.’ And so what they intended to do was to try to breach the doors of the school; in other words, to get inside and then demonstrate inside. And [then we] came out to the front and banged on the door; then someone opened the door a bit, and when the door opened the flow went in. Lincoln Lynch and Lloyd Delany and Baxter and Ewell Finley and Buddy Jackson, myself went in and then took over. The students came marching in right behind all of them and protesting, yelling ‘boom boom [Ungawa] black power...’ with the raised fist.²⁸⁰

School administrators, however, were unimpressed with the students’ unequivocal disregard for their authority, especially after having just issued 150 suspensions. More importantly, the 300 students had also showed no regard for the Nassau County police officers they brushed aside when they stormed the building. Once inside, S.A.N members

²⁷⁹ Benjamin Shore and Bob DeLeon, “150 Suspended at Malverne HS,” *Newsday* (17 March 1969), 5, 29.

²⁸⁰ Interview with Dan Silkess by Neil P. Buffett, 17 December 2007.

once again marched throughout the building, but unlike their previous demonstrations, the students did not disband when told to do so. To quell the disturbance, the Board of Education insisted that all protestors, students and parents alike, be arrested and charged with criminal trespass. Malverne and Nassau County Police Officers, however, did not immediately heed this demand. Rather, they actively tried to persuade students to leave on their own, a choice that over half opted for, especially when their arrest appeared to be imminent.²⁸¹ Still, such attempts at persuasion did not mean that those who remained, totaling 132 students and five adults, were treated justly once they had been taken into custody.

Despite their young age, several female protestors recalled police, particularly female officers, using abusive language and questionable tactics when processing them, the most humiliating of them including alleged strip searches.²⁸² While police did not discriminate between white and black students in this regard, a clear disparity between white and black students evolved at their arraignment. Repeatedly, white defendants were released without having to post bail, while their African American counterparts were charged between fifty to five hundred dollars. Moreover, when brought before the presiding judge, black defendants were not shown the same respect granted their white brethren. Elsie Silkiss, Vicki's mother, explained.

When Lloyd Delany and [his daughter] Robin came up for her arraignment or whatever it was the judge said to him, 'are you gainfully employed?' And Lloyd said, 'yes, I'm a professor at City College.' And the judge kept reiterating, 'are

²⁸¹ Roy Silver, "137 Are Arrested in Protest by Negroes at Malverne High School," *New York Times* (18 March 1969), 31.

²⁸² Dan Silkiss Interview; Elsie Silkiss Interview; Vicki Silkiss Interview; Sobel-Goldman Interview; Delany-Shabazz Interview; Brad O'Hearn and Jerry Labinger, "Malverne Protesters Returning to School," *Newsday* (20 March 1969).

you gainfully employed?’ In other words, deriding the fact that maybe he’s just making it up that he’s a professor at City College.²⁸³

The same judge did not treat white defendants or their parents in this manner. Still, while black students and parents were treated unfairly by the court, all student protestors were released into their parents’ custody pending future court action.

Students were not the only defendants arraigned for the March 17th protest, however. Among the 137 protestors arrested were five adults, mostly parents, including Lincoln Lynch, the executive Vice-President of the New York Urban Coalition, who had, for weeks, been publicly supporting S.A.N’s protest activities. While the other four adults were charged only with criminal trespass, Lynch was charged with trespass, felony assault on two police officers, resisting arrest, and inciting a riot. According to police, the local civil rights leader had allegedly punched and kicked his arresting officers during the protest. Moreover, officers later testified before the Grand Jury that Lynch was the principal adult in charge of the student demonstration, having “‘pushed the doors open and shouted, ‘come on in; show them who is boss.’” Despite community calls to drop or lessen his charges, Lynch’s trial was ultimately scheduled for June in Nassau County Court.²⁸⁴ Neither his nor the students’ arrest and detainment, however, prevented S.A.N members and their supporters from continuing on with their movement for racial justice.

Two days after their arrest and release, S.A.N leaders once again congregated outside the high school with roughly 250 black and white peers, as well as several of their parents, and staged a fifteen minute silent vigil. In addition to their original twelve demands, S.A.N members now demanded that either Superintendent James Carnrite

²⁸³ Elsie Silkiss Interview.

²⁸⁴ “New Malverne Protests Set,” *Long Island Press* (19 March 1969), 1,3; “Lynch to Face Grand Jury,” *Long Island Press* (22 March 1969) found in the private papers of Glenn Finley; “Suspend Sentence on 105 H.S. Sit-ins,” *Long Island Press* (27 May 1969), 13.

resign from his position, or he withdraw all criminal charges against student activists and their parents. During the vigil, the assembled students in unison “raised the clenched fist of a black power salute” only breaking their silence with “‘Carnrite must go!’” While the Superintendent appeased them with neither, School Board President John Lewis met students outside and explained that he and his four colleagues had “asked school administrators to expedite the implementation of some of their demands.” With this, Finley and fellow S.A.N leaders called off any further in-school demonstrations, save a brief “symbolic demonstration” scheduled for the following morning, “‘to give the school board an opportunity to react and to reflect on [student] demands.’”²⁸⁵ Clearly, S.A.N’s protests, the arrests, and the negative publicity fomented by both, had pressured the Board of Education to take the group’s demands seriously. Board members promised S.A.N leaders that they would issue a written response for each of its demands by that Friday evening. Nevertheless, S.A.N leaders were not deterred from leading a mid-day walkout with over one hundred of their peers after a failed meeting with their school principal, John Archer.²⁸⁶

The high school activists, however, *were* happy that the Board of Education had finally chosen to recognize them, as well as their list of fourteen (originally twelve) demands. At its Friday night meeting, board members agreed to implement eight of them. In its written response to S.A.N leaders, board members agreed to: further include black history, black culture, and black literature in each school’s general curriculum; hire more African American faculty and staff; introduce Swahili as a foreign language option; allow

²⁸⁵ “New Malverne Protests Set,” *Long Island Press* (19 March 1969), 1,3; “Malverne Rebel Students Call Off Boycott... for Now,” *Long Island Press* (20 March 1969).

²⁸⁶ “New Walkout at Malverne,” *New York Times* (21 March 1969), 36; “Demands Simmering in Malverne,” *Newsday* (21 March 1969).

meetings between a board representative and student groups; and, to allow the word “black” to replace “negro” in the school newspaper. Nevertheless, board members still refused to require or accept Carnrite’s resignation; to apologize for their behavior on March 11th; to close schools for Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday; to change the name of the Howard T. Herbert Middle School to simply Malverne Middle School; to abolish the school’s National Honor Society for alleged racism; and, to cancel the high school musical “Wonderful Town” for alleged discrimination in casting.²⁸⁷

While S.A.N leaders were happy with the Board of Education’s decision, they knew they had much more to accomplish, reporting to the media that the group’s steering committee had not “rule[d] out the possibility of future demonstrations.” Despite the board’s acceptance of eight student demands, the other six had been dismissed. The refusal of one in particular stung S.A.N members significantly, as Finley noted: “The group never expected all the demands to be met, but we were shocked at their refusal to make the Rev. Martin Luther King’s birthday a school holiday. This hurt many of us, and they offered no explanation.”²⁸⁸ Such dismay informed the students’ decision to organize another protest, which they had come to recognize as the only viable means to realize their desired changes. They, as their parents had before them, realized that activism was one of the most useful tactics in motivating the district’s Board of Education.

On Wednesday morning, Finley, with a bullhorn in hand, once again corralled a large group of students for what was to be a one mile march throughout the Malverne community. With Finley at the helm, the integrated group of 150 students set out from their high school, marched past the Davison Avenue and Lindner Place Elementary

²⁸⁷ *Minutes of the Board of Education of Union Free School District #12, Malverne, New York* (21 March 1969), 28c-f.

²⁸⁸ Pete Bowles and Carole Ashkinaze, “Malverne Students Appeased,” *Newsday* (22 March 1969), 5, 16.

Schools, and returned to the high school unscathed. Upon their return, S.A.N members defied Principal Archer's edict banning in-school demonstrations, and once again led their peers, this time silently, throughout the building, concluding their protest in the school yard with a "black power salute."²⁸⁹ With that, the students returned to their classes for the remainder of the day, having once again proven that S.A.N members were unwilling to abandon any of their demands. This unwillingness, which mirrored the unfettered resolve their parents had demonstrated years before, would ultimately lead to their success in forcing the Board of Education to fully implement nine of their demands, including the coveted school closures for Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

Civil Rights Success in the Absence of Environmentalism

Unlike March, April 1969 brought relative calm to Malverne Senior High School, as S.A.N leaders allowed school administrators and the Board of Education to once again consider their full list of demands. This interlude, however, cannot be attributed to S.A.N member's willingness to break from tradition alone. In the first week of April, Principal Archer indefinitely suspended three S.A.N leaders, including Glenn Finley and Pamela Corbin, for their refusal to cease inciting in-school and community-wide protests. According to a letter sent to Finley's parents, Archer explained that his suspension would remain in effect until assurance was given that "Glenn, upon your direction, will return to school for the sole purpose of pursuing his studies in accordance with the normally scheduled school program." Archer not only charged the students with "insubordination and disorderly conduct," he explained that their actions "and behavior is inimical to the

²⁸⁹ "Protestors at Malverne Warned," *Long Island Press* (27 March 1969), 9; Bob DeLeon, "Malverne Pupils Put Off Protest," *Newsday* (27 March 1969), 15.

instructional program...and will not be tolerated.”²⁹⁰ As Archer’s inference illustrates, S.A.N leaders and their colleagues were not acting within their rights as social and political organizers; rather, they were violating rules set forth by the very state-sanctioned institution they, and their demands, were challenging. Even though S.A.N could still have remained active, without Finley and Corbin, two principal leaders at the helm, in-school protests were brought to a stand-still. Nevertheless, the Board of Education and school administrators *had* witnessed an awesome display of student power, which had been covered by newspapers such as *Newsday*, *The Long Island Press* and the *New York Times* throughout the preceding month. Such press coverage not only reflected poorly upon the school district, it also reflected poorly upon board members themselves, for they had continuously refused to negotiate with student representatives who, quite arguably, were the constituency they truly served, even though they were not voting members of the public.

At its Tuesday, May 13th public hearing, the Board of Education unanimously agreed to support all of S.A.N’s suggested curriculum changes, as well as district-wide annual observation of Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday.²⁹¹ In a 2007 interview, Robin Delany noted how board members “finally acknowledged and agreed that they would meet certain things.”

At this point it was the end of the school year in 11th grade, so they agreed they would have a black studies class, that they would work to bring somebody in for Swahili, they’d work on bringing in new faculty, you know, trying to recruit faculty. Whatever; they had agreed that this was important that they would do this. So, in 12th grade we had a black studies class and we had a Swahili teacher who came in, and I don’t recall other than that [if] they had a lot of black faculty, but over time they started to be more proactive about doing that. But they were

²⁹⁰ Bob DeLeon, “Malverne Suspends 3 Negroes,” *Newsday* (3 April, 1969).

²⁹¹ “Malverne Schoolmen Agree to Black Student Demands,” *The Long Island Press* (14 May 1969), 3; “Malverne Schools Adopt Studies Urged by Blacks,” *New York Times* (14 May 1969).

really, the administration [had been] pretty-from our standpoint-unwilling to discuss or talk about this, which is what compelled us or impelled us to take the action of demonstrating and sitting in and boycotting the classes, and speaking to the media.²⁹²

Indeed, in just three month's time, S.A.N leaders had been able to force district administrators to not only recognize them as concerned students and invested community members, but they ultimately left the board with no other option but to implement student demands or face further demonstrations. Acceptance of the students' demands, however, was not the only action taken by Malverne's administrators.

On Monday, May 26th, Superintendent James Carnrite spoke in court on behalf of the student activists who had been arrested for criminal trespass on March 17th. Speaking before Minola District Court Judge James Neihoff, Carnrite explained that even though he believed that S.A.N members' ends had not justified their means, he had always supported their goals, and didn't "want to see the future of these young adults hurt by punishment." Like many of his contemporaries, Carnrite recognized, as he explained to the judge, that his school district had been "torn asunder for a period of not less than 10 years." While it was clear that S.A.N members had broken the law, they were "sincere and honest" in their attempts to "bring about needed educational changes in respect to curriculum, instruction, and staff." Carl Binder, an attorney representing the students agreed, noting that many of them had taken what they had learned from their parents and applied that knowledge where they saw fit. "These youngsters represent the second generation of protest in this school district and community. They represent the best in the community as far as their goals and aspirations are concerned." Judge Neihoff agreed, even though, like Carnrite, he opposed the students' unlawful means. Still, following the

²⁹² Delany-Shabazz interview.

superintendent's advice, Neihoff handed down a suspended sentence for each student, after they each pled guilty to disorderly conduct, a much lesser charge than the original, and more severe, misdemeanor charge of criminal trespass.²⁹³

For the members of Students Acting Now, their protest movement had finally come full circle. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s they had spent their formative years in a racially divided suburban school district, much like their contemporaries in Bellport and North Bellport. At the same time, many had witnessed, and several had assisted their parents in the four year struggle to eliminate de facto segregated, neighborhood schools. Having learned how to force change from their parents, S.A.N members crafted their own movement to make change within a high school structure they believed did not represent them as individuals or as members of a disenfranchised black citizenry. After three months of in-school protest demonstrations, S.A.N members followed in their parents' footsteps, having forced their school district's administrators to implement the curricular and administrative changes they demanded. Malverne students had not only succeeded in forcing change, but they had proven to their districts' leadership that they, the students, were justified in demanding that change.

Interestingly enough, much of their story mirrors that of their contemporaries in North and South Bellport, roughly forty-five miles east on Long Island. As discussed in Chapter Two, students at Bellport Senior High School spent much of the 1969-1970 school year organizing a similar Civil Rights campaign, calling for many of the very same changes in regard to racial composition of school faculty, racial inclusiveness of the curriculum, recognition of African American history week as well as holidays in honor of

²⁹³ "Suspend Sentence on 105 H.S. Sit-ins," *Long Island Press* (27 May 1969), 13; "Leniency for an Angry Day in March," *Newsday* (27 May 1969); Roy R. Silver, "Court with 'Heart' Frees Malverne High School Protesters," *New York Times* (27 May 1969), 33.

fallen black leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. Just like in Malverne, Bellport students led a convincing protest movement which ultimately forced school officials to implement many of these stated demands. On this score, similarity between both suburban communities and the students' equality campaign appears, on the surface, to be more than solid.

As noted above, however, the differences between these two manifestations of student-led civil rights activism certainly equaled, if not outweighed, their resemblance to one another. To be sure, neither group of teen activists shared a similar socio-economic background; while minority students from North Bellport typically understood themselves as members of an impoverished and, at best, working-class community, black student leaders from Lakeview were fully cognizant of their more middle-class standing. Throughout the late 1960s, these class-based realities influenced and informed the civil rights movements that evolved upon each of these two diverging suburban landscapes. For minority youths in North Bellport, the campaign to address and, if possible, alleviate local poverty dovetailed with their in-school and community-wide demand for racial and ethnic equality. In Malverne, black students focused their efforts on only one of these, oftentimes conjoined, social and political issues. As adolescent members of the postwar black middle-class, student leaders such as Glenn Finley, Marcia White, and Robin Delaney had no reason to tailor their locally-based racial justice campaign to include socio-economic uplift.

The differences between both Malverne and Bellport do not end there, however, as the lack of an organized in-school environmental action campaign in the former community indicates. As discussed in chapter two, Bellport witnessed the evolution of a

social justice *and* an environmental consciousness in its student population, both of which inspired two distinct groups of students - one in the fall of 1969, the other in the spring of 1970 – to organize their peers for social and political activism. In Malverne, this was not the case, as students, black and white, concentrated their efforts only in the realm of civil rights, a fact which begs the question why? While it is virtually impossible to pinpoint an exact reason for the absence of the latter social movement, several factors may be considered as possibilities, including the lack of student interest, limited adult and faculty influence, and the importance of “place” as an impetus for activism.

The first and most apparent of these is contrasting levels of student interest in the burgeoning environmental movement as it relates to the time period that students became socially and politically active. According to Glenn Finley, “environmental [activism] wasn’t something that we considered so much” in the late 1960s, noting that at the time S.A.N. was pushing for racial equality, it “was too early” for the type of environmental activism that would eventually explode in the early 1970s. Finley’s S.A.N colleague, Robin Delany-Shabazz concurred, also noting that environmental activism started later, mistakenly placing its rise in the mid-1970s rather than earlier.²⁹⁴ At the same time, by the spring of 1969, these S.A.N. alumni, as well as many of their peers, were fully invested in the personal identity politics of their struggle for educational equality, which surely limited the amount of free time each had at his/her disposal. This temporal and ideological reasoning, however, is still not a sufficient enough explanation for the dissimilarities between Malverne and Bellport, since members of Bellport’s SEQ were almost a completely different social group of students than those who had campaigned for racial equality. While a general lack of student interest could be purported as a viable

²⁹⁴ Finley interview; Delany-Shabazz interview.

possibility, the absence of an influential adult role-model, such as Art Cooley or Dennis Puleston, may prove a more accurate reasoning.

As former SEQ members have repeatedly noted, Cooley and Puleston, both of whom were already successful environmental activists in their own right, deeply inspired Cooley's Biology and Marine Biology students to organize and sustain a student-led environmental campaign in their school and, more importantly, throughout their suburban community. At Malverne Senior High School, no such adult role model stood out as a possible influence for students interested in working on behalf of their local environment. This did not mean, however, that local youth did not foment strong connections with the natural world through recreational usage of the environmental wonders within their midst. This included playing in local wooded areas, in which youths such as Glenn Finley remember "search[ing] and hunt[ing] for tad poles and pollywogs and frogs...look[ing] for garter snakes" as well as hiking along trails and constructing "imaginary forts" beneath the wooded domes of the mini-forests within their community. While such experiences certainly stood out as "exciting," "adventurous," and "special" to Finley as a youngster, he was more than cognizant of the fact that such experiences were taking place where he lived, right down the street from his family home within a nature preserve, a public park or any other local wooded area. This reality, on many levels, demystified nature for him and his peers, as their adolescent explorations "didn't feel unique" since, as he explained, "I just felt like this is the 'woods' and this is where we hang out." Unlike his contemporaries forty-five miles east in Bellport, such places did not stand out, to him, as frail and endangered ecosystems in need of preservation.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ Interview with Glenn Finley by Neil P. Buffett , (9 February, 2010).

Finley's S.A.N colleague, Marcia White, echoed such recollections, noting how she, Finley and several of their friends spent considerable time playing outdoors in their backyards, on the street in front of their homes, in public parks, as well as in wooded areas in their neighborhood. Moreover, White also noted the popularity of backyard vegetable and flower gardening throughout the Lakeview community. As she explained, "we were always in the dirt; we were always helping mom and dad make the yard beautiful...[since] everybody wanted their yard to look better than the next person's." In addition to assisting with backyard gardening, local youths such as Finley and White also experienced nature when traveling with family to points near and far from their homes in Lakeview. This included trips upstate to the Adirondack Park, cross-country camping trips to western and mid-western locations such as Mount Rushmore and the Badlands, as well as family vacations across the northeast to Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Providence, Rhode Island. In all of these varied settings, White, just like Finley, recognized and connected with "nature" far from her suburban home in Lakeview. For her, there existed a "separation" between the nature one experienced at home and the nature one experienced elsewhere. She explained.

No, it was a separation because if you were in your community, you were in your community. And you were a few blocks or right in back of your house. It was really your home environment. When you were away, you were away. So, it was an adventure. It was different.²⁹⁶

With "real" nature being defined as something else, in a place far off from their home environments, teens such as Finley and White were less inclined than their Bellport contemporaries to recognize environmental degradation within their local community. To

²⁹⁶ Interview with Marcia White by Neil P. Buffett, (17 February, 2010); Finley interview, 2007.

be sure, if nature were somewhere else other than Malverne, so too would the myriad dangers which threatened it.

This did not mean, however, that an environmental consciousness did not eventually manifest in the Malverne community, especially in the years following the first Earth Day in 1970. While no high school-based environmental organization evolved at this time, several local adults organized the Malverne Environmental Council (M.E.C) with the principal goal of establishing a community-wide recycling program. To this end, M.E.C.'s founders provided residents, including a small number of local teenagers, the opportunity to volunteer at various waste drop-off sites throughout the local area. In the absence of a high school organization such as Bellport's Students for Environmental Quality or Brooklyn's John Dewey High School Marine Biology Club, the subject of Chapter Four, M.E.C. provided interested teens an adequate outlet to join the budding movement.²⁹⁷ Still, as noted above, this did not include members of Students Acting Now, all of whom engaged in civil rights activism prior to not only M.E.C.'s founding in 1970, but also prior to the first national Earth Day celebration as well.

In the case of Malverne, "place" itself, and its relative importance to area teens, may have also played a considerable role in limiting student interest in environmental protection. While teenagers in Malverne, like members of SEQ in Bellport, shared a similar post- World War II suburban experience, these respective experiences were, geographically-speaking, far from mirror images of one another. Unlike Bellport which had been settled roughly sixty miles east of New York City, Malverne had been settled only fifteen miles from the urban metropolis, and, by the late 1960s, had, to some degree,

²⁹⁷ Interview with Alan Stalb, founder of the M.E.C, by Neil P. Buffett, (16 February, 2009); Interview with Carol O'Beirne by Neil P. Buffett, (19 February, 2009).

“urbanized” much more than its rural counterpart. In terms of population, Malverne was by far the larger community, with 10,865 residents. Taken together with the 1970 population totals for Lynbrook and Lakeview, the three communities claimed a total populace of just fewer than 40,000. In contrast, the more rural communities of Bellport and North Bellport claimed more meager populations of just 3,046 and 5,903 for a total populace of 8,949.²⁹⁸ While these numbers alone prove very little, if anything at all, in regard to the level of local interest in environmental activism, they do indicate something very concrete about each of these two suburban places and their relation to open space and other “wild” areas such as those along the shores of the Carmans River.

In *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, environmental historian Adam Rome makes the argument that post World War II American suburbanization and the rise of environmental activism in the same period is no coincidence. In fact, he explained, the mass production techniques employed by developers to construct thousands of suburban communities and millions of single-family homes throughout the United States inspired millions of eventual suburbanites to ultimately question the very processes which raised their very first privately-owned suburban home. Once in these suburban venues, millions of American families found themselves one step closer to more open and greener spaces, areas which many construed as more “natural” than the more urbanized neighborhoods they had left behind. At the same time, as Rome’s precursor, Samuel P. Hays noted, environmental activism was also a byproduct of rising post-World War II affluence, which allowed millions of Americans the free time and financial means to enjoy “nature” recreationally. Through recreational use, millions of Americans – be they urban or

²⁹⁸ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 1. Number of Inhabitants*, (1971) P. 17, 38, 40.

suburban – over time developed a new appreciation for “nature” and the environment, which, for many, fueled their desires to become environmentally active.²⁹⁹

While Malverne had clearly been settled as a suburban community, Bellport was by far much more rural in terms of open space and residential access to recreational opportunities. On the whole, Suffolk County, in which North and South Bellport were situated, was significantly less dense in 1970 than Malverne’s parent county of Nassau with 1,127,030 and 1,428,838 residents respectively.³⁰⁰ At a glance, this demographic difference appears quite minimal until it is viewed alongside both counties’ relative size per square mile. While both areas claimed over one million residents, Suffolk County was spread over much more land area, totaling 912 square miles as compared to Nassau’s 287.³⁰¹ These numbers clearly illustrate the limited amount of open space that Nassau County residents, and in this case, those in Malverne, shared in contrast to their counterparts in Bellport. Again, while such numbers cannot indicate residents’ relative interest in the budding environmental movement, it is clear that with more open space residents in Suffolk County enjoyed much more recreational area than residents in the more densely populated and more “urbanized” Nassau.

Unlike their counterparts in Malverne, Bellport residents lived in close proximity to Long Island’s coastal regions and local waterways, including not only the Carmans River, but Long Island’s Nissequogue, Connetquot, and Peconic Rivers, all of which flowed through Suffolk County alone. Moreover, South Bellport was settled in much

²⁹⁹ See Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*; Hays, *Beauty Health, and Permanence*.

³⁰⁰ The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, *U.S. Census '70: The Nassau-Suffolk Regional Planning Board, Vol. 1. Number of Inhabitants* (1971), 17, 20.

³⁰¹ City-Data.Com, “Nassau County, New York,” <http://www.city-data.com/county/Nassau_County-NY.html> (15 December, 2009); City-Data.Com, “Suffolk County, New York,” <http://www.city-data.com/county/Suffolk_County-NY.html> (15 December, 2009).

closer proximity to Long Island's Great South Bay than Malverne, Lynbrook, or Lakeview. All three of these latter neighborhoods had been originally settled further inland on Long Island, having not been founded for the purposes of fishing, whaling or shipbuilding, as had Bellport.³⁰² Due to this closer proximity to local waterways, recreational opportunities, and open spaces, an argument could be made that Bellport residents had, throughout the post-war period, developed much stronger ties to the local environment than their peers in Malverne. Despite testimonies such as Glenn Finley's, in which he noted him and his friends' youthful exploration of parks and local wooded areas, these students had not necessarily understood such places as jeopardized natural habitats as did their east-end contemporaries.

As the next chapter will illustrate, proximity to "natural" environments would become a key impetus for Brooklyn's John Dewey Marine Biology Club's environmental activism throughout the early 1970s. Similar to SEQ, John Dewey students found inspiration to become environmentally active in the leadership provided by their two Marine Science instructors, both of whom shared their students' excitement for the marine world and marine habitats. Interestingly enough, as the story of Brooklyn's John Dewey High School illustrates, urbanity did not preclude high school student environmental activism. On the contrary, their school's placement in the general vicinity of Brooklyn's Atlantic Coastline allowed Dewey students a unique opportunity to repeatedly insert themselves into the debate over waterfront development and environmental protection in New York City. Still, just as there were marked differences between the civil rights movements that evolved in Bellport and Malverne, so too were there marked differences between the environmental movements that manifested in

³⁰² See Chapter Two for more on Bellport's founding and early economy.

Bellport and Brooklyn. As Chapter Four, and later, Chapter Five will illustrate, crossing the urban-suburban divide between New York City and Long Island significantly altered the civil rights and environmental movements that students led on either side.

Chapter 4: Environmental Activism at John Dewey High School in Brooklyn

As the previous chapters have highlighted, high school student civil rights and environmental activism both manifested in diverging suburban localities across the post World War II Long Island landscape. In rural Bellport and the more “urbanized” Malverne, successful movements for racial and ethnic equality were led by teenaged activists intent upon securing unbiased high school experiences for not only themselves, but for future generations of students as well. In Bellport, such activism was then followed by an evolving student interest in the budding environmental movement, particularly in the years following the nation’s first Earth Day in April of 1970. Although, as noted in chapter three, this latter movement did not take root in Malverne, as teenaged activists in this community focused their attention solely upon in-school cultural bias and community-wide racial discrimination. Having taken place within the confines of post-World War II suburbia, both types of student activism were uniquely contoured by the very communal and educational places within which they evolved. As the last two chapters have made clear, student activism in Bellport and Malverne – be it civil rights or environmental – was heavily inspired, influenced, and molded by not only the students’ personal and collective realities within their home communities, but also by their communities’ historical pasts and trajectories as well. In many ways then, the two individual suburban places themselves served as, and provided, significant impetus for the types of social and political change students therein hoped to bring forth.

Suburban communities such as Bellport and Malverne, however, were not the only settings within which high school student civil rights and environmental activism flourished. As the following two case studies highlight, the late 1960s and early 1970s

also witnessed the fruition of both student movements upon the urban terrain of Brooklyn, New York as well. Manifesting independently of one another in two separate high schools, student-led civil rights and environmental activism in Brooklyn took on uniquely urban characteristics which differentiated both from similarly-situated social and political movements on nearby Long Island. In the case of John Dewey High School, at which students engaged in a variety of borough-wide environmental preservation campaigns, differentiation in spatial relationships between students and the sites of their activism proved significant throughout the early 1970s. Whereas students in suburban Bellport lived and learned within close proximity of the natural wonders they studied and labored to preserve, most students at John Dewey did not, as their high school and hub of environmental activity were located several miles from the homes and neighborhoods they called home. Again, unlike in Bellport, this expansive spatial reality in Brooklyn had limited individual students' opportunities to foment long-standing, personal and communal relationships with the endangered areas they would one day come to know and appreciate. Only as students of John Dewey would many come to be familiar with such places, as most were located within the areas surrounding their urban high school.

Similarly, the geographic expanse of the city also proved significant to the civil rights activism which manifested at Brooklyn's Franklin K. Lane High School in the late 1960s. Just as youth environmentalists in Bellport had lived and learned within the same community that housed their high school, so too had Bellport and Malverne's white, black and Hispanic civil rights advocates. For all of these suburban youth, regardless of the movement activity they chose, their lived realities and social worlds were uniquely tied to and, throughout their lives, had been contoured by their personal and collective

experiences as local community residents. For each and every one of these students and their respective families, all had stake in not only the success of the social and political campaigns that were waged, but also in the peaceful resolution of racial tensions and ecological debates within their home communities.

While such communal feelings certainly existed in Brooklyn and upon similarly-situated urban landscapes, such personal connections did not necessarily extend to the high schools in which students were assigned. As the case study of Franklin K. Lane High School in Chapter Five will later highlight, the majority of African American students at Lane hailed from Brownsville, Brooklyn – a primarily African American neighborhood which lacked its own community high school. As residents of a distant neighborhood which was far removed their school, black students were bused daily from Brownsville to Lane, the latter of which had historically served the predominantly white neighborhoods of Woodhaven and Cypress Hills. Throughout the late 1960s, as racial and ethnic tensions exploded throughout Brooklyn as well as in greater New York City, Lane’s African American student population organized for racial and ethnic equality in a school within which they felt like outsiders and against a school administration that viewed them as such. In the following two chapter case studies, the aforementioned spatial realities, as well as the movement similarities and differences they brought forth, will be analyzed in relation to both high school student environmental and civil rights activism in Brooklyn, New York. While this chapter will focus specifically on youth environmentalism at John Dewey High School, chapter five will highlight the evolution of a Black Power-oriented civil rights campaign at Franklin K. Lane.

As participants in an interactive and hands-on high school Marine Biology program, teenaged environmentalists at John Dewey High School were routinely exposed to the open, green and undeveloped spaces within the general area of their high school. With John Dewey situated along the border of south Brooklyn and Coney Island, the high school placed hundreds, if not thousands, of urban youth in close proximity to New York City's Atlantic coastline which consisted of not only boardwalks and ocean beaches, but several fragile and, at times, endangered wetland areas as well. Similar to Art Cooley's students in Bellport, science-oriented youth at Dewey spent considerable time researching, testing and cataloguing such places as required field-work for their courses in Marine Biology. Through these experiences, students, along with their instructors, developed their own personal and collective relationships with the natural environment they routinely encountered. From the spring of 1970 onward, such connections with what, for many students, had previously been a somewhat alien landscape, inspired them to become environmentally active as members of John Dewey's Marine Biology Club.

While some similarities between Bellport and John Dewey do, on the surface, seem ever-present, high school student environmental activism in Brooklyn did, in fact, diverge from the activism performed by Students for Environmental Quality on suburban Long Island. As an analysis of Dewey students' Earth Day, 1970 clean-up of Plum Beach on Jamaica Bay will reveal, man-made pollution was much more pervasive and threatening along the waterways of New York City than it had been along the Carmans River in rural Bellport. While students on Long Island had concentrated most of their efforts on preserving the Carmans River and preventing the *possible* future endangerment of the ecosystems therein, John Dewey students routinely worked to halt *proposed* and

much more imminent devastation of fragile areas along the Brooklyn coastline. As a study of these students' opposition to several projects proposed by the Army Corps of Engineers and various private land-use developers will highlight, youth environmental action in Brooklyn was always in response to very real, impending threats to the survival of land and marine-based ecosystems along the urban shoreline. In rural Bellport, such threats were typically much more hypothetical and plausible, which allowed student activists the time and resources to advocate for preventive legislation rather than battle to halt one or more specific projects.

The activism of John Dewey's Marine Biology Club differed from that which transpired in Bellport in other ways as well. To be sure, the fact that SEQ's faculty mentors, Art Cooley and Dennis Puleston, were already well-established environmental activists and co-founders of the EDF long before high school student environmentalism manifested on Long Island is more than significant. Due to the advisors' longstanding commitment to, and participation in, various local preservationist campaigns, SEQ was to organize as a separate, completely student-led group that was elective as an after school and weekend, extra-curricular activity. As the pages which follow detail, high school student environmentalism at John Dewey High School was different in that the ecological interests and activist tendencies of both students *and* advisors evolved simultaneously as a result of the work conducted in the field as well as in the classroom. As noted in Chapter Two, while mandatory field research analyses in Bellport certainly inspired Cooley's science students to organize SEQ in the fall of 1970, the students themselves decided to translate such experiences into some form of community-wide environmental action. At John Dewey, as the school's Marine Biology program evolved from 1969

onward, students who registered for the inventive and action-oriented science program also became, by extension, members of the Marine Biology Club. In essence, while local environmental activism in Bellport was elected after and in addition to registration in Advanced Biology and Marine Science, at John Dewey, youth environmentalism was part and parcel of the science program in which they had enrolled.

To this end, students in the Marine Biology Club at John Dewey High School complemented their in-class discussions and required field research analyses with mandatory internship and volunteer experiences, both of which grounded the curriculum designed by their instructors. Indeed, while students in Bellport only participated in such activities when they so desired, students in John Dewey's Marine Biology program were required to spend at least one day a week outside of the classroom volunteering at the nearby New York Aquarium on Coney Island. As the pages which follow explore in detail, such volunteerism was required of all students at John Dewey High School, as the school was originally opened in 1969 as an "experimental" facility in which students garnered not only intellectual experiences within the classroom, but academically-related, practical experiences out in the community as well. Together, both types of educational experiences – in-class, textbook-based lectures and discussions along with required field research analyses and volunteerism – cultivated the environmental interests of John Dewey's Marine Biology Club as well as that of the two instructors who guided their students along the way.

Unlike its contemporary in Bellport, however, high school student environmental activism did not evolve on the heels of a successful student-led civil rights movement. Just like suburban Malverne, John Dewey only witnessed the manifestation of one

protracted form of high school student political activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As this chapter illustrates, John Dewey had been founded in 1969 as an “experimental” high school, which, upon its opening, was not only racially and ethnically integrated, but was also based upon a culturally-sensitive curriculum which was taught by a racially and ethnically diverse faculty. While other New York City Schools, including Franklin K. Lane, witnessed in-school civil rights and Black Power campaigns to instill these same progressive programs and ideals, John Dewey High School did not. As a facility, which, at its opening, had already addressed many of the concerns that black, white and Hispanic civil rights advocates in other schools repeatedly raised throughout the late 1960s, the John Dewey community enjoyed cordial race relations while other area high schools did not. As one of the only relatively calm and peaceful New York City Schools in the age of student protest, John Dewey stands out as a unique urban setting for high school student environmental activism.

Brooklyn as Place and the “Experimental” High School

Just like its much smaller suburban counterparts on Long Island, Brooklyn – one of five expansive New York City boroughs – had been repeatedly shaped and manipulated throughout time by the historical forces of social, cultural, and political succession. With its earliest place histories rooted by a strong Native American presence in the pre-colonial era, the Brooklyn landscape was first occupied by European settlers and enslaved African peoples in the first half of the seventeenth century.³⁰³ Controlled first by the Dutch and, later, the English throughout the colonial period, Brooklyn quickly

³⁰³ Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 5-7; Leonard Benardo and Jennifer Weiss, *Brooklyn by Name: How the Neighborhoods, Streets, Parks, and More Got Their Names*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3-4.

came into its own as an expanding colonial outpost and prosperous port city with between five and six thousand white and black inhabitants by 1800.³⁰⁴ Throughout the succeeding one hundred year period, as Brooklyn industrialized and expanded, this relatively small urban population rapidly increased, reaching 279,122 residents in 1860 and totaling 1,166,582 by 1900.³⁰⁵ In addition to witnessing an increase of roughly 900,000 residents, this forty year period also witnessed the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 as well as the burgeoning city's merger with and annexation by greater New York City in 1898.³⁰⁶ As a newly minted borough at the dawn of the twentieth century, the Brooklyn landscape continued to evolve throughout the 1900s, annually attracting thousands of foreign and domestic immigrants representing a host of differing racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. By mid-century, this diverse urban population had crested at an astounding 2,738,175 residents, representing a fifty year net population increase of 1,571,593 people.³⁰⁷

Such population growth, however, soon became a relic of Brooklyn's past, as the borough's total population slowly began to decrease from the 1950s onward, dropping to 2,627,319 in 1960, 2,602,012 in 1970, and 2,230,936 in 1980.³⁰⁸ Throughout this same thirty year period, Brooklyn's racial and ethnic demography also shifted as the total number of white residents declined and the total number of African American and Latinos rapidly increased. Indeed, while Brooklyn's white population between 1940 and 1970 dropped from 2,587,951 to 1,905,788, the borough's total African American

³⁰⁴ Benardo and Weiss, 4; Wilder, 61, Table 4.1.

³⁰⁵ Wilder, 118, Table 6.1.

³⁰⁶ Benardo and Weiss, 4, 28.

³⁰⁷ Wilder, 178, Table 9.1.

³⁰⁸ Wilder, 178, Table 9.1.

population rose from 107,263 to 656,194.³⁰⁹ By 1980, the borough's African American community had once again increased, totaling 723,748, while the total number of Latino residents was, for the first time, recorded separately at 393,103. With the latter population subgroup having been previously tallied as either "white" or "black" by the U.S. Census Bureau, the sharp ten year decline in Brooklyn's white population, from 1,905,788 in 1970 to 1,265,769 in 1980, illustrates a much greater decrease than the borough actually experienced.³¹⁰ Nevertheless, as the aforementioned census statistics do certainly indicate, not only did Brooklyn's total population exponentially increase and, later, slowly decrease throughout the twentieth centuries, so too did the total numbers of racial and ethnic majorities and minorities in the same period. More importantly, these numbers also illustrate the sheer size of Brooklyn's total population as it relates to the much smaller demographic realities in nearby suburban communities such as those found in Bellport and Malverne on Long Island.

As a borough of New York City, Brooklyn has also been geographically expansive throughout its long history of social, cultural, and political succession. Having evolved from a patchwork of farmlands to a patchwork of industrial zones, commercial centers and ethnic neighborhoods, Brooklyn has spanned the most western region of Long Island since long before its earliest settlement by the Canarsee Indians.³¹¹ As a one-time city in its own right, this urban landscape continues to cover roughly ninety-seven square miles of total land mass with just fewer than seventeen of these miles underwater.³¹² While these seventy-one miles of land mass hold roughly 36,000 people

³⁰⁹ Wilder, 178, Table 9.1.

³¹⁰ Wilder, 178, Table 9.1.

³¹¹ Benardo and Weiss, 4.

³¹² www.city-data.com/city/brooklyn-New-York.html, (12 January, 2011).

per square mile, they do so within a patchwork of anywhere between fifty and eighty separate neighborhoods and sub-neighborhoods, many of which are over ten to fifteen miles apart from one another.³¹³ For students at John Dewey High School, which accepted students from any Brooklyn neighborhood, this geographic reality often times meant that students lived several miles from their school in a wholly separate community. For these students, particularly those who enrolled in Marine Biology and became environmentally active, these miles had kept them alienated from the very places they would one day learn to appreciate and protect.

This type of spatial separation only alienated those students who were politically active in Brooklyn, however. As the previous two chapters have noted, students in suburban Bellport and Malverne lived in the communities in which they were active and in close proximity to the high schools they attended. Unlike the vast Brooklyn landscape, Bellport and Malverne were much smaller in geographic size. Indeed, while Bellport and North Bellport had only been settled upon 1.46 and 4.65 square miles of land mass, Malverne, Lynbrook and Lakeview had only been settled upon 1.05, 2, and .96 respectively. Moreover, all five of suburban neighborhoods were much less dense than Brooklyn, with 1,639 and 2,058 residents per square mile in Bellport and North Bellport; 8,457 and 9,947 in Malverne and Lynbrook; and, 5,923 per square mile in Lakeview.³¹⁴ While these latter numbers appear to be rather high, they cover much less actual land-mass than Brooklyn's 70.61 square miles containing 35,956 people per mile.³¹⁵

³¹³ www.city-data.com/city/brooklyn-new-york.html, (12 January, 2011); Benardo and Weiss, vii-viii.

³¹⁴ www.city-data.com/city/bellport-new-york.html, (12 January, 2011); www.city-data.com/city/north-bellport-new-york.html, (12 January, 2011); www.city-data.com/city/malverne-new-york.html, (12 January, 2011); www.city-data.com/city/lynbrook-new-york.html, (12 January, 2011); www.city-data.com/city/lakeview-new-york.html, (12 January, 2011).

³¹⁵ www.city-data.com/city/brooklyn-new-york.html, (12 January, 2011).

Therefore, unlike in Bellport and Malverne – within which students lived, learned, and engaged in political activity – students at John Dewey were much less likely to live in close proximity to their high school or the various sites of their environmental activism.

While this geographic reality did not prevent John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club members from becoming environmentally active in the coastal areas close to their high school, it certainly enhanced the agency of their faculty mentors. With many of their students having been previously far removed from “nature,” Marine Biology instructors at John Dewey played a much more directorial role in their students’ preservationist campaigns than Art Cooley and Dennis Puleston had in Bellport. As mentioned above, while students in Bellport had elected to engage in environmental activism on the side of, and in addition to, their regularly scheduled curricular exercises in Advanced Biology and the Marine Sciences, their urban counterparts were almost required to participate in such activities as not only registrants of Marine Biology but as students at John Dewey High School. Having willingly elected to attend Brooklyn’s first “experimental” school facility, teenaged attendees were exposed to a secondary education which routinely forced them to journey outside the confines of their classrooms for a more well-rounded experience based upon service learning and volunteerism.

* * *

Opened in September of 1969, John Dewey was the New York City Board of Education’s response to the various youth rebellions of the mid to late 1960s. Conceived as a “dream” school by twelve New York City principals at a ten day administrator’s conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania roughly six years prior, Dewey was slated to be less like the typical 1960s high school and more like a college or university, at which students

and faculty would both be granted academic and, over time, social and political autonomy. By the end of the decade, a period when high school and college students alike had begun to more openly question authority, demand change, and organize for social and political justice, New York City's Board of Education recognized the need for something new, and more importantly, something different. A school founded on the principals and theories of educational philosopher John Dewey, namely a hands-on, autonomous, "democratic", and student-centered experience, rather than a strictly lecture-based and regimented secondary education, seemed a miracle cure.³¹⁶ In the summer of 1969, Dewey's first class of admitted students committed themselves to a high school experience like no other in New York City.

Whereas the typical secondary school graded its students quarterly on a letter-graded scale, enrolled them for five subjects per term in a two semester academic year, and did so from a standardized list of basic subjects, Dewey's students were given literally hundreds of courses to choose from, within a school year divided into six seven-week cycles which included the summer. This meant that each student was afforded the opportunity to earn credit in at least thirty-five mini-courses every school year. Moreover, Dewey students were in attendance for eight hours each day rather than the standard six, and while teachers did grade their students, they employed a pass/fail scoring system in which students received an "M" for mastery, "MC" for conditional mastery, or an "R" for retention if a student failed to master his or her subject. Students were also given access to several subject-based resource centers and libraries, offered countless independent study options, and the opportunity to graduate in as few as two or as many as six years.

³¹⁶ For more on Dewey's educational philosophy, see John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916); John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938).

This atypical secondary school experience provided students the opportunity to chart a more individual and autonomous path towards their own graduation.³¹⁷ While students in other high schools were demanding many of these same rights, John Dewey opened in 1969 guaranteeing an unprecedented level of student autonomy.

Similar to a college or university, students at John Dewey High School were able to focus their attention in the academic areas that interested them the most, including the various performing arts, foreign languages, literature, writing, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. One of the most important similarities, however, that John Dewey shared with post-secondary institutions was the student selection process. Whereas most New York City high schools served one specific neighborhood leaving most students with little choice in which public school they would attend, John Dewey accepted applications from youths all across Brooklyn. While most students were told which high school they would attend, John Dewey's students were given a choice. According to Saul Bruckner, the school's former Social Studies Department Chairman, such student autonomy, from the decision to apply to class selection and program of study, prevented student dissatisfaction in the new facility. More importantly, as Bruckner explained, "kids had to volunteer to get into that school...[which] right away meant a selective student body."³¹⁸ Although, this selectivity wasn't about who *could* apply, since all Brooklyn youth – regardless of race, ethnicity, class, or academic ability – were afforded the opportunity, but selective in the sense of whom actually *did* apply. Indeed, prospective

³¹⁷ Patricia Margaret Reilly, *The John Dewey High School* (Brooklyn, 1970), 2; See also: Sol Levine, "The John Dewey High School Adventure," *Phi Delta Kappan: Some Theory and Three Case Studies*, (October 1971), 108-109.

³¹⁸ Interview with Saul Bruckner by Neil P. Buffett, (28 September 2007); Interview with Brian Shmaefsky by Neil P. Buffett, (20 May, 2007).

students were made fully aware of John Dewey's unique academic program long before they submitted their applications and were ultimately accepted to the new school.

Much like a college or university, Dewey quickly attracted an incredibly diverse student body, and unlike many urban and suburban high schools, opened with, what at the time would have been considered, a diverse faculty. This included nine African American teachers in a faculty of seventy-two.³¹⁹ Moreover, to be in accordance with the New York State Department of Education's policies on integrated schools, thirty percent of the student body was non-white on the first day, a percentage which would increase over time as the student-body grew in size. Indeed, by 1973, this percentage had already increased from thirty to thirty-five. Dewey was socio-economically diverse as well. Nevertheless, while the school served students from Brooklyn's richest to her poorest, the "predominant mode would [have to] be classified as lower-middle class."³²⁰ With such a uniquely diverse group of students and faculty, who, on the whole, enjoyed a much higher level of academic and personal autonomy, it is no wonder that Dewey opened peacefully in September of 1969, as schools across New York, including Brooklyn's Franklin K. Lane High School, experienced racial, ethnic, and class conflict throughout same period.³²¹

A diverse campus, however, was not the only advantage Brooklyn's newest high school offered the borough's youth. It also offered them a vast selection of unique courses and academic programs that were unavailable to students in the city's other

³¹⁹ M.S. Handler, "Experimental High School is Opened in Brooklyn," *New York Times* (9 September 1969), 52.

³²⁰ Wayne E. Williamson, "Assessment of Learning Environments in a Restructured Secondary School," (E.ED Thesis, Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1973), p. 12.

³²¹ Harold Saltzman, *Race War in a High School: The Ten-Year Destruction of Franklin K. Lane High School* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1972).

school facilities. This included, among others, specified classes in art, such as art appreciation, sculpting, photography, fashion design and film making; business courses in accounting, data processing, bookkeeping and business law; literature courses on subjects from The Bible and Shakespeare to Mythology, Folklore, Science Fiction and Fantasy; Social Studies courses from African American History and Sociology to Nationalism and Colonialism, as well as American Foreign Policy; and, a slew of foreign language, mathematics, and natural lab science courses.³²² One of Dewey's most popular and unique programs, which intrigued and attracted hundreds of students and parents from across the borough, was Lou Siegel and Harold Silverstein's inventive and archetypical Marine Biology Curriculum. As one of the only schools in New York City with a Marine Science program, Dewey quickly became the Mecca for not only those students interested in a non-traditional high school experience, but those with a desire to study aquatic life. In the age of Jacques Cousteau, Rachel Carson, and Garrett Harding, the pair's new program, unbeknownst to them, would become the springboard for their students – and themselves – that would catapult them into the burgeoning environmental movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Rumpelstiltskin and Strings of Gold

Likened to Rumpelstiltskin by former student and now Marine Biologist, Dr. Merryl Kafka, Lou Siegel and Harold Silverstein have been credited with stringing “average” students “into gold” and, similar to Art Cooley and the “Cooley Kids” in Bellport, developed “their own little following of clique[y] kids.”³²³ Unlike Cooley, however, who was able to cultivate a suburban-based marine science program throughout

³²² Reilly, *The John Dewey High School*.

³²³ Interview with Merryl Kafka by Neil P. Buffett, (19 May 2007).

the 1960s, Siegel and Silverstein were, just like their first students, participants in the John Dewey High School “experiment.” Furthermore, their innovative curriculum, which consisted of in-class lessons, routine field trips, routine field work, and mandatory volunteer experience, was unique and untested for urban high schools prior to the 1969-1970 school year. Dewey, however, provided the perfect arena for such a program to not only be put to the test, but to flower into a state-sanctioned and officially recognized science program. As Siegel explained, New York State’s Board of Regents approved the school’s proposal to offer “Marine Biology as an alternative to Regents Biology” making John Dewey “the only school in the state [that] had that variance.” In the years that followed, word of Siegel and Silverstein’s techniques spread throughout the New York City School System, leading other science teachers to register for various in-service training workshops to hear them speak. Within just a few years, the number of city schools offering Marine Biology rose from just one to eight.³²⁴

Dewey’s Marine Biology Program, however, was only as unique as its two creators and their first few cohorts of students. While both men had taught public school in New York City prior to John Dewey’s opening, both had traveled upon differing, yet somewhat similar, trajectories. While Siegel had grown up on the Brooklyn Shore in Sea Gate and had always been interested in marine science, Silverstein had been much more of a traditional biologist and, as one former student surmised, more than likely had originally hoped to attend medical school.³²⁵ Commenting on their different backgrounds, Siegel noted that while his elder colleague had taught Biology for over ten years and certainly knew “a lot about different kinds of organisms,” marine science was primarily

³²⁴ Interview with Lou Siegel by Neil P. Buffett, (22 May, 2007).

³²⁵ Interview with Jacqueline Webb by Neil P. Buffett, (31 May 2007).

his own interest. Having taken several graduate courses in Marine Science at Long Island University's C.W. Post Campus, Siegel, along with Silverstein, adapted and streamlined much of what he learned in these classes for his own curriculum at John Dewey. Unlike his seasoned colleague, however, by September of 1969, Siegel, who was just twenty-four years old, had not been teaching high school science for very long. Having only graduated with his Bachelors Degree in Zoology just two years prior, Siegel spent his first year as a teacher not in the laboratory or in the classroom, but on strike.³²⁶

Assigned to Brooklyn's infamous Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental school district, Lou Siegel found himself planted squarely in the middle of what quickly became New York City's most polarizing political and Civil Rights episode of the late 1960s. In what has since become known as "*the strike that changed New York,*" contestations and frustrations over race, class, educational equality, labor rights, and community control of schools, plagued New York City throughout the second half of the 1960s, ultimately erupting several times during the 1967-1968 and 1968-1969 academic school years.³²⁷ As Civil Rights activists across the nation still celebrated national legislative victories such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of the following year, they continued to vie for social justice in the communities and neighborhoods in which they lived. Educational equality remained a top priority for activists and parents across the

³²⁶ Siegel interview, 2007.

³²⁷ Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University, 2002); For more on the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment in community control and resulting UFT strikes, see Maurice R. Berube and Marilyn Gittell, eds., *Confrontation at Ocean Hill-Brownsville: The New York School Strikes of 1968* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969); Saltzman, Chapters 5 & 6; Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia, 2000), 223; Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), Chapter 8.

nation, leading many, particularly in New York City, to demand community control of local schools. In the age of the burgeoning Black Power Movement which, by the end of the 1960s, had become increasingly popular as an alternative to the integrationist philosophies of Martin Luther King Jr. and the SCLC, black activists and community leaders recognized community control as the only way to ensure equal education for minority children. New York City's liberal Republican Mayor John V. Lindsay, agreed, and in the spring of 1967 moved to partially decentralize the power wielded by his city's Board of Education.

Ironically, however, Lindsay's decentralization plan seemed to promise much more local autonomy than the actual power transfer ultimately allowed. While local school districts, such as Ocean Hill-Brownsville were given *some* control over their schools, the plan in reality offered local districts only a limited authority, curtailing just *some* of the powers which had been originally enjoyed by city-wide Board of Education. According to historian Jerald Podair, community control "sought to make local school boards, which had heretofore been virtually irrelevant, into limited partners, but not co-managers, in the business of running the public school system." While local school boards were certainly granted more power over curriculum choice and more leeway when hiring minority faculty members, the central school board still "continued the central assignment of teaching and administrative personnel, and competitive, examination-based hiring procedures."³²⁸ Such limitations, in effect, ran contrary to the black community's original purpose for seeking community control in the first place. With limited power over faculty recruitment and instructor assignment, local school boards were left without

³²⁸ Podair, 79.

the ability to remove teachers deemed inefficient, indifferent, and in several instances, racist.

Nevertheless, Rhody McCoy, the local African American school district supervisor of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, believed that community control should and did, in fact, grant local administrators full authority over their schools, including the right to hire and fire staff, as well as transfer instructors out of their districts. Members of New York's United Federation of Teachers (UFT) disagreed. Over the course of the year and half that followed, beginning in the summer of 1967, McCoy and UFT leaders would come to logger-heads over just how much control local school boards should ultimately wield. As Podair hypothesized, McCoy's "eventual goal was an all-black teaching staff in Ocean Hill-Brownsville" who would serve the district's primarily African American student population. Such a proposition, however, ran contrary to "the merit principle, and the idea of 'equality' itself" which the UFT's recruitment procedures had previously maintained. These different agendas and the ideologies in which both were grounded fomented an aura of distrust that was, seemingly overnight, understood by many as another manifestation of America's racial divide. Consequently, when members of the UFT went on strike for two weeks in September of 1967 during routine contract negotiations, which, according to Podair "did not arise out of events specific to Ocean Hill-Brownsville," they were ultimately "interpreted" as such by the community.³²⁹

Lou Siegel, who had been hired to teach in Ocean Hill-Brownsville months before the conflict began, disagreed with community control advocates *and* the teachers union, since tensions fueled by both placed him on a picket line instead of in a classroom on his first day of school that September. When the two week strike came to a close and classes

³²⁹ Podair, 90-91; Pritchett, 231.

finally began, Siegel's disappointment subsided for a short while, but enflamed once again as the school year ended the same way it had begun.³³⁰ By the end of May, UFT members, Siegel included, were again on strike, this time in opposition to Rhody McCoy and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Board of Education's decision to unilaterally transfer nineteen white, Jewish teachers out of the local district. According to the UFT and its members, McCoy and the community board of education possessed no such power. McCoy and his supporters disagreed.³³¹

In Lou Siegel's mind, though, both sides were in the wrong. In fact, as he later explained, his only goal was to continue teaching his classes.

Being a good, liberal Jewish boy, I said, 'you know, both sides are wrong. I want to teach, [and] I'm going to go back in there and teach.' And one of my friends and I went to the school, we were going to cross the union line...but the school was locked... so we decided that we would go in anyway. We went into the school...and we said, 'we're here to teach. Give us a class, and [we'll] teach. I don't want to hear anything about your politics...give me a class and I'll teach.' And they didn't know what to do with us. And what happened was that they would not allow us to teach the classes unless we swore an allegiance to the [Ocean Hill-Brownsville] school district...so we said, 'good-bye.'³³²

Immediately thereafter, Siegel transferred out of the district, and accepted a position at Brooklyn's Sinnott Junior High. Despite the move, the teacher's strike followed him to this new facility, as the city's entire UFT membership went on sympathy strike several times throughout the first half of the 1968-1969 school year, preventing roughly one million students from attending class.³³³ Still, it was while teaching at this new school that Siegel first learned of the new experimental John Dewey High School, which was slated to open in the fall of 1969. Intrigued by the concept of an "experimental" school

³³⁰ Siegel interview; Email communication from Lou Siegel to Neil P. Buffett, (6 September, 2008).

³³¹ Podair, 100-102; Pritchett, 230-232.

³³² Siegel interview.

³³³ Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University, 2006) 70-71.

Siegel quickly applied for a position and was hired. Once on staff, he spent the summer at the school, along with all of Dewey's newly hired instructors, who were given the task of working on each of their specific course curriculums. Along with his new Science Department colleague and eventual friend, Harold Silverstein, Siegel began to craft the fledgling high school Marine Biology curriculum. By April of Dewey's opening year, Siegel and Silverstein's students would begin to translate this nascent and archetypical science curriculum into local environmental activism.³³⁴

The majority of these students, however, enrolled in the new Marine Biology course with little, if any, foreknowledge of and/or experience with the Marine Sciences, environmental preservation, or political agitation.³³⁵ While a select few, particularly those who lived along the coast, had been exposed to the marine world as young children, most entered Siegel and Silverstein's classroom having been inspired to enroll out of mere curiosity of the unique subject matter. To be sure, few, if any, of these students chose Marine Biology with plans of becoming environmentally-active themselves or having their in-class research influence other's environmental action. For most, their interest and enrollment in Marine Biology mirrored their earlier application and admittance to John Dewey High School, both of which emanated from a youthful curiosity about the new school's unique curricula and overall educational experience.

For students such as Dennis Bader, who, like Lou Siegel, had been born and raised in the coastal neighborhood of Sea Gate, interest in the marine environment predated his 1973 admittance to John Dewey High School. As Bader explained in 2007, much of his appreciation and respect for the ocean and marine life can be attributed to his

³³⁴ Siegel interview; Email communication from Lou Siegel to Neil P. Buffett, 6 September, 2008.

³³⁵ Siegel interview; Email communication from Lou Siegel to Neil P. Buffett, 14 July, 2011.

parents' ability to "push this nature, specifically the marine environment" on him as a child. At the same time, he and his family had, for years, maintained strong relationships with the local marine science community, becoming quite "familiar...and friendly with the New York Aquarium crowd." This included, among others, a personal relationship with the late 1970s Marine Biologist and Aquarium Director, Dr. George Ruggieri. Having routinely experienced "marine science...in [his] community [and] social circles" throughout his adolescent years, enrollment in Siegel and Silverstein's action-based science program, then, was an obvious and intentional choice.³³⁶ The same can be said of other similarly-situated Dewey transplants, including Gene Ritter, Lenny Speregan and Joseph Koppleman, all of whom became certified divers in their teenaged years. For them, just like Bader, the choice of John Dewey High School, Marine Biology and environmental intervention seemed obvious.³³⁷

Although, for others, including students such as Meryll Kafka, Lisa Breslof, Jackie Webb, and David Goldenberg, their involvement with Marine Biology and environmental activity was not nearly as evident as it had been for students like Dennis Bader. For these youths, their interest in applying to John Dewey had grown from a desire to simply experience a more engaging high school curriculum, framed within a more flexible schedule, which allowed for more diversified course offerings and programs of study. While this included electives representing a wide range of subjects, one of the more unique and intriguing for them proved to be Siegel and Silverstein's action-based Marine Biology course. For all four of these students, three of which later pursued careers in the natural sciences and the other in the field of medicine, their initial

³³⁶ Interview with Dennis Bader, (20 September, 2007).

³³⁷ Email communication from Lou Siegel to Neil P. Buffett, 14 July, 2011; Interview with Gene Ritter by Neil P. Buffett, (9 June, 2007).

curiosities about the mysterious John Dewey experiment and the unique science program it proffered shaped not only their adolescent years, but also shaped their professional lives as well.³³⁸ Having registered for Marine Biology as inquisitive students, they, like many more of their teenaged peers, completed the curriculum as nascent, and in some instances, accomplished, environmental activists.

Marine Biology, Earth Day, and Coastal Pollution

When Eddie Wilensky applied to John Dewey High School in the summer of 1969, he had no idea that the new school's Marine Biology program would ultimately prove to be the foundation upon which he would build a life and a career devoted to the Marine Sciences. For that matter, before gaining admission to the new school, he hadn't even known that Marine Biology even existed or what it was. Having requested a fall registration in general Regents Biology, the young Wilensky was initially skeptical of the "MAR BIO" designator which had been mistakenly listed on his fall program card when school opened that September. Rather than bring the mistake to the attention of school administrators, Wilensky instead opted to satiate his curiosity and go to the class just to see what, in fact, it was. Despite having never asked for Marine Biology, the young man quickly fell in love with the subject and, as he noted years later, he "never left it." To be sure, he not only remained in the mysterious class, he also followed in its creators' footsteps, studying to become a Marine Biologist and returning to John Dewey twenty years later to teach in the very same classroom.³³⁹

Still, while Wilensky's path from unsuspecting high school student to college-educated Marine Biologist does illustrate the impact which Marine Biology had on

³³⁸ Kafka interview; Webb interview; Interview with Lisa Breslof by Neil P. Buffett, (30 May, 2007); Interview with David Goldenberg by Neil P. Buffett, (25 June, 2007).

³³⁹ Interview with Edward Wilensky by Neil P. Buffett, 29 May 2007.

students, several other alumni have echoed his stories about the program and its founders. For all of them, Lou Siegel and Harold Silverstein's ability to bring the discipline alive, in the classroom as well as in the field, intensified their personal and collective interests in the subject. Keeping in the spirit of John Dewey, the two instructors' curriculum mandated a fully hands-on experience which included not only in-class lecture and exercises, but routine field work and volunteer opportunities as well.³⁴⁰ The school's prime location, on the border of south Brooklyn and Coney Island, just blocks away from coastal wetlands and the New York City Aquarium, put students in close proximity to countless sites to experience Marine Biology first-hand. This hands-on component of the John Dewey experience, however, was not just limited to students registered for Marine Biology.

'Four and one' and 'service-learning' academic programs were some of the most unique opportunities afforded to students at John Dewey High School, designed to enrich their educational experience. While typical high schools focused primarily on in-class exercises, John Dewey incorporated an early form of 'service-learning' that not only illustrated the relevance of various curricula, but added another dimension to the learning-process designed to assist students in their understanding of academic material. In a period when students across the United States and in New York City in particular, questioned the relevance of abstract academic disciplines to their tangible and very real lives at the tail-end of the 1960s, such a program filled a necessary void in the learning process.³⁴¹ For example, John Dewey's Social Studies Department utilized 'service-learning' in its *American Dream* course to highlight the stark polarities of wealth and

³⁴⁰ Kafka interview; Josh Horowitz, "Marine Biology Students Explore Jamaica Bay," *Bay News* (20, February, 1971).

³⁴¹ Graham, 128-130.

poverty, urban and rural through student exchange programs in which students temporarily traded lives with students from less affluent, more rural school districts.³⁴² Even more so than for Social Studies, ‘service-learning’ quickly became an integral component of Siegel and Silverstein’s Marine Biology curriculum.

Located just down the street from the high school, the New York City Aquarium offered Marine Biology students a perfect opportunity to fully appreciate and employ the Marine Science education they received in the classroom. As former student Dr. Jackie Webb explained, “it was sort of a given that if [students] took the Marine Biology program, then [they’d] volunteer at the Aquarium.” As a one-time volunteer herself, Webb recalled spending countless after-school and summer hours working as an “interpreter at the exhibits...stand[ing] by the ‘touch-it tank’ and explain[ing] to Joe Public what was going on.”³⁴³ While such volunteer experience certainly provided Webb and her classmates a venue in which to apply their in-class exercises to the real world, volunteering at the Aquarium was not the only hands-on opportunity that Siegel and Silverstein’s students were offered.

Students were also led on a variety of field-research trips along Brooklyn’s Atlantic coastline on which they collected samples, tested local waters, and observed land and marine-based ecosystems in tidal areas. In addition, students were also introduced to scuba diving and boating, as well as led on less frequent trips to such places as Southampton and Montauk Point on Long Island, and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts. Most importantly, Marine Biology students were provided with extensive training to comfortably use a variety of high-powered, technical, and

³⁴² Webb interview.

³⁴³ Webb interview.

professional laboratory equipment.³⁴⁴ Former student, Dennis Bader explained the significance of these field research experiences as well as the training the students received.

When we went somewhere, we really showed up... and we went out to the beach with our field equipment...first of all, equipment-wise, if we wanted or needed a microscope to do studies...we would get our hands on a five thousand dollar precise phase contrast microscope with a television camera and a TV remote monitor... We used and they bought the same thing that the Sewage Treatment Plant or the Water Quality Science Operator was using out in the field. So, we not only knew how to use a water conductivity meter, we knew how to use the WSI model B55 that you're using at the New York City Department of Environmental Protection or the state D.E.C. to do your monitoring. And we knew how to use your protocols according to the E.P.A to do the field titrations that needed to be done so that they would hold up in court in litigation.³⁴⁵

Indeed, the extensive training and hands-on experience that Siegel and Silverstein provided their students would adroitly lend itself to their students' eventual forays into environmental activism. For many of them, the first Earth Day in the spring of 1970 marked the beginning of their journey from inquisitive student to environmental advocate.

While millions of concerned Americans celebrated April 22, 1970 by attending lectures, participating in rallies, and volunteering in their local communities, nearly one hundred of Siegel and Silverstein's Marine Biology students met at Brooklyn's Plum Beach, just off the Belt Parkway, to clean it. Armed with rakes, wheel barrows, and sanitation trucks provided by the city's Parks Department, Dewey students spent the day picking up bottles, cans, drift wood, and a variety of other debris that had been scattered along the shoreline. In addition to removing trash, the students also refurbished weathered park benches and picnic tables, applying fresh coats of paint to some and

³⁴⁴ Bader interview; Goldenberg interview; Webb interview; Siegel interview.

³⁴⁵ Bader interview.

mending others that were in disrepair. As former student Dr. David Goldenberg explained years later, if any public area needed such a facelift, Plum Beach certainly did.

The reason why the first Earth Day occurred there was because...Plum Beach in Jamaica Bay was wildly polluted. It was a polluted open sewer in Jamaica Bay. It was dying. It was a cesspool, and the beach was neglected. It was strewn with garbage. I mean...all the beaches in New York City were just horrible. That whole environmental activism, you know, ecologically-aware student life stuff, was stimulated by the fact that the local eco-system was in such poor condition, and it was so neglected. It was so disgusting.³⁴⁶

For Goldenberg and his fellow classmates, Plum Beach offered too much for the observer, the naturalist, and for the general public to be left in disrepair.

This had not always been the case, however, as Sociologists William Kornblum and James Beshers have noted in their research on Brooklyn's Atlantic Coastline. In their article titled "White Ethnicity: Ecological Dimensions," both authors note that while "New York City's edge is an ecological zone, both in human and natural terms," "for much of the city's history [its] lowlands have been treated as urban wasteland, best suited for dumping garbage and construction fill." Moreover, such places, particularly in more modern times, routinely "became convenient terrain for commercial recreation, suburban housing tracts, public housing, harbor forts, and airports."³⁴⁷ This latter commercial usage, made manifest with the 1948 opening of Idlewild Airport (later to be renamed after John F Kennedy in 1963) ultimately proved ecologically disastrous for nearby tidal wetlands and beachfronts along Brooklyn's Jamaica Bay. Situated just beyond the runways' end, the waters of Jamaica Bay had, for decades, been polluted by unregulated jet-fuel and oil flushing. As New York Times columnist Michael Harwood reported in

³⁴⁶ Goldenberg interview; Michael Harwood, "The 'Black Mayonnaise' at the Bottom of Jamaica Bay," *The New York Times* (7 February 1971), SM9.

³⁴⁷ William Kornblum and James Beshers, "White Ethnicity: Ecological Dimensions," in John Hull Mollenkopf, ed., *Power, Culture and Place: Essays on New York City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988), 201-202.

1971, combined with the ecological impact of runway extensions and underwater landfill projects, such oil seepage and jet-fuel run-off created “a liquid quicksand” or “black mayonnaise” along the “difficult to find” bay bottom.³⁴⁸

Still, as the aforementioned condition of Plum Beach on the first Earth Day illustrates, pollution in Jamaica Bay was not only found along its bottom in man-made trenches and sludge fields. Indeed, as Harwood explained, “everywhere on the margins, even where man has not built and does not set his foot, there is trash – trash blown, trash washed up and trash dumped.” Exemplifying his point further, the writer noted “the marshes [in] bloom with flotsam and newspapers...[and] the meadows above the marsh [that had] collect[ed] abandoned cars, tires, beer cans, white plastic bottles, broken glass, piles of lumber peeling paint and sprouting rusty spikes – right to the edges of homes and shopping centers and gas stations.” At the same time, parts of the shoreline had also become home to not only “herds of two-family homes and monotonous brick apartment buildings,” but also to six sewage treatment plants which together “dump[ed] more than a quarter million gallons of partially treated waste [into the water] everyday.”³⁴⁹ To be sure, all forms of such waste had reached the shores of Plum Beach, as well as several others, by April 22, 1970, and had certainly inspired the beach clean-up undertaken by students from John Dewey High School.

Members of the school’s Marine Biology Club, however, recognized that while their Earth Day “clean-in” had been fruitful, there was no way to guarantee that Plum Beach would remain clean. Hoping to embarrass those who would otherwise disrespect

³⁴⁸ Michael Harwood, “The ‘Black Mayonnaise’ at the Bottom of Jamaica Bay,” *New York Times* (7 February 1971), SM9.

³⁴⁹ Harwood, *The New York Times*; See also, David Bird, “Cesspool or ‘Jewel’? City Studies the Reclamation of Jamaica Bay,” *New York Times* (16 September, 1969), 49.

the area, the students drafted a sign and posted it at the entrance for all to see. Signed by Larry Cohen, a student volunteer, the posted message urged visitors to “wipe [their] feet before entering,” reminding them that “no littering, polluting, or desecrating [was] allowed.” In rather bleak, yet poignant terms, Cohen’s note reminded all that such acts would be “punishable by extinction under [the] laws of nature and ecology,” and before they littered asked all to think of themselves, their “children, humanity, and our Earth.”³⁵⁰ Impressive as it was, the students’ Plum Beach effort ultimately proved to be only the beginning of what would become a five year foray into local environmental activism for the preservation of their borough’s endangered Atlantic Shoreline.

In the early phases of that activism, however, the students’ projects remained relatively small in scale, and were more often than not only extensions of course-related assignments and exercises conducted in the field. The first of these was publicized by New York’s *Daily News* in May of 1971, when John Dewey Marine Biology students discovered high levels of coliform bacteria in Brooklyn’s coastal waterways. The students, whose survey included the waters off of and near Rockaway Beach, “Manhattan Beach, [the] Verrazano Bridge, [the] Bay Parkway, Sheepshead Bay, Dead Horse Bay, [the] Mill Basin Bridge, East Mill Basin, Paerdegat Basin, Fresh Creek, and [the] Gerritsen Beach Bridge,” noted that Rockaway proved to be the only site that did not “exceed the safe maximum levels” mandated by the New York State’s Department of Health. Moreover, just a few months prior, the students had also set out to ascertain the level of tidal current flow in Jamaica Bay. Hoping to learn whether organic pollutants could be washed out to sea or remain in local waters, student released “50 drift bottles,

³⁵⁰ Josh Horowitz, “H.S. Students Clean Beach for ‘Earth Day’ Campaign,” *Bay News* (May, 1970); Joseph Lelyveld, “Mood is Joyful as City Gives its Support,” *New York Times*, (23 April, 1970), 1, 30; Plum Beach Photograph taken by Lou Siegel from the private collection of Lou Siegel.

each containing a postcard, in the waters around Brooklyn.” With more than thirty postcards returned by area residents, students and instructors alike concluded that there was, in fact, “little current flow from Jamaica Bay to the ocean...[and] that the dumping of organic wastes into the bay [could ultimately] destroy it.”³⁵¹ Unlike the Carmans River Corridor in Bellport, the waters off the coast of Brooklyn, and the ecosystems therein, had become thoroughly endangered by man-made pollutants by the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Organic and inorganic pollutants would not be the only threat to the Brooklyn coastline, however. To be sure, just as students in Bellport had battled to preserve the natural wonders of the Carmans River shoreline from residential, commercial and industrial development, so too would members of John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club. In the five years which followed the nation’s first Earth Day, these latter students would rapidly evolve into quasi-environmentalists bent on not only limiting the spread of local pollution, but also preventing the destruction of tidal wetlands all along the Brooklyn shoreline. Unlike their counterparts in Bellport, whose landscape of activism was confined to a very small and much more closely-knit suburban area, students at John Dewey would spend the first half of the 1970s struggling to defend several miles of urban coastline. The sheer size and scope of the latter students’ preservationist campaigns uniquely set them apart from their SEQ contemporaries on Long Island, despite the similar nature of much of their environmental pursuits.

³⁵¹ “Water Study Shows High Bacteria Count,” *Daily News* (29 May, 1971); “Marine Biology (and for Credit) Brings out the Best in Students,” *New York Times* (6 June, 1971), BQ105.

Coney Island, Plum Beach, and Battling the Army Corps of Engineers

Unlike in Bellport, where membership in Students for Environmental Quality remained an extra-curricular activity for students to elect, membership in what would become John Dewey's Marine Biology Club was, for all intents and purposes, a foregone conclusion for Siegel and Silverstein's students. While Art Cooley's Marine Biology program may have opened the door for his students to organize SEQ, his counterparts at Dewey had devised a curriculum that, in many ways, required that students participate in the budding Environmental Movement. However, similar to SEQ, John Dewey's Marine Biology Club was "primarily white" in racial composition, even though both schools' non-white population percentages rested at roughly twenty-five and thirty percent, respectively. While African American and Hispanic students did occasionally enroll in Siegel and Silverstein's program, the action-oriented Marine Biology program at John Dewey remained less racially integrated than the high school on the whole.³⁵²

Siegel and Silverstein explained the merits of their "action" based science curriculum in the October 1975 edition of *The American Biology Teacher*.

Our young New Yorkers first encounter marine biology in the waters off Coney Island, where they measure the height and amplitude of waves... The second and third weeks of field work are devoted to the study of another outdoor area, Plum Beach, which offers a lagoon, marshland, and barrier beach. Here the students study water transport in a stream, measuring density and evaporation. Up to this point we have introduced marine biology through physical measurement: math tables, weighing techniques, density and temperature determinations. We have involved our students in *action* biology. [Emphasis original]

Most importantly, Siegel and Silverstein's curriculum allowed their students to "simulate what the senior scientist does in his laboratory: utilize those tools of science and

³⁵² Siegel interview; Shmaefsky interview; Kafka interview; Goldenberg interview; Breslof interview; Interview with Erik Cohen by Neil P. Buffett, (2 June, 2007); Wilensky interview.

mathematics necessary for undertaking a specific biological investigation.”³⁵³ It is through this type of field-specific ‘biological investigation’ that Dewey’s Marine Biology students were able to, over time, develop personal relationships with many of Brooklyn’s coastal wetlands, marshlands, and beaches. Such relationships and personal experiences ultimately inspired Siegel, Silverstein, and their students’ to employ in-class and field-related Marine Biology studies in defense of the city’s shoreline.

Their first opportunity to do so presented itself in the fall of 1971, when Lou Siegel learned of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ proposed Coney Island beach erosion control and flood prevention project. Hoping to safeguard the peninsula from Hurricane flood-waters and beachfront erosion, the Army Corps of Engineers had proposed several defensive measures, the most extreme of which included the construction of a fifteen foot concrete seawall that would encircle almost the entire island. Designed to prevent floodwaters from compromising the island’s integrity, the proposed seawall was to stand between Coney Island’s various beachfronts and her local residents. As the *New York Times* explained, however, “the seawall would have openings for public access, but they could be closed in case of flood tides.”³⁵⁴ Siegel and Silverstein as well as their Marine Biology students, were troubled by the prospects, especially since many of them had visited and studied Coney Island’s beaches throughout their time at John Dewey High School.³⁵⁵

In a 1975 interview and publication, Harold Silverstein reflected on the project, noting that the proposed wall “would be huge. It would be a hulking deterrent against the

³⁵³ Harold Silverstein and Lou Siegel, “45 Minutes from Broadway: An Action Approach to Marine Biology,” *The American Biology Teacher* (October, 1975) 37:7, 422-425.

³⁵⁴ Kenneth P. Nolan, “Proposed Seawall Along Coney Island Kicks Up Storm,” *New York Times*, (16 April, 1972), A1.

³⁵⁵ Siegel interview.

Ocean.” That being said, however, Silverstein also noted that New York City had only experienced four hurricanes since the late eighteenth century, and thus massive seawall around Coney Island was unjustifiable and unnecessary. Hoping to prevent its construction, Silverstein and his students set out to study the area and produce an “ecological report on the projects” to publicize “what would happen ecologically in building this thing.”³⁵⁶ Throughout the fall of 1971, John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club and their advisors analyzed the Army Corps’ position, conducted their own examination of Coney Island’s beachfront areas, and drafted their own, albeit unofficial, Environmental Impact Statement. On March 21, 1972, Siegel and Silverstein, accompanied by a small group of students, presented their findings to Army Corps representatives as a public hearing held at the New York City Aquarium, which was attended by roughly 250 local residents and community leaders.³⁵⁷ Present, but unable to speak or to be officially recognized in the Army Corp’s meeting minutes due to their young age, John Dewey students listened as their mentors presented the group’s findings.³⁵⁸

In *A Critical Analysis of the Report Submitted by the Army Corps of Engineers*, Siegel, Silverstein and their Advanced Marine Biology students objected to the Corps’ proposed seawall and groin construction, maintaining “that further experimentation is

³⁵⁶ Harold Silverstein, quoted in James Robertson and John Lewallen, eds., *The Grassroots Primer* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1975), 55.

³⁵⁷ Siegel interview; Interview with Harold Silverstein by Neil P. Buffett, (6 May, 2007); Robertson and Lewallen, 55; Bader interview; Judith Gillespie and Stuart Lazarus, eds., *American Government: Comparing Political Experiences* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 130; See also: Department of the Army, New York District Corps of Engineers, “Announcement of Public Meeting on the Cooperative Beach Erosion Control and Interim Hurricane Study for the Atlantic Coast of New York City from Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point, (3 March 1972), Public Notice No. 6984; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Atlantic Coast of New York City from Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point: Communication of the Secretary of the Army* (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Defense, Department of the Army Corps of Engineers, 1979), Appendix L, Digest of Public Hearings, 356-368.

³⁵⁸ Bader interview; Siegel interview.

obligatory...to more accurately assess the effects of this phase of the project prior to any consideration of authorization of the plan.” Citing Plum Beach as an example, their report explained what would be lost if Coney Island and southern Brooklyn’s marine and beach-front eco-systems were disrupted by the Corp’s defensive remedy.

Plum Beach represents a unique ecological park. Here we find the last remaining natural dune and lagoon communities to be found in Brooklyn and one of the very few to be found within the confines of the city limits. In addition, the area also encompasses a large mud flat and marsh community. It is truly a dream come true for both teachers and students attempting to study ecology within the city. Within the confines of the area one finds a large variety of common invertebrates of the New York seashore.

To exemplify this point, the authors listed the variety of species common to the Coney Island and Brooklyn shoreline, which included diverse populations of Sponges, Jellyfish, Comb Jellies, Segmented Worms, Univalve Mollusks, Bivalve Mollusks, Sea Squirts, Sea Stars, and joint legged animals such as Crab and Lobster. According to John Dewey’s Marine Biology contingent, “it would be criminal for these organisms to be destroyed when further experimentation in flood control is suggested.”³⁵⁹

In addition to laying out the ecological impact of the Corp’s proposal, Siegel, Silverstein and their students also explained how a seawall and supplemental groin structures could actually *contribute* to, rather than limit, Coney Island’s beach erosion problem. To this end, they cited the work of Wesley Marx, particularly his 1967 book, *The Frail Ocean*.

‘These fortifications [rock groins, steel-sheet pilings, concrete sea-walls, rubble revetments, timber bulkheads] although pictorially impressive, qualify as little more than holding devices. The groins which extend out from the beach to intercept and hoard the stingy littoral drift for upstream beaches, only compound

³⁵⁹ Lou Siegel, Harold Silverstein and students in Advanced Marine Biology, John Dewey High School, *A Critical Analysis of the Report Submitted by the Army Corps of Engineers, “Proposed Beach Erosion Control and Hurricane Protection Improvement – Atlantic Coast of New York City – From Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point* (21 March, 1972), 3-4, from the private collection of Lou Siegel.

erosion problems downstream. Downstream beach owners react by erecting their own groins to compete for what little sand is left...Communities that erect expensive seawalls to protect upland property only jeopardize the natural feature that attracted property development in the first place. The seawalls create a severe surf backwash that accelerates beach erosion.’³⁶⁰

Such erosion, the students concluded, would “continue despite the proposed plan of the Corps” and would, in some areas, “actually speed up the process.”³⁶¹ For John Dewey’s Marine Biology contingent, the possible benefits of the Army Corps of Engineer’s proposal were simply not worth the negative ecological costs, especially when beach erosion would more than likely continue, regardless.

Various local politicians and scores of Coney Island residents agreed, many of whom, according to the *New York Times*, “likened the seawall to the Berlin Wall.” While John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club opposed the plan on ecological grounds, local residents and concerned property owners opposed it more for its aesthetic impact. For many local residents who attended the March 21 public forum on the proposal, a seawall “would prevent accessibility” to the beach and “obstruct their view of the ocean.” As the Marine Biology Club’s use of Wesley Marx’s research relayed, such a measure would indeed “jeopardize the natural feature that attracted property development in the first place.”³⁶² The *New York Times* publication of Cartoonist Norm Doherty’s hyperbolic sketch of a possible Coney Island seawall, surely did not quell such concerns. Published in mid-April, Doherty’s cartoon depicted a roughly thirty foot concrete wall, separating

³⁶⁰ Wesley Marx, *The Frail Ocean* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1967, 31, quoted in *A Critical Analysis of the Report Submitted by the Army Corps of Engineers, “Proposed Beach Erosion Control and Hurricane Protection Improvement – Atlantic Coast of New York City – From Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point*, 7.

³⁶¹ *A Critical Analysis of the Report Submitted by the Army Corps of Engineers, “Proposed Beach Erosion Control and Hurricane Protection Improvement – Atlantic Coast of New York City – From Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point*, 7-8.

³⁶² Marx, 31, quoted in *A Critical Analysis of the Report Submitted by the Army Corps of Engineers, “Proposed Beach Erosion Control and Hurricane Protection Improvement – Atlantic Coast of New York City – From Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point*, 7; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Atlantic Coast of New York City from Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point: Communication of the Secretary of the Army*, 70-71, 360-368.

beach-goers and sun-bathers from the waterfront, which appeared to only be accessible by one roughly ten-foot by five foot doorway. If a picture can, in fact, paint a thousand words, Doherty's illustration alone could have forced even the seawall's advocates to cringe.³⁶³ Regardless, the Army Corps of Engineers continued to support its project, summarily publishing its Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement on November 28, 1972.

In return, Marine Biology Club members, once again, submitted an unofficial environmental impact statement, hoping to quell the Army Corps' proposed floodwall and groin construction components of the beach erosion project. Again, John Dewey's Marine Biology Club articulated the probable ecological devastation that groin construction and/or a permanent seawall structure would elicit. In their estimation, the only viable and ecological-friendly alternative was to implement a natural beach replenishment program that would rely upon a nearby "feeder beach." In their report they explained the proposal in detail.

All nourishment sand would be placed upon this one area by barge or pumping. Sand from this feeder beach would then be transported by the littoral current and distributed to the beaches west. In this way, the sand would be added to the beaches in a more natural and non-destructive manner whereby the marine organisms would not be adversely affected. Thus the same effect to restore the beaches could be accomplished at a reduced cost and without the wholesale disruption of the food chain upon which the commercial and sport fisheries depend.

Ultimately, the students concluded, any unnatural methods of beach erosion control and/or hurricane protection would be detrimental to local marine and beachfront eco-

³⁶³ Kenneth P. Nolan, *Proposed Seawall Along Coney Island Kicks Up Storm* (16 April, 1972), A1.

systems. To them, collaboration with nature's very own shoreline replenishment processes seemed to be the best possible solution at hand.³⁶⁴

While the Army Corps of Engineers disagreed, the department did eventually withdraw its support for the construction of a floodwall mechanism, citing the negative community response which had declared the proposal "unacceptable"³⁶⁵ In the Army Corps' August 1973 Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the floodwall measure had been removed from the beach replenishment and protection project.³⁶⁶ Nevertheless, throughout the two decades which followed, various groin construction and non-littoral sand replenishment programs for Coney Island were touted by the department, the last of which would take until 1995 to be completed.³⁶⁷ Despite their inability, however, to force the Army Corps of Engineers to rely upon nature's own erosion abatement processes, John Dewey's Marine Biology Club members, their faculty advisors, and the countless Coney Island residents who had shared their dismay, could claim at least a partial victory on behalf of New York City's Atlantic coastline areas.

Spring Creek, Laurelton, and Pollution in Jamaica Bay

Reflecting on his years as a member of John Dewey's Marine Biology Club, Dennis Bader commented on the level of student excitement and overall interest in the

³⁶⁴ Marine Biology Club of John Dewey High School, "A Critical Analysis of the 'Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point, New York Beach Erosion Project – Prepared by the U.S. Army Engineer District – New York, 28 November 1972' – Promise and Performance," (22 March, 1973), 6-8, found in the personal collection of Lou Siegel.

³⁶⁵ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Atlantic Coast of New York City From Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point, Report of the Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army" (18 August, 1976), 94, found in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Atlantic Coast of New York City from Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point: Communication of the Secretary of the Army*.

³⁶⁶ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point, New York (Coney Island Area) Beach Erosion Control Project," (August, 1973).

³⁶⁷ Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point (Coney Island Area), NY, Completed Work <http://www.nan.usace.army.mil/business/prjlinks/coastal/norton/index.htm> (1 November, 2008); See also, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement: Atlantic Coast of New York City, Rockaway Inlet to Norton Point (Coney Island Area) Shore Protection Project, New York City, New York, (March 1992).

group's local environmental protection projects. He noted that while he and his colleagues were legally too young to testify at the various hearings they attended with Siegel and Silverstein, the students "did all of [their] scientific lobbying during the intermissions with the participants." As Bader explained, anywhere from twenty to thirty Marine Biology students accompanied their instructors to scheduled public hearings, at which they sat quietly, listened, and took notes "so that during the break [they] could zing whomever [they] were talking to with the point [they] needed and would have scientific data to back it up."³⁶⁸ While Bader and his colleagues had employed this system throughout 1972 and 1973, specifically in their opposition to the Army Corps of Engineers, the students perfected the process throughout the 1973-1974 academic school year. Indeed, while John Dewey's Marine Biology students had been environmentally active since April 1970, 1974 became their busiest and most fruitful year as they submitted environmental impact assessments in four separate cases, three of which relied upon New York State's Tidal Wetlands Act.

Passed by the legislature in 1973 to preserve the state's remaining wetland areas, the Tidal Wetlands Act recognized the significance of marshland ecosystems, deeming them "one of the most vital and productive areas of our natural world." Defined "as areas that border or lie beneath tidal waters," tidal wetlands offer "multiple values," eight of which were highlighted in the legislation. Not only were such areas listed as essential for marine food production, flood and storm control, sedimentation, and natural pollution treatment, they were also noted as key places for recreation, education, research, open space, aesthetic appreciation, and as wildlife habitats. By 1973, however, it was clear to legislators that wetland survival was uncertain without state protection, as "vast acreage"

³⁶⁸ Bader interview.

had “already been irreparably lost or despoiled as a result of unregulated dredging, dumping, filling, excavating, polluting, and like activities.” Hoping to stem the tide, legislators in Albany enacted an immediate cessation of all development projects in and around wetland areas, while granting the state’s Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) enough time to survey and chart them.³⁶⁹ The new law, slated to take effect on September 1, would prove invaluable to Siegel, Silverstein and the Marine Biology Club’s 1974 campaign to preserve Brooklyn’s coastal wetlands, beginning with the Queens section of Spring Creek.

Located roughly ten miles from John Dewey High School, Spring Creek, consisted of undeveloped marshland along southeastern border of Brooklyn and Queens, and quickly became a local battleground over wetland preservation when the city’s Environmental Protection Agency proposed to fill it with solid waste incinerator residue. Having garnered significant notoriety for their work on the Coney Island Seawall project, Siegel and Silverstein’s Marine Biology students were sought after by local residents hoping to defeat the EPA’s proposal. “Hot with intellectual ego,” Silverstein explained, he and his Advanced Marine Biology students conducted “a salinity study of the area, [in which they] looked for some chlorides, identified some organisms, and that was it.” Along with their two instructors, the students presented their findings to the EPA in January of 1974.³⁷⁰

In their report, Marine Biology Club members chided the Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, stating that the EPA’s proposal indicated “that that the New

³⁶⁹ Roy R. Silver, “The State’s Tidal Wetlands Act Goes Into Effect,” *The New York Times* (2 September, 1973), 34; *McKinney’s Consolidated Laws of New York, Annotated, Book 17.5, Environmental Conservation Law* (New York: Thomson-West, 2007), 5-6.

³⁷⁰ Silverstein quoted in Robertson and Lewallen, eds., 56; See also Gillespie and Lazarus, eds., 130-132; Siegel interview.

York City EPA has not yet steeped itself in the biology of the wetlands.” Grounding their argument in the stated purposes of the state’s newly enacted Tidal Wetlands legislation, the young activists explained the significance of the “shallow marshes which surround estuarine regions such as the Spring Creek marshes.”

The most significant segment in the estuarine environment is the marshland fringe. Marine life dependent on these marshlands may be divided into several classes. Many important species, such as clams, oysters and certain fin fish are wholly indigenous to the estuaries and their marshes. Other species have more subtle dependence on the wetlands. Various species of fish spawn in the open ocean but must return to shallow wetland ‘nurseries’ in the early stages of their development. Other fish swim through estuarine areas to spawn and many species of mammals, birds, and other forms of wildlife are supported by the marshland environment.

In the students’ estimation, if approved, the proposed landfill project would devastate the fragile wetland eco-system that had developed in and around Spring Creek. The youths noted, however, that the proposed project would also impact the lives of local residents as well. Indeed, not only would a prime educational laboratory be lost, but “fishermen [would] pay for wetlands development in reduced catches; consumers [would] pay higher prices for sea food; sportsman and nature enthusiasts [would] pay in lost recreational opportunities; and neighboring landowners [would] pay in increased flood damage.” Truly, the social, economic and environmental costs of such a project would not be worth what the EPA’s proposal promised in return.³⁷¹

Ironically, twelve lawyers and biologists hired by the EPA agreed, citing that the students’ assessment of the EPA’s proposed project was wholly accurate. Having thoroughly examined the students’ report, the EPA’s hired consultants were unable to dispute their findings. Reflecting on the proceedings years later, Silverstein recalled how,

³⁷¹ Marine Biology Club of John Dewey High School and Faculty Advisors, *Opposition to Petition of NY City EPA (Petition No. Tw-20,000-0068, To fill in with solid waste incinerator residue the area of Queens section of Spring Creek Development)* (23 January, 1974), 1-4, from the private collection of Lou Siegel.

before he or any of his students could testify, EPA officials declared ““The Spring Creek areas will not be touched. We sent out our biologists and they agree with you.”” Despite the victory, however, Silverstein recognized that the report he and his students submitted had been based on a “very low viability study” which he himself “could have shot... full of holes.”³⁷² Therefore, whether the students’ report alone led the EPA to abandon its project remains unclear, especially since the proposed landfill, if approved, would have been in violation of the state’s Tidal Wetlands Act. Regardless, John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club members were able to once again claim victory on behalf of the local environment. By the end of February they had claimed two more, beginning with Laurelton, located in Queens, roughly seventeen miles from John Dewey High School.

Much like at Spring Creek, doubts of marshland preservation in Laurelton began circulating when New York City’s EPA publicized a plan to completely fill the areas’ marshland that, according to Silverstein, had already been “partially filled.” John Dewey’s Marine Biology students, however, were fully aware of the ecological consequences of such a project, having spent considerable time studying the city’s wetland and marshland areas. Hoping to halt another questionable EPA project, the students researched the area, drafted their findings, and submitted their opposition in writing. In the report, almost cynically, they lamented the popular assessment that “wetlands...are considered by some to be zones of specialized successions: natural marsh, landfill, spoil areas, and finally, the climax community, a housing development.” Indeed, similar to historian Hal Rothman, who, in 1998, would argue that most Americans are only ““green”” when it is convenient, (or “inexpensive-economically,

³⁷² Silverstein quoted in Robertson and Lewallen, eds., 56-57; See also Gillespie and Lazarus, eds., 130-132.

socially, and culturally,") John Dewey's Marine Biology Club had begun to realize society's willingness to sacrifice its local environmental treasures, especially when the speculative residential, commercial, or industrial rewards promised abundance.³⁷³ Such was the case in Laurelton.

Nevertheless, EPA administrators were also aware of the marshland's ecological significance, prompting the agency to designate a portion of the site "prime marshland" that "would remain in its natural state." This area, designated by the EPA as 1B, was home to a variety of fish, as well as "many species of mammals, birds and other forms of wildlife." While the students applauded the agency's decision, they did not waiver in their opposition to the overall proposal, citing that section 1A of the EPA's proposed site plan would destroy several species of local plants which had been protected by the state's Tidal Wetlands legislation – namely, *Spartina alterniflora*, *Distichlis*, *Baccharis* and *Samphire*. Recognizing the presence of such endangered plants as an essential bargaining chip, the students recommended that the EPA scale down its project, preserve the endangered plant life, and fill in the remaining area for development. While the students had originally hoped to preserve the sites' entire marshland area, they, along with Siegel and Silverstein, shared a "willingness to compromise." EPA administrators felt likewise, offering to fill only three acres with the promise of preservation for the remaining twelve.

³⁷³ Marine Biology Classes of John Dewey High School and Faculty Advisers, *Opposition to Petition of NY City EPA to Fill Area Bounded by Springfield Boulevard to the West, 149th Avenue to the North; A Continuation of 232nd Street to the East and Proposed Rockaway Boulevard to the South* (Petition No. TW-24, 107-0068), (3 February, 1974), 1, from the private collection of Lou Siegel; Robertson and LeWallen, 57; Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 5.

The students happily agreed, having successfully saved yet another marshland ecosystem.³⁷⁴

Just weeks later, those same negotiating skills led to a similar turn of events when John Dewey's Marine Biology Club stood in opposition to twenty-four of the world's largest oil companies, including Exxon, Shell, B.P, and a host of others. Although, this time tidal wetlands and beachfront ecosystems were not the students' central concern. While their first three projects had dealt exclusively with such areas, the students' February 24th petition expanded the reach of their activism to include New York's open water areas, particularly in Jamaica Bay. Having learned of Exxon and its fellow petitioner's proposal to release increased levels of oil refuse into the waterway, the students surveyed the area and submitted their findings to the EPA. Once again, their work skillfully illustrated the environmental degradation that oil refuse would elicit. Roughly three years after journalist Michael Harwood published his 1971 *New York Times* article calling attention to the “‘black mayonnaise’ at the Bottom of Jamaica Bay,” Siegel, Silverstein, and their students urged the EPA to deny “Big Oil” the right to enhance its destructive potential.³⁷⁵

Interestingly enough, however, John Dewey's Marine Biology students did find several key allies in the very companies they sought to hinder. In the opening paragraph of their report, the students highlighted their experience with Sun Oil, whose executives “without any hesitation” shared with them the company's laboratory results pertaining to

³⁷⁴ Marine Biology Classes of John Dewey High School and Faculty Advisers, *Opposition to Petition of NY City EPA to Fill Area Bounded by Springfield Boulevard to the West, 149th Avenue to the North; A Continuation of 232nd Street to the East and Proposed Rockaway Boulevard to the South* (Petition No. TW-24, 107-0068), 3-4; Robertson and Lewallen, 57.

³⁷⁵ Michael Harwood, “The ‘Black Mayonnaise’” at the Bottom of Jamaica Bay,” *New York Times* (7 February, 1971), SM9.

oil deposits in Jamaica Bay. At the same time, the students cited one Sun Oil representative who likened the spillage of oil in the bay to ““dumping garbage on the sidewalk.”” In the students’ estimation, his “attitude [was] a positive one [that could] only be commended.” Representatives from other companies, “with the exception of one or two,” were just as accommodating and just as positive when working with the young activists, “although not as fully cooperative as the Sun Oil Company.”³⁷⁶

Despite the cooperative nature of their interactions, however, both oil company representatives and John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club *did* envision two competing futures for Jamaica Bay. While Siegel and Silverstein’s students hoped to limit oil seepage and preserve marine life, representatives of the various oil companies *had* petitioned the EPA to increase the “maximum concentration of oil which was to be allowed in the waterway.”³⁷⁷ According to the students’ February 24th opposition report, such a decision, and the resulting pollution, would devastate submarine ecosystems, leading to the “direct kill” of various organisms by means of poisoning, asphyxiation, and an imbalanced food chain. The students emphasized the latter of these in further detail.

Petroleum hydrocarbons are persistent poisons. They enter the marine food chain; they are stabilized in the lipids of marine organisms and they are transferred from prey to predator. Many biological processes which are important or the survival of marine organisms and which occupy key positions in their life processes are mediated by extremely low concentrations of chemical messengers in sea water. Marine predators are attracted to their prey by organic compounds at concentrations below one part per billion. Such attraction – repulsion plays a role in the location of food, escape from predators, homing of many commercial[ly] important species of fish, selection of habitats in sex attraction.

The students concluded that such processes would be hindered by water pollution, even when it was “seemingly innocuous... [and] at low concentrations” which could “have an

³⁷⁶ John Dewey Marine Biology Club, Harold Silverstein, and Lou Siegel, *Opposition to NPDES 74-287, Petitioners: Exxon et al.*, (24 February, 1974), 1, from the private collection of Lou Siegel.

³⁷⁷ Robertson and Lewallen, 58.

irreversible effect on a marine species if not on various organisms in a specific marine food chain.” As occasional members of this food chain, humans, the students explained, were also at risk, especially when commercial seafood products were harvested from fisheries exposed to oil’s carcinogenic compounds. To limit the likelihood of such an occurrence, Club members urged EPA administrators to sustain oil pollution levels at 1ppm (one part per million), rather than raising them to the 40ppm requested by oil representatives.³⁷⁸

In light of the students’ research, EPA administrators once again compromised. Rather than raising allowable refuse levels to 40ppm, the agency limited them to just 10.³⁷⁹ For the second time, John Dewey students had persuaded the EPA to preserve and protect New York’s local marine environments. As agency administrators reported to the *New York Times*, the strength of the students’ analyses had fueled both of their decisions. In fact, EPA representatives explained that they were “much more receptive to [Marine Biology Club] presentations than to the emotional charges that [were] made by some environmentalists.” More importantly, the EPA often took “such reports seriously because they [could] be a two-edge sword.” Not only could they “give a regulatory agency ammunition in fighting pollution” they could also “be used to show that an agency is not doing its job if it does not act when it is given specific and detailed information.”³⁸⁰ Clearly, the students’ scientific approach to each case they accepted had accomplished both. Despite their youth, Siegel and Silverstein’s students had, by 1974, become full-fledged environmental activists, and only enhanced their skills as such when

³⁷⁸ John Dewey Marine Biology Club, Harold Silverstein, and Lou Siegel, *Opposition to NPDES 74-287, Petitioners: Exxon et al.* (24 February, 1974), 1, from the private collection of Lou Siegel.

³⁷⁹ Robertson and Lewallen, 58.

³⁸⁰ David Bird, “Marine Biology Students Attempting to Cut Pollution,” *New York Times* (7 April, 1974), 102; Robertson and Lewallen, 58.

they took on the Department of Environmental Conservation in their fourth and final major ecological study of that school year.

Halting Development at Fresh Creek, Gravesend, and Beyond

On June 26, 1974, members of John Dewey's Marine Biology Club traveled the ten miles across Brooklyn to Canarsie High School to, once again, submit an opposition brief in defense of the borough's coastal wetlands. Hoping to sway Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) officials, like they had with the EPA, the students delivered, what Silverstein later explained was, their "first truly competent work," in the form of a nineteen page report rich with charts, graphs, and ecological analyses. Similar to their case strategy with Spring Creek and Laurelton, the students' argument in favor of Brooklyn's Fresh Creek Basin relied heavily on New York's 1973 Tidal Wetlands legislation. Unlike before, however, this time the students' expertise was sought after by local community associations, which included the Canarsie Committee for Better Transportation as well as the Rockwood Park Civic Association.³⁸¹ Both organizations had clearly come to understand the level of credibility that a John Dewey Marine Biology Club scientific study and public presentation could afford any local environmental campaign. Despite the fact that Fresh Creek was, like Spring Creek and Laurelton, located several miles away from John Dewey, the school's young environmentalists agreed to study the area and draft their analyses for public consumption.

³⁸¹ Advanced Marine Biology Class and Harold Silverstein, "Opposition to Application to Fill in With Solid Waste Residue and Construct Bulkhead in the Area Adjacent to Fresh Creek in Fresh Creek Basin, Kings County, New York," (Opposition to Petition No. TW 22405-0068 SPWQ, Submitted to the Department of Environmental Conservation by Seymour Tillinger, Seaview Estates), (26 June, 1974), Exhibit 1 and 1A, from the private collection of Lou Siegel; "Brooklyn Students' Data Used at Wetland Hearings," *NYS Environment* (1 December, 1974).

Club members opened their report with an acknowledgement of the unceasing debate over Brooklyn's coastal wetlands that prevailed throughout the early 1970s. Such debates had been, they explained, "a source of continuing controversy between those who wish[ed] to develop and expand housing, shopping and other activities" and "those...who wish[ed] to maintain the marshland's integrity and its concomitant beneficial ecology." For them, as well as for concerned local citizens, Fresh Creek, which flowed into Jamaica Bay, had "become a focal point of such conflict." With this in mind, Siegel and Silverstein's students spent considerable time and effort sampling and studying Fresh Creek's estuarine ecosystem. In their report, they detailed their methods for DEC officials, noting that they visited the site on at least seven occasions for research and study, and then spent another 120 hours in the laboratory analyzing their results. At the same time, Siegel, Silverstein and their students were also able to enlist the support of Dr. John Teal, a biologist from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, who, on multiple occasions, advised Club members as their study progressed.³⁸² Teal, however, offered the young environmentalists much more than just his advice, as former student Dennis Bader recalled. Teal, who, along with his wife Mildred, authored the *Life and Death of the Salt Marsh*, also served as the students' "expert witness on the witness stand" before DEC officials at the June 26th hearing. Indeed, as Bader later surmised, Dewey students "were directly engaged with the best and the brightest that this country had in Marine Science or wetlands conservation at the time."³⁸³

³⁸² Advanced Marine Biology Class and Harold Silverstein, "Opposition to Application to Fill in With Solid Waste Residue and Construct Bulkhead in the Area Adjacent to Fresh Creek in Fresh Creek Basin, Kings County, New York," 2.

³⁸³ Bader interview.

As they had in prior cases, Maine Biology Club members explained the ecological degradation that would inevitably result if a housing development were to be allowed on or near Fresh Creek Basin. According to the students' drafted analyses, "the proposed housing [development]... would radically alter the character of the creek by introducing an ever increasing amount of pollutants due to leaching and storm water outflow." Not only would such pollutants be harmful to the estuarine ecosystem, they explained, it would also endanger residents' private property.

The varying types of pollutants would eventually destroy the phytoplankton population, a basic trophic source for higher life organisms. The dredging resulting from building activities would increase the "flush-time" with the consequent result that noxious odors arising from the waters would intensify. These odors now present, would increase, resulting in an unpleasant and unhealthy effect on the residents of the community. The chemicals contained in these noxious gases would increase the deleterious effect to the outside paint on the houses further south on 108th street.

In addition, the students explained, alterations, including landfill projects and construction, on one wetland property would certainly lead to the destruction of neighboring marine environments as well as to the flora and fauna therein. Most importantly, though, Club members noted that the "productivity" of one marshland area could not be reproduced by neighboring estuaries; therefore, if Fresh Creek were to be filled in and construction was allowed, its "productivity" as a unique marine ecosystem would be "lost" forever.³⁸⁴ Such an outcome, they concluded, would ultimately run counter to the stated goals of New York's Tidal Wetlands legislation.

This legislation undoubtedly provided a necessary boon to the Marine Biology students' argument against filling the Fresh Creek marshland, especially since, as they

³⁸⁴ Advanced Marine Biology Class and Harold Silverstein, "Opposition to Application to Fill in With Solid Waste Residue and Construct Bulkhead in the Area Adjacent to Fresh Creek in Fresh Creek Basin, Kings County, New York," 3-4.

noted, their “analysis fits the various categories and criteria of the Act.” Not only did the estuarine area provide a source of marine food production, a wildlife habitat, natural flood and storm protections, and sedimentation, the area also provided “hundreds of square miles and millions of days of recreation,” various educational and research-based opportunities, natural pollution treatment, as well as “unique open spaces and aesthetic qualities.” Since the marshland clearly met all eight criteria of the legislation, Club members “strongly urge[d]” the DEC to reject any proposal that endangered Fresh Creek’s viability. The students, however, did not limit their criticisms and recommendations to just a simple repudiation of the applicant’s petition. The area, they explained, should also “be considered as a vital adjunct to the [nearby] Gateway National Park” and summarily urged the department to prepare “suitable legislation...to incorporate this land area.”³⁸⁵ After careful consideration, DEC administrators concurred with the students’ recommendations, subsequently denying the petitioner’s request to fill Fresh Creek for residential development.

In his official report, John Saccar of the DEC’s Office of Hearings and Mediation Services cited the ecological importance of tidal wetlands as one of the central reasons for the department’s denial. Not only, Saccar explained, would “the proposed project...eliminate 4 acres of tidal wetlands which [were] performing a very valuable function,” the project would also significantly impact the local fish population, “result[ing] in a loss of some 2,000 pounds of fish annually.” Citing the findings of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist John Hanlon, Saccar stressed Fresh Creek’s importance “as an area for spawning, nursery feeding, nesting and resting for many fish, wildlife and

³⁸⁵ Advanced Marine Biology Class and Harold Silverstein, “Opposition to Application to Fill in With Solid Waste Residue and Construct Bulkhead in the Area Adjacent to Fresh Creek in Fresh Creek Basin, Kings County, New York,” 17-19.

marsh birds.” Just as John Dewey’s Marine Biology students had noted in their own study, biologists from the DEC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concluded that the local eco-system would be drastically altered if Fresh Creek were filled. Saccar agreed, and based his denial not only on the testimony of his professional expert witnesses, but also on the students’ report which, he noted, “support[ed] the testimony of Mssrs. Colvin and Hanlon” of the DEC and FWS, respectively.³⁸⁶ With yet another success under their proverbial belt, John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club turned their attention to Gravesend Bay.

Located on the southwestern shore of Brooklyn, Gravesend’s tidal wetlands had, by 1975, become, like Fresh Creek before them, contested space: recognized by some as prime real estate, and by others, a potpourri of flora and fauna worthy of preservation. Like they had throughout 1974, John Dewey’s Marine Biology students, once again, fully injected themselves into this contentious debate and committed themselves to the preservation of Brooklyn’s shoreline. In the spring of 1975, with their collective resume padded with success, Marine Biology Club members and their advisors confidently contested local land developer David S. Ziff’s petition to fill sections of Gravesend Bay for future residential development. Just as they had many times before, the students submitted their opposition report to the DEC which detailed the environmental hazards that such a project, if approved, would elicit. Using their Fresh Creek report as a template, the students explained their methodology and their findings, most of which mirrored the earlier study. After roughly sixty hours of field research, and another five hundred hours of laboratory study and analysis, Club members concluded that Ziff’s

³⁸⁶ New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, “Tidal Wetlands Application No. TW-22405-0068, Final Report by John Saccar, In the Matter of the Application of Seaview Estates, INC.,” (16 January, 1975), 4-7.

property was “highly productive” as a marshland and worthy of preservation. Moreover, having fit “the various categories and criteria of the [Tidal Wetlands] Act,” Gravesend’s wetlands should, in fact, be protected by New York State law.³⁸⁷

In his March 9, 1976 denial report, DEC hearing Officer, Fiero DeMasi concurred with Silverstein and his students’ apprehension, citing the clear ecological degradation that would result if he approved Ziff’s application. He explained.

The placement of some 32,000 cubic yards of fill on the Applicant’s property would result in the destruction of approximately 90,100 square feet of tidal wetlands which are contiguous with Gravesend Bay, including a small area of marsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*). The area provides habitat for several species of fish, hermit crabs, periwinkles, mud snails and other marine organisms.

In addition, DeMasi noted, Ziff did not “carry the burden of showing that the project [was] reasonable or necessary or in the public interest.” In DeMasi’s opinion, Ziff was unable to prove that the Gravesend area in question was in need of further residential development, or even “compatible with residential construction.” Recognizing no clear need for the proposed project, DeMasi denied Ziff’s petition for a moratorium permit, allowing John Dewey’s Marine Biology students, as well as their instructors, to claim yet another victory for Brooklyn’s coastal wetlands.³⁸⁸

In the years that followed, however, while John Dewey’s Marine Biology students continued to visit and study New York City’s various beaches and waterfront eco-systems, their involvement in the local environmental movement evolved from political activism to community-based marine science education. Rather than continuing

³⁸⁷ Harold Silverstein, Marine Biology Consultant and the Advanced Marine Biology Class, John Dewey High School, “Opposition to: Fill in Land Under Water. Approximately 32,000 Cubic Yards, Clean Fill, Sand, Gravel, and Clay. In the Matter of David Ziff, Petition No. TW SP 22406-0056.” (12 June, 1975) 19-20.

³⁸⁸ New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, “Tidal Wetlands Application No. TW-22406-0056-SP-WQ, Final Report by Fiero DeMasi, In the Matter of the Application of David S. Ziff,” (9 March, 1976), 4.

to focus their efforts only upon wetland preservation, Siegel, Silverstein, and their students hoped to inculcate an appreciation for such areas through a variety of educational experiences targeted at New York City's youth. To this end, they designed and directed various community-education programs for New York and New Jersey's Gateway National Recreation Area, including "Explore the Beach" and "Environmental Sailing." Through these programs and others, Siegel, as well as several of his students, volunteered their time to teach thousands of New York City children about the very marine environments they had spent previous five years laboring to preserve.³⁸⁹ Moreover, when Gateway eventually hired full-time park rangers to lead such program, Siegel and his students were asked to assist in their training.³⁹⁰

The students' forays into environmental education, however, were not limited to their activities with New York City's youth or Gateway National Recreation Area. While the students continued to volunteer at the New York City Aquarium, they also volunteered to help their advisors lead various Marine Biology in-service programs for New York City teachers. Not only were students allowed to help lead such in-service programs, they were also encouraged to co-present with Siegel and Silverstein at professional development science education conferences. One former student, Marlene Zichlinsky, who assisted in this way recalled one event in particular, that took place at Manhattan's Americana Hotel in 1976. Along with Lou Siegel, a small contingent of students presented on salt-marsh ecology, a topic John Dewey students had spent the first half of the 1970s studying in much detail. Zichlinsky noted the paradoxical moment,

³⁸⁹ Lou Siegel, e-mail message to author, (10 November, 2008); Siegel interview; James Elardi and Warren E. Yasso, "Brooklyn and the Sea: 'Explore the Beach'," *The Journal of Marine Education* (Summer 1976), 10-12.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Marlene Zichlinsky by Neil P. Buffett, (12 June, 2007).

when she and her colleagues were, in fact, “teaching teachers how to teach Marine Biology.” Having been thoroughly trained by Siegel and Silverstein, and having repeatedly employed their knowledge in defense of Brooklyn’s Atlantic Coastline, Zichlinsky and her peers were certainly well-suited for such a task. Indeed, despite their young age, student environmentalists at John Dewey High School had, over the years, become relative authorities on the marine sciences as well as the local ecology within their midst. Just as it had for members of SEQ in Bellport, this knowledge-base had served as a solid foundation for successful high school student environmental activism upon the urban landscape in Brooklyn.

As this chapter has highlighted, however, it is exactly the breadth of this latter landscape which differentiated teen environmental activism in New York City from similar undertakings on suburban Long Island. Indeed, as noted above, the more expansive geography of Brooklyn erected two spatial barriers for John Dewey students that were not faced by their contemporaries in SEQ; not only were many Brooklyn youth’s residences spatially separated from their high school, their home *and* their high school were spatially separated from the various places they researched and preserved as students and activists. While such spatial barriers did not necessarily inhibit student success in protecting such locations, most of which contained fragile and jeopardized marshland ecosystems, they certainly made the task that much more difficult. Unlike their contemporaries in Bellport, all of whom lived in and around the areas they targeted for local activism, students at John Dewey were usually “outsiders” who lived and learned in Brooklyn neighborhoods far removed from the sites of their activism. As a result, Marine Biology Club members and their advisors were unable to employ *local residence* as an

additional credential to bolster their preservationist aims. As residents of greater Brooklyn – and not necessarily the neighborhood or section targeted for activism – students and instructors alike needed to fully base their called for local preservation on the strength of their research and analyses alone. While members of SEQ in Bellport could certainly depend upon their status as local residents of the small area within which they were active, Lou Siegel, Harold Silverstein, and their students could not and did not.

At the same time, such spatial differentiation in Brooklyn also led to a much stronger and centralized faculty role in the environmental campaigns undertaken by students at John Dewey High School. As noted above, the influence of Lou Siegel and Harold Silverstein stands out as a prominent impetus for the activism performed by their students, especially in light of the action-oriented nature in which they designed their innovative Marine Biology program. Unlike in Bellport, where Art Cooley and Dennis Puleston served as advisors of an optional, extra-curricular activity for interested students, Siegel and Silverstein, for all intents and purposes, almost required some form of environmental action from the students enrolled in their program. Again, this differentiation can be viewed as a natural result of the spatial differences between the relatively small suburban community in Bellport and the expansive urban geography in Brooklyn. For youths in rural Bellport, their familiarity with “nature” – be it the Carmans River, Swan Lake, the Great South Bay, open and green parklands, or the mini-forests of trees at the ends of their block – began at a very young age and, once in high school, was further cultivated by their interactions with Art Cooley and Dennis Puleston. For these students’ contemporaries in Brooklyn, familiarity with such places in their formative years was not necessarily assured. While some certainly hailed from neighborhoods in

close proximity to John Dewey High School and within walking distance of the Brooklyn shoreline, just as many, if not more, hailed from inner-borough neighborhoods which were far removed from marshlands, ocean beaches and other recreational areas. For these latter students in particular, many of their first interactions with what as youngsters they would have narrowly defined as “nature,” took place in Lou Siegel and Harold Silverstein’s Marine Biology program. Understanding this implicit reality, both teachers designed a program which would not only cultivate their students’ relationships with the natural world, but would force them to engage and defend it as well.

The increased level of pollution along the Brooklyn shoreline also differentiated the experiences of John Dewey High School students from those of their activist contemporaries on Long Island. While students in Bellport had engaged in preservationist activity as a means to *prevent* inorganic pollution from harming the green spaces within their midst, students at John Dewey labored to clean and advocate for the natural spaces which had *already been* polluted. For these latter student activists, the shorelines they engaged were not simply composed of suburban homes and parklands, as they were in rural Bellport. In Brooklyn, the Atlantic coastline was, among other things, a patchwork of airports, manufacturing firms, shopping centers, treatment facilities, resort communities, beaches, marshlands, apartment complexes, *as well as* privately-owned homes and parklands. By the early 1970s, the mixed-use nature of this waterfront terrain had led to various levels and forms of inorganic pollution in the waters and waterfront areas of Jamaica Bay. In their first five years as a high school environmental organization, members of John Dewey’s Marine Biology Club inserted themselves into various debates over pollution abatement as well as wetland preservation that spanned

their entire home borough. While students in Bellport certainly engaged in similar activities on their less dense and much smaller suburban landscape, they did so on a much smaller scale and in a much more *preventative* style. Ultimately, the levels of synthetic pollution and tangible waste along the Carmans River corridor and elsewhere in Bellport was much less than the levels found along the coastal areas of Brooklyn. As this chapter has clearly illustrated then, the urban landscape of New York City necessitated a much more expansive environmentalism than the one which concurrently evolved on nearby Long Island. As the next chapter will reveal, the same can be said of the high school student civil rights activism which manifested at Brooklyn's Franklin K. Lane High School and – unlike in Bellport or Malverne – across the urban landscape of New York City as well.

Chapter 5: Civil Rights and Black Power Activism at Franklin K. Lane in Brooklyn

As the previous chapter explored, teenaged environmental activism at John Dewey High School was uniquely contoured by the expansive geographic and spatial realities of Brooklyn's urban landscape. Unlike their contemporaries on Long Island, the majority of student activists at John Dewey had been born and raised several miles from not only the high school hub of their political activism, but also the various places they chose to preserve in their campaigns. Such spatial separation had, for many, delayed their entrée into organized environmental action until their eventual enrollment at John Dewey High School. Once there, students who were interested in environmental protection quickly garnered the necessary skills needed for local as well as borough-wide preservationist activity. Such skills then made it possible for these students and their advisors to preserve a variety of fragile beachfront and wetland ecosystems all along the fragmented Brooklyn shoreline. While these students' contemporaries on suburban Long Island had limited their preservationist activities to the *local* environments within their midst, for students at John Dewey, environmental activism was uniquely connected to an urban world that spread far beyond the confines of their high school or the neighborhoods they knew as home. As residents of the same urban landscape, the same can surely be said of student civil rights activists at Brooklyn's Franklin K. Lane High School.

Similar to their contemporaries at John Dewey, student activists at Franklin K. Lane lived, learned and politically organized upon an expansive urban landscape which was much larger in geographic size than the relatively small suburban landscapes of Bellport and Malverne. While student-led civil rights activism manifested in both types of settings, a uniquely urban-style movement took root at Franklin K. Lane – one in

which students' social movement activity linked them to political issues throughout Brooklyn and the greater New York area. In other words, while student civil rights activists at Lane spent considerable time organizing and protesting for racial and ethnic equality *within* their high school, they were also heavily involved in, and inspired by, borough and city-wide movements for the same. These student activists – the majority of whom were African American and Latino – also involved themselves in a host of Brooklyn-based and city-wide coalitions against the War in Vietnam, for the alleviation of poverty, for an expansion of student rights, as well as for the promotion of community control of public schools. While all of these issues were certainly relevant to black, white and Latino youths at Franklin K. Lane, they were also relevant to other politically-engaged teenagers in schools throughout New York City, a fact which routinely united youths from all five boroughs in the late 1960s. Therefore, this chapter will explore not only the evolution of high school civil rights activism within Franklin K. Lane, it will also explore the school and its students' uniquely urban-based connections to, and relationships with, a variety of other social movement activities and student-led protest organizations elsewhere in New York City.

As the first sections will note, the movement for racial and ethnic equality at Franklin K. Lane was intrinsically related to, and influenced by, the larger forces of the city-wide and, more specifically, the Brooklyn-based civil rights campaigns of the late 1960s. As a central hub of the northern Civil Rights Movement, mid to late 1960s New York was a much more politically and racially charged environment than suburban Bellport or Malverne, despite the latter communities' varied experiences with racial, ethnic and socioeconomic inequality. Nothing illustrates this more than the contentious,

and now infamous, 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers Strike, which pit New York City's primarily white, Jewish teacher's union – the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) – against Brooklyn's African American community, the latter of which had called for, and provisionally won, local control of community schools. As discussed in chapter four, the formation of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Experimental School District had provided the African American community an opportunity to play a much larger role in the administrative and educational processes of the public schools within their own neighborhoods. When the implementation of community control began to threaten the sanctity of labor rights, however, UFT members in Brooklyn and, later, throughout the city, went on strike in opposition. Lasting from May until November of 1968, the union's strike against community control was quickly interpreted by social justice advocates as a protest movement against African Americans and civil rights. This belief only intensified and became more paramount in the strike's aftermath when community control and Ocean Hill-Brownsville were, for all intents and purposes, dismantled.

From 1968 to 1970, this string of events uniquely influenced and inspired high school student civil rights activism at Franklin K. Lane, especially since the majority of the school's black student body had been born and raised in the Brownsville area. Without a high school facility of their own, youth from the predominantly black neighborhood were left with little choice but to enroll at a school which was located roughly five miles away in the primarily white neighborhood of Woodhaven. Nestled upon the eastern border of Brooklyn and Queens, Franklin K, Lane differed greatly from the elementary and junior high schools that students had previously experienced in their home neighborhood. For many, especially those who were freshmen or sophomores in

the 1969-1970 school year, they had spent their last two years of junior high school as participants in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control experiment. To be sure, this opportunity had left an indelible mark upon each of them, as they had not only learned from black teachers in minority-run schools within the borders of a primarily African American community, but they had also witnessed white teachers and the UFT rally against all three. Once enrolled at Lane, which was a heavily integrated facility with a less than welcoming white teaching staff in a reactionary white neighborhood, these students quickly realized their positions as unwanted outsiders. Again, such beliefs only intensified and became more prevalent in the weeks and months following the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers' Strike.

In the last two years of the 1960s, these beliefs and the racial fear and mistrust that gave them life, led African American students at Lane to politically organize for the promotion of civil rights within their high school and in other schools across the Brooklyn landscape. Organized as the African American Student Association (ASA), black students at Lane – and in schools throughout Brooklyn – worked closely with their parent organization, the African American Teachers Association (ATA), to implement racially inclusive and culturally sensitive academic curriculums in public schools. Moreover, members of the ASA and ATA also supported the diversification of faculty and administrative rosters while also calling for the revival of community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville and elsewhere. In addition, both organizations demanded the recognition and celebration of African American cultural icons such as Martin Luther King Junior, Malcolm X and a variety of other culturally-significant individuals as well. Coming on the proverbial heels of the city's most controversial racial dispute of the late

1960s, these students' demands for in-school social change were not warmly received by UFT representatives, white teachers, or the predominantly white neighborhood surrounding Franklin K. Lane. Over time, this led to a much more radicalized, militant, and, at times, violent civil rights and social justice campaign than those which manifested just sixty miles east on suburban Long Island.

As the following analysis reveals, high school student civil rights activists at Franklin K. Lane were much more heavily influenced and inspired by the resurgence of Black Nationalism and Black Power of the mid to late 1960s. Unlike their contemporaries in Bellport and Malverne, the majority of Lane's black student body had not only been born and raised in one of the central hubs of the northern civil rights movement, they had also experienced the harsh extremes of racial, ethnic and socio-economic inequality against which it was waged. While such realities had certainly divided blacks, whites and Latinos on Long Island, the inner-city manifestations of all three proved much more pervasive and divisive, leading to much less conciliatory civil rights activity at Franklin K. Lane and in New York City on the whole. From the fall of 1968 onward, the demise of community control of schools did little to bridge this gap between black and white New Yorkers. At Franklin K. Lane, this led to not only white backlash against African American students, but also to a more radicalized and, at times, violent civil rights and Black Power protest movement against white racism.

While this chapter focuses primarily on the evolution of this much more intense and polarizing student-led civil rights movement, it also sheds light on the lack of high school student environmental activism at Franklin K. Lane. Unlike its suburban counterpart in rural Bellport, the beleaguered inner city school did not witness a surge of

youth environmentalism in the years following successful civil rights reform. Much like in suburban Malverne, this reality can be loosely attributed to a variety of possible factors, including the lack of student interest, the absence of an influential faculty member, as well as the significant impact of “place” in the lives of prospective youth activists. While all three of these factors certainly played a role in inhibiting an environmental ethos at Franklin K. Lane, the latter will be highlighted as not only the most significant, but also the precursor to the others. As residents of Brooklyn in the mid to late 1960s, Lane students – particularly those from Brownsville – had been significantly inspired to become politically active by the social, cultural and spatial realities they had experienced in their home neighborhoods as well as in their schools. Having experienced various levels of inner-city poverty and/or racial and ethnic discrimination, these students recognized civil rights activism as the most essential form of political activity they could engage in. Inspired and influenced by the contested landscape upon which they were raised, such activism proved much more intense and militant than it had on suburban Long Island. With the burning of science teacher, Frank Siracusa in January of 1969, this intensity yielded to violence as black student activists began to engage a white power structure incensed by their very presence. As one of the very first acts of political defiance in the Civil Rights Movement at Franklin K. Lane, an analysis of the “Siracusa Incident” opens the chapter analysis as its causes and its consequences were significant to not only the student activism it bred, but to the official and administrative responses it would ultimately yield.

“The Burning” as The Beginning?

In the first chapter of his 1972 memoir, *Race War in High School: The Ten Year Destruction of Franklin K. Lane High School in Brooklyn*, former Social Studies teacher Harold Saltzman, opens his narrative with a graphic account of an unprovoked student attack on his friend and colleague, Frank Siracusa. In quite ominous and yet suspenseful prose, the author simultaneously horrifies as well as angers a sympathetic audience as he recounts each step his fellow teacher took on the morning of January 20, 1969. Ironically, on this Monday morning one of Lane’s most “popular” instructors was set ablaze by three African American students in the school’s outdoor courtyard just as the day began. Saltzman relayed the assault in vivid detail.

It was only minutes before [Siracusa’s] morning class was scheduled to assemble when a stone came crashing through the window... Cautiously, he approached the window, wary of yet another missile. Looking out at the courtyard he observed two black youths...deked out in the fashionable *dashikis* and sporting the hairdo which had become the sign of black militancy ...He put on his overcoat, descended the stairway...and went out to the courtyard. Slowly, he approached the two tall youngsters who by now were joined by a third youth, somewhat shorter and younger, but with as menacing a veneer as the older pair. “I’m Mr. Siracusa,” he said quietly. “I’m a teacher, not a cop, and I would like to know who broke my window...” In a flash, one of the youngsters drew a water pistol...spraying the teacher’s outer garments with a liquid which was later discovered to be a highly flammable lighter fluid...Suddenly he felt a thunderous blow crashing into his spine. As he dropped to the ground, anguishing in pain, defenseless, he felt the smashing of fists against his jaw and the pounding of booted heels into his groin. Lying helpless...he sensed the burning flames from his overcoat which had been set afire by his assailants, who then left him there as a potential immolation fatality.³⁹¹

Fortunately, despite the pain, the chemistry instructor had maintained the wherewithal to wrench himself free of his blazing jacket and cry out for assistance. Within seconds,

³⁹¹ Harold Saltzman, *Race War in High School: The Ten Year Destruction of Franklin K. Lane High School in Brooklyn*, (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1972), 14-16; See also Peter Kihss, “Teacher Beaten, Clothing Ignited: Three Negro Youths Attack White Instructor at Lane” *New York Times* (21 January, 1969), 1, 36.

fellow teachers came rushing out of the building to help, dragging him a safe distance from the blazing garment. In Saltzman's estimation, with this assault, "a brand new chapter had been written into the annals of racial strife in the public schools, less than fifteen years after the United States Supreme Court spoke out against the doctrine of racial separatism in public educational systems."³⁹² For such a dedicated and "popular" faculty member to be so viciously assaulted by students was virtually inconceivable prior to that January 20th, and, as Saltzman concluded, could be categorized as nothing less than a criminal act against a hapless victim.

If analyzed from a different perspective, however, the burning of Frank Siracusa can be classified as much more than simply an isolated instance of illegality and physical assault upon a beloved Chemistry teacher. When examined from the student perspective, which Saltzman's memoir curiously neglects, "the Siracusa incident" appears to be more in line with political protest – be it violent political protest – than unbridled criminal activity. In the weeks that followed the attack, Lane students – some anonymously, others by name – wrote in sympathy of Siracusa's three attackers, in the hopes of rationalizing this violent action to their fellow students, members of the local community, as well as to readers throughout New York City. In the March 1969 edition of *Challenge*, one of New York City's many underground newspapers, one student anonymously penned that "contrary to all reports in the press, Frank Siracusa, science teacher, is not a well-liked teacher at F.K. Lane." Moreover, the student accused Siracusa of racism, arguing that the teacher had publicly supported a call for the involuntary transfer of one thousand Lane students – all of whom happened to be black and Latino – in order to alleviate

³⁹² Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 16.

overcrowding in the troubled high school.³⁹³ Interestingly enough, that call had originated with Harold Saltzman, who, in addition to teaching Social Studies, also served as Lane's UFT Chapter Chairman. The student rationalized the burning, then, as a "political act of defense by students at Lane...[and] not a racially-instigated or indiscriminate act, as the press would mislead us to think."³⁹⁴ This student's teenage contemporaries in the New York High School Student Union (NYHSSU), a few of whom also attended Lane, agreed.

In the February-March, 1969 edition of the New York High School Student Union's (NYHSSU) underground newspaper, *The New York High School Free Press*, white Lane student, Ira Schwartz along with several of his union colleagues commented on "the Siracusa incident" and the overall racial tensions at Franklin K. Lane. Unlike Saltzman's memoir, Schwartz et al placed the burning in its appropriate historical context, citing it as nothing less than a natural response to the racial discrimination to which black and Latino students had been subjected to in the weeks and months following the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teacher's Strike. The students provided readers a variety of examples of this bigotry, noting the confederate flag that had been hoisted up Lane's flag pole, the photos of Adolf Hitler that had been placed in the school's entrance way, as well as the various anti-black leaflets and signs that had been posted in bathrooms and hallways throughout the school building.³⁹⁵ New York Times Journalist, Peter Kihss, confirmed these reports, noting the various racial epithets that graced the

³⁹³ In *Race War in High School*, Harold Saltzman notes Frank Siracusa's speech at a January 17th meeting of the Woodhaven-Cypress Hill Civic Association Meeting. See page 110.

³⁹⁴ "Franklin K. Lane H.S. Students Strike: Black, White & Brown Pickets Hit 'Concentration Camp,' *Challenge* (March, 1969) found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

³⁹⁵ Ira Schwartz, Ernestine Walker, Charlene McMullen, Adriane Morris, Larry McKeithan, Waco and the High School Free Press Staff, "F**K Lane," *New York High School Free Press* (February-March, 1969) Issue 6, Page 5 found in the Underground Newspaper Collection, microfilm collection, Frank Melville Jr. Library, Stony Brook University.

walls of Franklin K. Lane when students had returned to school in November. Ironically enough, as Kihss reported, one such epithet had been scrawled just below Frank Siracusa's classroom window, reading "'Nigger Out' [along with] three swastikas," a critical fact which Saltzman failed to acknowledge in his recounting of the January 20th attack.³⁹⁶

Still, it is unlikely, if not completely absurd for one to believe that Frank Siracusa had either known of the message's existence or that he would have actually penned it himself, leaving one to question why he, one of roughly three hundred faculty members, was set ablaze by students. In their article on Lane, Schwartz and his co-authors imply that while Siracusa was a lone victim on January 20th, any one of his many colleagues could have been a victim, in light of, what the authors perceived to be, mistreatment of not only black and Latino students, but white students as well. They explained.

When students are driven to burn teachers there must be some cause. It's because teachers and administrators have treated them like shit... The press has presented the picture that helpless teachers are the innocent victims of student assaults and that the students are animals. On the contrary, students are reacting to the UFT's organized racism and the more subtle racism (and not so subtle racism) that is in the classrooms. Undoubtedly many innocent people have been victimized. But the school system doesn't recognize the existence of individuals. It's the whole tragedy of this country. Groups, classes are pitted against groups and classes. Black against white Teacher against student. The [UFT] ended up fighting the community when it should have been allied with it. That's the way the American system keeps the real power unharmed – make the people fight among themselves.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Peter Kihss, "Teacher Beaten, Clothing Ignited: Three Negro Youths Attack White Instructor at Lane," *New York Times* (21 January, 1969), 1, 36; See also Martin Bloch et al, "Statement Prepared by the Committee of Concern Teachers: A History of the Crisis," (22 January, 1969) found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

³⁹⁷ Schwartz et al, "F**K Lane."

Caught in this matrix of unequal power relationships, Frank Siracusa then, innocent as he may have appeared, was, at the very least, guilty by association – association with not only the United Federation of Teachers and its 1968 strike against community control, but with the collective white power structure of New York City and, by extension, the nation on the whole.

Frank Siracusa, though, *had* played a significant role in marking himself as a possible target of student rage, having repeatedly enflamed the ire of black and Latino students with his public support of third party presidential candidate, Alabama Governor, George Wallace. Indeed, as Ira Schwartz recalled in a 2009 interview, Siracusa, along with a handful of other Lane faculty members, proudly voiced their support of the segregationist Governor’s 1968 campaign with bumper stickers on the cars they drove to the integrated inner-city school. To these instructors, Schwartz surmised, “it was a badge of honor to have George Wallace on [their] bumper.” However, as ‘the Siracusa incident’ clearly illustrates students periodically “took some of the teachers to task for their political views,” especially when such views influenced faculty members’ interactions with their black and Latino students.³⁹⁸

In a few instances, such political views altered collegial relations among the faculty, administration, and staff as well. One anti-racist white teacher, who chose to remain anonymous, recalled how he, as a young African Studies instructor, frequently received racist, reactionary, and sometimes even “pornographic” literature in his school mailbox. While this instructor never learned who actually adorned his mailbox with such literature, his loyalty to the black and Latino student population did draw the enmity of

³⁹⁸ Interview with Ira Schwartz by Neil P. Buffett, (11-12 March, 2009); Interview with Richard Byrd by Neil P. Buffett, (6 April, 2009).

one of his more conservative colleagues, in particular. Believing that this teacher had somehow inspired three African American students to set him ablaze, Frank Siracusa spat on him in disgust, despite his target's obvious innocence.³⁹⁹

Ironically, however, the obviousness of his innocence clearly indicates the level to which the racially-charged atmosphere at Franklin K. Lane in the late 1960s fomented relationships between faculty members, students, and administrators, especially in the two years following the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers' Strike. Nevertheless, while the teachers' strike certainly served as a catalyst for political activism on the part of black and Latino students (not to mention that of the community and faculty as well), the racial and ethnic tensions that would come to define Lane by the 1968-1969 school year had, in fact, begun to manifest much earlier in the decade. In order to fully understand the burning of Frank Siracusa as well as the evolution of high school student civil rights activism at Franklin K. Lane, these earlier tensions must first be examined in light of the school's ever-evolving, mid-decade racial and ethnic demography as well as the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers Strike and the various city-wide student coalitions it birthed.

Reverse Segregation, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and the New York High School Student Union

At the same time that African American and Latino parents in Malverne and Bellport were organizing against segregated neighborhood schools on nearby Long Island, minority parents could rest easy with the knowledge that Franklin K. Lane was already an integrated school facility by the fall of 1965. While Lane had, at least from the late 1950s onward, always been racially and ethnically integrated, 1965 witnessed the

³⁹⁹ Interview with former Franklin K. Lane Faculty Member by Neil P. Buffett, (30 April, 2009).

school's first academic year when the student body composition split, almost exactly, in half. In just seven years, the school's non-white population had risen from roughly 23% of the whole in 1958 (somewhat comparable to integrated suburban schools in the late 1960s) to roughly 50%, increasing from 877 of a total student population of 3,650 to 2,216 of an even larger student population of 4,413 in 1965. This neat fifty-fifty demographic split, however, proved only temporary, as Franklin K. Lane's racial and ethnic population continued to increase in the three year period which followed. In fact, by 1968, the black and Latino student body population had risen to roughly 66% of the whole, equaling an impressive 3,551 of 5,374 enrolled students, making Lane the fifth most integrated high school in both Brooklyn and Queens.⁴⁰⁰

Interesting and unique as these numbers may appear, however, they also illustrate the demographic impact of a staggering increase in academic "white flight" which contributed to Lane's remarkable integration record from the late 1950s onward. While Lane's white student population totaled 50% of the whole in 1965, this was, in fact, a significant decrease from the 76% it had been in 1958. Moreover, in the three years from 1965 to 1968, as the school's minority population increased, the white student population decreased from 50% of the whole to 34%, equaling a drop from 2,197 of 4,413 to 1,823 of 5,374.⁴⁰¹ Even as the school's total population increased, the white population still decreased dramatically as Lane opened its doors to an ever-increasing population of black and Latino students from nearby Bedford Stuyvesant and Ocean Hill-Brownsville – two

⁴⁰⁰ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, Appendix A, 221, Appendix B, 222; See also "School Census, October 31, 1958-October 31, 1966, Incl." found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁴⁰¹ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, Appendix A, 221; See also "School Census, October 31, 1958-October 31, 1966, Incl."

primarily Black and Latino neighborhoods that lacked public high schools of their own.⁴⁰²

For many in the surrounding white community, as well as for Harold Saltzman and several of his colleagues, such unregulated population shifts meant that Franklin K. Lane was to be “the safety valve for Brooklyn, [and] the place to send the bulk of the black students coming out of the junior high schools in the Central Brooklyn ghetto.” Saltzman explained his point further.

They [minority students] would be crammed into Lane, more and more each year, youngsters with long records of conviction for felonious crimes, youngsters who were academically disoriented, emotionally unstable, illiterate, socially maladjusted, and an increasing number hooked on hard drugs long before the city took cognizance of the *spreading evil* [emphasis mine] in its high schools.⁴⁰³

To illustrate his point, Saltzman laid out these concerns in an early 1968 memorandum to the UFT’s central administration, including its president, Albert Shanker. Noting the aforementioned demographic shifts of the mid to late 1960s, Saltzman purported that Lane was “rapidly becoming a reversely segregated public institution” having already ““tipped”” in violation of Board of Education policy as well as decisions by the United States Supreme Court and New York State’s Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen. Moreover, he explained, it was the “responsibility of all interested parties to work towards restoration of quality integrated education at Lane High School.”⁴⁰⁴

This “responsibility,” however, which Saltzman eagerly delegated to parents, principals, teachers, and district superintendents, was to encourage Brooklyn’s white

⁴⁰² Memo from Harold Saltzman, Chapter Chairman, Lane High School, UFT to United Federation of Teachers, (Circa 1968) found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁴⁰³ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 52.

⁴⁰⁴ Memo from Harold Saltzman, Chapter Chairman, Lane High School, UFT to United Federation of Teachers, (Circa 1968).

families to choose Franklin K. “Lane rather than parochial, private, or another public high school” for their teenaged children. Ironically, while this plea for action seemed, on the surface, to espouse a traditional school integration campaign like similar action campaigns in suburban Malverne and Bellport, Saltzman’s later actions, as well as those of many of his colleagues, clearly indicate otherwise. Indeed, his more immediate goal proved to be nothing less than a veiled attempt to halt the annual in-migration of minority students to Franklin K. Lane High School. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that Lane had not become an “overcrowded” school by the mid to late 1960s, as Saltzman also stressed in the same UFT memorandum.⁴⁰⁵ On this point, his argument was, in fact, more than truthful, as the school was at 125% capacity in the fall of 1968.⁴⁰⁶ This reality, however, would, by the end of that year, become overshadowed by several proposed, racially controversial resolutions of this issue, many of which would be offered and/or supported by Saltzman, Siracusa, and the UFT. At the same time, the beginning of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers’ Strike in May of that year only heightened tensions in what was an already explosive racial environment not only at Franklin K. Lane but across New York City on the whole.

As discussed in Chapter Four, beginning in the fall of 1967, school district decentralization and support for community control of public schools quickly set in motion a series of racially-charged political and social contestations which ultimately led to the, now infamous, city-wide teachers’ boycott of schools beginning in September of

⁴⁰⁵ Memo from Harold Saltzman, Chapter Chairman, Lane High School, UFT to United Federation of Teachers, (Circa 1968).

⁴⁰⁶ The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, “Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), P. 43, found in the Papers of Ira Glasser, (Former) Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, accessed at the Offices of the New York Civil Liberties Union, New York, NY.

1968. As the ensuing UFT strike divided parents, teachers, school officials, and local politicians along racial, ethnic and philosophical-lines, roughly one million New York City school children enjoyed a ten week extension to their typical two and one half month summer vacation.⁴⁰⁷ Throughout this ten-week period, teenaged students from various high schools across New York City, including Franklin K. Lane, began to (and for some, continued to) politically organize themselves, as well as their teenaged peers, in support of Civil Rights, the alleviation of poverty, an end to the War in Vietnam, and community control of public schools. The majority of these nascent student activists stood in opposition to the United Federation of Teachers' strike against the experimental community control district in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, which, on principle, the students enthusiastically supported. To these students, despite their UFT-affiliated teachers' claims to the contrary, the racial undertones of the strike were more than obvious. This reality rang especially true for members of the newly organized New York High School Student Union (NYHSSU), which, according to historian Gael Graham, became "the largest high school student union in the United States...with individual chapters in more than a hundred New York public and private schools."⁴⁰⁸

Founded in late September of 1968, the NYHSSU almost immediately voiced its collective membership's opposition to the teachers' strike and openly proclaimed its allegiance to the African American community and community control.⁴⁰⁹ In his 1970 independent documentary, *Ira, You'll Get Into Trouble*, filmmaker Stephen Sbarge

⁴⁰⁷ Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University, 2006), 70-71.

⁴⁰⁸ Graham, 73.

⁴⁰⁹ "Teen-agers Join Protest Parade: 200 High School Students of City Form a Union," *New York Times* (22 September, 1968), pg. 29; Dana Driskell, "Now we have a Union! Up Against the Wall Bd. Of Ed.," *New York High School Free Press* (9-22, October, 1968), Pg. 7.

captures NYHSSU members on film as a small gathering of them discuss Ocean Hill-Brownsville and their intention to lead a sit-in demonstration at UFT headquarters, and, in effect, “hold liberation classes” in protest. As union members begin to articulate their platform to each other as well as to the camera, white student activist, Eugene Elk explains the nascent union’s position: “We’re against the teacher’s strike, which in itself is racist, and is a show against decentralization and black control of the black community.” In the very next scene, fourteen NYHSSU members are shown boarding an elevator, which will presumably elevate them to the UFT’s Central Headquarters in Manhattan. Once there, the fourteen students spill into the lobby and begin their sit-in demonstration, refusing to leave, despite the looming threat of arrest. NYHSSU co-founder Robert Newton defiantly explains their rationale to a young, male UFT representative: “If your union can shut down our schools...just to stop community control, then we can come into your offices.” With the threat of arrest still looming, however, by scene’s end, all fourteen activists willingly disband and vacate the building.⁴¹⁰

NYHSSU leaders and members also vocalized their avid support of the African American community in the union’s underground newspaper, *The New York High School Free Press*, the first printing of which was released to teens across New York City in October, 1968. Through a variety of student-penned articles, NYHSSU members – black and white – repeatedly challenged the legitimacy of the UFT strike, and encouraged their peers to connect with sympathetic faculty to “open” closed high schools throughout the

⁴¹⁰ Stephen Sbarge, “Ira You’ll Get Into Trouble,” Newsreel, 1970, DVD; Dana Driskell, “N.Y.C. H.S. Student Union Offensive,” *New York High School Free Press* (Nov. 11-December 20, 1968), Pg. 3; Interview with Dana Driskell by Neil P. Buffett, (29 December, 2008); Interview with Howard Swerdloff by Neil P. Buffett, (18 September, 2008).

city, and to hold liberation classes in spite of the UFT.⁴¹¹ This same encouragement was also given in person, as NYHSSU leaders visited schools throughout the city with the same proposal. In *Ira, You'll Get Into Trouble*, student activist Bruce Trigg is caught on film speaking with teens at Thomas Jefferson High School.

We're part of an organization, the High School Student Union, which has members in every school in the city, who are organizing for locals. All over the city, high school union chapters are opening up their schools and the schools are open, just like this, all over the city today in Queens, Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and people aren't opening up the schools because they think school is a great thing and because they think its worthwhile. They're opening up to oppose the teachers' strike which they think really stinks.⁴¹²

Franklin K. Lane was no different. Indeed, as the majority of the school's 306 faculty members picketed outside, roughly twenty-five rogue, and in some instances, anti-UFT instructors and about two hundred Lane students held impromptu class meetings inside, a fact that certainly drew the ire of those on the picket-line.⁴¹³

These students and their contemporaries in the NYHSSU did much more, however, then simply oppose the UFT and advocate for the "liberation" of city high schools; they also openly supported and defended the one man that the UFT and its membership abhorred - their autumn nemesis, Rhody McCoy. In its third issue of the New York High School Free Press, the city-wide student union printed its full length, in-person interview with the beleaguered Ocean Hill-Brownsville District Superintendent. Conducted by student union co-founder Howard Swerloff and his colleague Christina

⁴¹¹ See Dana Driskell, "UFT vs. Blacks," *New York High School Free Press*, no.1, (9-22 October, 1968), Pg. 3, 9; Jon Gottlieb, "Seward: Open Your School," *New York High School Free Press*, No.2, (Halloween Edition), Pg 3; Larry Siegel and Paul Steiner, "Bronx High School of Science," *New York High School Free Press*, No.2, (Halloween Edition), Pg 3; 8; Graham, 70-74; See also Robert Rossner, "The Year Without an Autumn: Portrait of a School in Crisis," (New York: Richard W. Baron, 1969); Donald Reeves, *Notes of a Processed Brother* (New York: Pantheon, 1971), 74-78.

⁴¹² Sbarge, *Ira, You'll Get Into Trouble*, 1970.

⁴¹³ Ira Schwartz et al, "F**K Lane," *New York High School Free Press* (February-March, 1969) Issue 6, Page 5.

Zompakos at Junior High School # 271 in mid-November, the interview offered teenaged readers an, arguably, unbiased glimpse of, as the authors titled the piece, *The Real McCoy*. Asked to define his definition of community control, McCoy's offering, interestingly enough lacked any mention of race or ethnicity, two issues which had, in fact, come to define community control of schools as well as the Ocean Hill-Brownsville crisis.

Basically, [community control means] that the policy making function is right on the site. That's the simplest answer I can give you. If your relative who lives in Tennessee is making decisions for you here in New York, there's something wrong. He can have the best interests at heart but it's just no good. You gotta be able to make decisions that affect your life right on the site. I wouldn't want the superintendent of schools to make decisions for me here running this operation.⁴¹⁴

With this colorblind explanation, McCoy's rationale for transferring nineteen, white members of his teaching staff, in spite of UFT and Board of Education policy, becomes abundantly clear and, quite arguably, more than justifiable. While community control of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district was clearly linked to the racial and ethnic composition of the communities it served, as a principle and as an educational philosophy, community control (and what it would mean if maintained) was more a geographic reality than a racial reality. In essence, since Ocean Hill-Brownsville served a primarily African American populace, community control of its schools became, by default, intrinsically-linked to the race of the pupils and families within its borders. Therefore, as a principle and as an educational philosophy, community control of schools was, in fact, much more about who wielded educational power on the local level, rather

⁴¹⁴ Christina Zompakos and Howard Swerdloff, "The Real McCoy," *New York High School Free Press*, No.3, (20 November-11 December, 1968), Pg. 6.

than a referendum on racial relations in New York City – even though white racism had become a precipitating factor in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.⁴¹⁵

As Swerdloff and Zompakos discovered on their tour of J.H.S 271, McCoy *had* maintained an integrated teaching staff throughout the fall of 1968. Rather than finding “chaos and anarchy in the halls,” “extremists running the school” or “teachers of race-hatred and black supremacy,” as had been alleged by the UFT, the two noted how, upon their arrival, they were both “greeted by sincere, friendly teachers and smiling students.” More importantly, the two authors witnessed cordial and professional relations among the school’s integrated faculty and staff. They explained.

In the teacher’s cafeteria white and black teachers sat together discussing the trials and rewards of the school day. “Kids here don’t dislike white teachers – they dislike bad white teachers – teachers that don’t give a damn, and that’s about all we had here until this year,” a white teachers explained over a bowl of jello.⁴¹⁶

Interestingly enough, however, as the unnamed teacher above alluded, relations among the teaching staff as well as between black students and white faculty, had not always been as positive as they had become.

In a 2009 interview, former J.H.S 271 alumni and Franklin K. Lane activist, Richard Byrd, noted the inherent racism and bigotry he experienced at the hands of his junior high school educators in the year just prior to the strike. Byrd recalled one instructor’s attitude most vividly, citing the eighth grade Social Studies teacher’s negative feelings towards the Brownsville neighborhood as well as alleged inappropriate treatment

⁴¹⁵ For example, see Rhody McCoy, “The Year of the Dragon,” in Maurice R. Berube and Marilyn Gittell, eds., *Confrontation at Ocean Hill-Brownsville: The New York School Strikes of 1968* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 52-63. While race is mentioned, due to its obvious relevance to Ocean Hill-Brownsville, McCoy also places race aside and focuses primarily upon community control as a principle and educational philosophy.

⁴¹⁶ Zompakos and Swerdloff, *The Real McCoy*, Pg. 6; For more on J.H.S.271, see Charles S. Isaacs, “A J.H.S 271 Teacher Tells It Like He Sees It,” in Berube and Gittell, eds., 192-205; Isaacs’ piece can also be found in the *New York Times* (24 November, 1968), SM52.

of female students. As Byrd recalled, the teacher's "mantra was 'look where you live,' you know, at how depressed our community was, accepting that we were nothing." At the same time, the teacher only provided his students a "Eurocentric" portrayal of American History, one in which "slavery was glossed over" and the myriad contributions of African Americans or other non-white minorities were almost entirely disregarded. He explained.

So, he just pretty much [said]: "African Americans came over here as slaves, 1863, boom, boom, boom that was it. You know...even when we went over the whole Kansas-Nebraska Act and he just said it was a dispute between Kansas and Nebraska when they joined the Union because one was pro-slavery. He didn't go into depth about John Brown's role in that and how this was a prelude to Harpers' Ferry and the Civil War. Of course he said nothing about Frederick Douglass...Henry Box Brown, William and Ellen Craft...in other words, not even Nat Turner, you know, one of the more famous slave revolts was spoke about, which would have shown how people, you know, as any people the world over worked to resist against their oppression. Or Henry Box Brown who mailed himself in a box to freedom.

In addition to these instances of dismissal, bias and misrepresentation, Byrd also noted his teachers' sometimes physical, although typically minor, mistreatment of the African American students in their care. Ultimately, in the fall of 1968, like many of his J.H.S. 271 classmates, Byrd carried these foundational memories with him to Franklin K. Lane, where at they fueled the social and political activism that would evolve in the wake of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers' Strike.⁴¹⁷

**"Fuck Your 45 Minutes,"
Leslie Campbell, and the African American Student Association**

Ironically, when the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Teachers' Strike came to a close on November 19, 1968, and 54,000 of the city's 57,000 teachers agreed to once again take the helm of their classrooms, high school students across New York City took to the streets for a strike of their own. Much to the chagrin of these students, as well as to the

⁴¹⁷ Interview with Richard Byrd by Neil P. Buffett, (6 April, 2009).

African American community they had enthusiastically supported, the dream of community control of city schools was, for all intents and purposes, extinguished when UFT leadership, New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay, and State Education Commissioner, James Allen agreed to a negotiated settlement. While the Allen-sponsored proposal *did* call for the retention of Rhody McCoy as the Ocean Hill-Brownsville unit administrator, the commissioner's settlement removed nearly every other semblance of community control from the embattled district. In addition to replacing the locally elected school board with an "Allen-appointed state trustee...[and] a three man supervisory committee [that] would be empowered to conduct hearings and mete out punishment, including suspensions, dismissals, and school closings," the plan also provided UFT president, Albert Shanker "veto power over the composition of this committee." In theory, this settlement did not disband the locally elected – community control – Board of Education; rather, the plan only "suspended" its members until the "district returned to normal operations" at which time "the trustee would step aside and reinstate the board." In practice, however, this settlement marked the symbolic end to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control experiment. By July 1970, due to New York State legislation on decentralization and district rezoning, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, as a school district, was no more.⁴¹⁸

Despite the UFT's decision to end the strike, however, teenaged activists – both black *and* white – from high schools across the New York City, including Franklin K. Lane, remained deeply incensed at where the agreed upon settlement left not only community control advocates, but where it left the teenagers themselves – in relation to their roles as students as well as their roles as activists. Interestingly enough, members of

⁴¹⁸ Podair, 115, 137-138, 142-146; Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 17;

the New York High School Student Union argued, after the fact, that student representatives should have been invited to participate in strike negotiations as equal contributors. This belief became even more prevalent among students as news of the UFT and the Central Board of Education's "make-up time" arrangement began to spread throughout the city.⁴¹⁹

In a move designed to earn its members retroactive income for the time lost during the strike, as well as to "provide make-up instruction" for students, UFT representatives successfully negotiated an agreement that not only lengthened the 1968-1969 school year by nine days, but also lengthened each school day by approximately forty to forty-five minutes.⁴²⁰ As one can imagine, students were vehemently opposed to this agreement, regardless of either one of the aforementioned rationalizations. Rather than simply comply with the agreed upon arrangement, student groups, including the NYHSSU and the African American Student Association, coordinated their efforts to publicly condemn and protest against the extra 45 minutes. By the time school opened that November, both student-led organizations had established chapters at Franklin K. Lane and had recruited varied memberships.

Unlike the NYHSSU which was initially founded as a city-wide student organization with chapters in high schools throughout all five boroughs, the African American Student Association (ASA) had been founded, in late 1966, as a primarily Brooklyn-based teen organization. According to former ASA recruiter, Richard Byrd, the group's organizers found their inspiration by the example set by the city's African

⁴¹⁹ See Robert Walsh and Judson Hand Article (title unavailable), *Daily News* (23 November, 1968), found in the Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn, New York, Franklin K. Lane High School Newspaper Clipping Folder.

⁴²⁰ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 18.

American Teachers' Association (ATA), which had been founded in 1964 by famed educator and activist Leslie Campbell (now Jitu Weusi) and ATA Chairperson, Albert Vann.⁴²¹ In his memoir on Lane, Saltzman also links the school's ASA chapter with the 4,000 member ATA, readily implying that the student organization was nothing more than a tool of the teachers' association, and Campbell – himself a Lane alumni - its chief motivator. Noting the Social Studies teacher's "separatist" philosophy and his support of "black self-determination," Saltzman argued that, by late 1968, Campbell had become "the idol of frustrated youths in whose minds was fed a hodgepodge of Maoist dogma, Black Panther ideology, and all the catchy slogans about American imperialism, white slave-driving businessmen, and the genocide that the government [was] carrying forth against the black people of America."⁴²² In his estimation then, naïve as it may seem now, black student activism at Franklin K. Lane, and for that matter, throughout Brooklyn, would have been less entrenched had it not been for Leslie Campbell and the ATA.

As Saltzman's account implies, however, Campbell had, by the fall of 1968, become one of the most controversial figures in New York City's educational system, having routinely defied, what he often argued were, discriminatory Board of Education policies on school curriculum and the state of integrated education in New York City.⁴²³ As a young man, Campbell had himself experienced New York City's segregated school patterns, having been one of only nineteen black students to attend Brooklyn Technical

⁴²¹ Byrd interview; "Jitu Weusi: Passionate Community Activist," *Our Time Press* (16 November, 2006), Pg. 2, 16. This typed reproduction of this article can also be found on the H-Net Discussion Networks, re-titled "Jitu Weusi: Warrior Educator, Interview Part One, <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-AfroAm&month=0611&week=c&msg=IJNEcgfoRpFRfDHjPcKKSQ&user=&pw=>, (12 November, 2009); Podair, 41.

⁴²² Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 17-18; See also Podair, 96-97.

⁴²³ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 21.

High School – a school of six thousand – before transferring to Franklin K. Lane in his junior year.⁴²⁴ While still in the minority at Lane, Campbell and his African American peers did represent roughly twenty percent of the school population, a percentage which remained constant throughout the 1950s.⁴²⁵ Just as it would be in the following decade, Lane in the 1950s was geographically located in the primarily white, European-American neighborhoods of Woodhaven and Cypress Hills – leading to periodic clashes between white and black students.⁴²⁶ While such experiences certainly marked Campbell’s adolescent years, his enrollment at Virginia Union University in Richmond would bring him face to face with the victims of a more extreme form of abject racism. In a 2006 interview with Our Time Press, Campbell, by this point known as Jitu Weusi, noted how he “felt the sting of the separate bathrooms, going through the back door to the colored cafeteria,” prompting him to return home after only six weeks. With his southern experience behind him, Campbell enrolled at Long Island University and chose History as his major and Education as a minor. Once finished with his studies, Campbell was granted his first teaching post at J.H.S. 35 in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn.⁴²⁷

Almost immediately, Campbell became what he described as, a “political radical,” a role which he would willingly maintain throughout the 1960s, particularly

⁴²⁴ Interview with Leslie Campbell/Jitu Weusi by Neil P. Buffett, (16 November, 2009); Olufunmilayo Gittens, “Baba Jitu Weusi,” from Assata Shakur Forums, <http://assatashakur.org/forum/shoulders-our-freedom-fighters/17691-baba-jitu-weusi.html>, (12 November, 2009).

⁴²⁵ “School Census, October 31, 1958-October 31, 1966, Incl.” found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; “Race Issue Denied In School Episode,” *New York Times* (26 February, 1951), 23.

⁴²⁶ Schwartz interview; Byrd interview; Campbell/Weusi interview; “1,200 in High School Riot in Brooklyn,” *New York Times* (16 January, 1951), 33; “16 in Teen-Age Gang Seized in Brooklyn,” *New York Times* (10 October 1958), 11.

⁴²⁷ “Jitu Weusi: Passionate Community Activist;” Gittens, “Baba Jitu Weusi;” Campbell/Weusi interview.

throughout his tenure in the African American Teachers' Association. As he noted in 2006, in addition to attending the 1963 March on Washington, the young teacher enthusiastically attended any community activist meeting he could find, including those held by the Brooklyn chapter of CORE, the Black Panthers, and the local NAACP. Moreover, he "got a chance to see how one of these organizations really worked," having volunteered with the Brooklyn Chapter of CORE in the summer of 1966. Having learned much from this experience, Campbell brought fresh organizing ideas back to his colleagues in the ATA, many of which would prove fruitful in the group's future battles against the city's Eurocentric Social Studies curriculum, and in promotion of more black and Hispanic teachers and administrators.⁴²⁸

Although, despite these varied experiences, Campbell's activities did not receive much popular press coverage until the beginning of 1967-1968 school year, when a quote from his ATA newsletter article "The Black Teacher and Black Power" was published in the *New York Times* in the midst of the UFT's September 1967 two week strike (discussed in Chapter Four). Written from the increasingly popular Black Nationalist perspective, Campbell's article challenged his black colleagues to "seek teaching positions in the black community...[to] protect black children against educational injustices and systematic genocide." To do this, ATA Chairperson Albert Vann explained, the organization was based upon on three guiding principles: "self-control, self-determination, and self-defense" the last of which he translated as "a superior education system in the black community for survival."⁴²⁹ For Leslie Campbell, these

⁴²⁸ "Jitu Weusi: Passionate Community Activist," Gittens, "Baba Jitu Weusi," Campbell/Weusi interview.

⁴²⁹ C. Gerald Fraser, "Negro Teachers Define Their Stand," *New York Times* (21 September, 1967), 52.

three principles would guide his actions throughout his early years as an educator and beyond.

Just six months after his *Forum* article was quoted in the *New York Times*, Campbell's politics would once again be spotlighted in the daily news, when, against the wishes of Superintendent of Schools, Bernard E. Donovan, he accompanied forty eighth grade J.H.S. 35 students to a memorial for slain Civil Rights leader Malcolm X. Scheduled for the third anniversary of the February 21, 1965 assassination, the proposed I.S. 201 program had been officially "barred" from taking place on school grounds or during school hours, since the event could possibly "disrupt the educational activities of the school." Believing the memorial to be educationally relevant to students, Campbell, the ATA, and the ASA – two of the many co-sponsoring parties – disagreed, promising that "the program will go on as scheduled." With roughly six hundred African American students and teachers in attendance, many of whom were members of the ATA and ASA, local Civil Rights and Black Power activists, which included famed writer LeRoi Jones and Herman B. Ferguson, discussed, in, allegedly, bleak and separatist language, U.S. race relations, racially-motivated violence and discrimination, as well as self-defense for the black community. One speaker reportedly urged black students to "obtain weapons for 'self-defense' against whites and to practice using them so that when 'hunting season' came, they would be ready."⁴³⁰ While such comments and their meaning were surely taken out of context, and quite possibly misrepresented, their impact upon the written page cannot be denied. Unlike in Malverne and Bellport, where Civil Rights

⁴³⁰ Leonard Buder, "Program Honoring Malcolm X In East Harlem School Barred," *New York Times* (17 February, 1968), 18; Leonard Buder, "Negroes Urged at I.S. 201 to Arm for 'Self-Defense,'" *New York Times* (22 February, 1968), 1; Leonard Buder, "Control I.S. 201, Donovan is Told," *New York Times* (23 February, 1968), 1; Leonard Buder, "Police Guarding I.S. 201 Principal," *New York Times* (24 February, 1968), 1.

activism was, throughout the 1960s, only peripherally inspired by a Black Power, Black Nationalist ethos, Civil Rights in New York City by early 1968 had become, or would be perceived by the public as having become, much more militant and separatist than the integrationist ethos of Martin Luther King Jr. and the movement's southern wing. Throughout this period, Leslie Campbell and the African American Teachers Association's public image did little to assuage this perception.

Within days of the February 21 event, Campbell was summarily relieved of his students and his classroom to face an official inquiry into his actions, noted in the press as nothing less than "insubordination and unbecoming conduct." With his teaching career on the line, however, Campbell did not have to look very far for support. While school officials publicly excoriated him both privately and publicly, members of the African American community stood steadfast in their support of the teacher's "disobedience of orders."⁴³¹ To exemplify this support, roughly two hundred junior and high school students, many of them members of the ASA, picketed outside Campbell's March 5th disciplinary hearing, carrying signs with slogans including "'Don't Fire Mr. Campbell,' 'Down with White Power,' 'Stop White Racism in Our Schools,' and 'Black Principals and Black Teachers for Black Children.'" While it is unclear if such community and student support swayed school board officials' decision, Campbell's teaching position was ultimately spared.⁴³² That did not mean, however, that the young teacher escaped judgment unscathed. For his part in defying the superintendent's directive, school board

⁴³¹ Leonard Buder, "Teacher is Shifted for Taking Pupils to Anti-White Rally at I.S. 201," *New York Times* (27 February, 1968), 32.

⁴³² Leonard Buder, "Negroes Protest At School Inquiry," *New York Times* (6 March, 1968), 54L.

officials involuntarily transferred Campbell from J.H.S 35 to J.H.S 271.⁴³³ Ironically, this punishment would place him in a school squarely in the middle of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the eventual “ground zero” of the 1968 UFT strike against community control. More importantly, this new assignment would place the activist educator in direct contact with students who would, after eighth grade graduation, move on to Franklin K. Lane.

* * *

Just as Harold Saltzman surmised, the African American Student Association was intrinsically linked to Leslie Campbell and, by extension, the ATA, having, in fact, been the latter’s brainchild. In a 2009 interview, the famed teacher, who also served as the student group’s ATA-designated advisor, explained that the African American Teachers’ Association intentionally supported the creation of the ASA, especially after students expressed an interest in organizing. At its inception, the newly established ASA mirrored its parent organization, in that, as Campbell recalled, “it was organized external to the schools,” as a borough-based organization with “a lot of activities outside of the schools.” He continued.

But by 1968, with Ocean Hill or what not, then came internal organizations in the schools and the students met a lot of resistance to their organizing in the schools. You know, like, ‘can we have an African American Club?’ ‘No! You can’t have an African American Club.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Well, because we don’t have an advisor.’ Okay, we’re going to find an advisor.’ And in some cases they had to find like a teacher’s aide or something to be their advisor because there were no black teachers in their high school. So they met resistance at first, but they persisted and after a while they became very involved with the schools.

Franklin K. Lane High School was no different. Like its sister high schools throughout Brooklyn, Lane’s African American students organized their own branch of the ASA,

⁴³³ Leonard Buder, “Teacher Who Took His Class to I.S. 201 Program Loses License,” *New York Times* (13 March, 1968), 37.

and, as Campbell admitted, it would become a “very, very militant” chapter from the fall of 1968 onward.⁴³⁴

Almost immediately following the UFT’s decision to discontinue its autumn strike, Lane’s student body, both black *and* white, ASA *and* NYHSSU alike, joined their teenaged peers from across New York City in opposition to the Board of Education’s forty-five minute extension of the school day. On Wednesday, November 27th, Lane students held their first major anti-UFT demonstration since the school had reopened the previous Monday. In his memoir, Harold Saltzman explained his interpretation of the day’s events.

Student demonstrators had been roaming the city streets all week, going from school to school, upsetting the educational tone and calling on students to join with them in protesting the make-up time which they felt was discriminatory against them. At 3:00 P.M., after most of the early session students and teachers had left for the day, a marauding band of about 150 black youths, many wielding knives, sticks, and chains, invaded the school. Several teachers were set upon when they tried to contain small groups of outsiders who went on a rampage all over the building. Steve Margolis, an assistant dean, attempting to aid a teacher being assaulted was knocked to the floor, his glasses broken, his face lacerated and jacket torn to shreds directly in front of the principal’s office.⁴³⁵

Interestingly enough, while demonstrations such as this did inevitably occur in many city high schools during this period, this particular event at Lane was not reported in local newspapers in the way in which Frank Siracusa’s burning would be reported just two months later. More importantly, Saltzman’s account of November 27th and the “forty-five minute strikes” in general unfairly portrays the student demonstration as racially-motivated and quite contrary to its proper context: as a racially-unifying, citywide high school student protest experience.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Leslie Campbell/Jitu Weusi by Neil P. Buffett, (16 November, 2009).

⁴³⁵ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 19.

As Board of Education officials discovered on that Friday, one day after Thanksgiving – a required school day, as per the UFT-Board of Education agreement – high school students from across New York City were united in their anti-UFT sentiments, regardless of their race. While a small group of students picketed outside Franklin K. Lane chanting ““Hell no, we won’t go,”” a larger group of roughly fifteen hundred teens boycotted their schools for the day and chose instead to demonstrate at the United Nations Plaza in Manhattan. Organized by a conglomeration of student leaders from, among others, the ASA and the NYHSSU – known collectively as the Citywide Student Strike Committee – this “Black Friday” boycott decreased the city’s school attendance by as much as thirty-five percent, or 350,000 of the reportedly one million New York City school children. Voicing their displeasure with the UFT strike’s resolution as well as the lack of student rights in general, teenaged demonstrators at the U.N. carried signs proclaiming ‘No student power, no peace,’ ‘We demand that student reps be on all school boards,’ and ‘Off with the 45 minutes, on with the vacations.’”⁴³⁶ Similar incidents took place in the days and weeks which followed, as students – both black *and* white – absconded from class and picketed schools throughout all five boroughs, including Franklin K. Lane, sometimes leading to incidents of violence as well as to student arrests.⁴³⁷

Despite the occasional act of violence, however, these students’ collective and independent activities can and should be acknowledged as political activism – not random acts of teenaged illegality. In an attempt to publicly stress this very point and thus

⁴³⁶ Leonard Buder, “35% of Students Boycott Schools,” *New York Times* (30 November, 1968), 1, 34; Hugh Wyatt and Dennis Eskow, “Third of Pupils Play Hooky; Rallies Protest Extra Days,” *Daily News* (30 November, 1968).

⁴³⁷ Peter Kihss, “Student Bands Disrupt at Least 12 City Schools,” *New York Times* (3 December, 1968), 1, 41.

rationalize the students' citywide strike activities, NYHSSU co-founder, Robert Newton appeared on News Anchor Roger Grimsby's 11pm Eyewitness News Report in early December of 1968. With a prepared statement in hand, Newton offered the following position.

The growing demonstrations and acts of violence seen by the city in the past weeks were made necessary by the immoral agreement signed by the UFT and the Board of Education. The New York City High School Student Union and the Citywide Student Strike Committee consider this agreement unfair and detrimental to the success of the New York City educational system. Such demonstrations will continue to be held until the city realizes that there are more important figures involved than the UFT. In the past, all decisions have been made by a few bureaucrats. High school students are expected to obey like robots. Therefore, as of now, we're taking a strong stand on this issue. In the future, the Board of Education will have to deal with the students as they deal with the teachers in times of crisis.⁴³⁸

In a New York High School Free Press article titled "Fuck Your 45 Minutes," Newton and several of his NYHSSU peers reinforced this position, arguing that the UFT-Board of Education settlement, which had "castrate[d] the black communities that had been running good schools without racist UFT teachers" was "Bullshit!" Moreover, they explained, "when [UFT and Board officials] bypassed us they threw the students and the black communities into a pitched battle to take back the schools...[and created] an alliance that has made community control and student power a united front." Offering a much different perspective than the one provided by Saltzman, Newton and his peers understood the November-December school confrontations as "New York's first politically-oriented and interracial riot."⁴³⁹ Interestingly enough, however, while many NYC schools would begin 1969 with these divisive issues left unresolved, Franklin K.

⁴³⁸ Sbargo, *Ira, You'll Get Into Trouble*, 1970.

⁴³⁹ Robert Newton et al, "Fuck Your 45 Minutes," *New York High School Free Press* (December-January, 1969), 3, 12 found in Underground Newspaper Collection, microfilm collection, Frank Melville Jr. Library, Stony Brook University.

Lane would become the central battleground upon which the casualties and victors of Ocean Hill-Brownsville would continue to clash.

Tensions, Transfers and Civil Rights Activism at Franklin K. Lane

By the time Frank Siracusa was burned and beaten by students on January 20, 1969, race relations at Franklin K. Lane had soured and thus intensified to such a degree that physical violence, as a manifestation of political struggle, had long since become the likely, if not inevitable, outcome of the events of the previous year. Many of Lane's white teaching staff had returned to school on November 25th having spent nearly ten weeks demonstrating *against* the African American community and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental school district. Similarly, Lane's African American student population had spent most of their autumn counter-protesting *against* the UFT, opening up schools in the black community, and echoing their parents' and black teachers' demands for black self-determination. As white teachers and minority students finally walked through the doors of Franklin K. Lane to begin the academic year, both parties were keenly aware of the racial, ethnic, and philosophical chasms that had developed between them.⁴⁴⁰ With attendance required of both students *and* teachers, such pent-up and unresolved hostility was bound to escalate to violence, regardless of its political or social intent.

In his role as UFT Chapter Chairman, Harold Saltzman did little, if anything, to assuage the increasing racial tensions, and, unbeknownst to him or not, routinely brought them to the fore in his attempts to restore, what he would have defined as, order. From his vantage point, students were students – they were not adults, they were not members of

⁴⁴⁰ See Ira Schwartz et al, "F**K Lane," *New York High School Free Press* (February-March, 1969) Issue 6, Page 5; Martin Bloch et al, "Statement Prepared by the Committee of Concern Teachers: A History of the Crisis," (22 January, 1969).

the voting populace, and they were not political or social activists. Consequently, when students returned to Lane having developed a political consciousness and having organized, Saltzman, as well as many of his colleagues, viewed the manifestation of this political awakening as little more than illicit insubordination and violent illegality. Moreover, being that Saltzman, and the UFT in general, had misinterpreted and philosophically-disagreed with the African American community throughout the Ocean Hill-Brownsville crisis, it stands to reason that they would continue to misinterpret and disagree with similar calls for self-determination from their black students. The fact that these “new” activists were also minors complicated the matter even further, as Saltzman and his colleagues wielded power in what both parties recognized as an unequal power relationship.

As one former faculty member noted, in 2009, the “kids were angry” and “Harold Saltzman and a number of teachers of that conservative persuasion believed that kids should not be engaging in the kinds of political activity that kids were engaging in.” He concluded, however, that “they were also witnessing a student behavior for which they had nothing to really help them understand it.”⁴⁴¹ Just like in Malverne and Bellport, few, if any, of Lane’s tenured faculty members had previously encountered politically-active and organized teenagers, having, throughout their earlier careers, worked with much more compliant and less challenging pupils. Despite this similarity with their Long Island contemporaries, however, faculty members at Franklin K. Lane took a much more direct, less sympathetic, and in many ways, insidious approach to stifling their students’ activism. Ironically, the techniques that Lane’s faculty and administrators introduced to quell student protest activity only strengthened the very student movements they hoped to

⁴⁴¹ Interview with former Franklin K. Lane Faculty Member by Neil P. Buffett, (30 April, 2009).

squelch. On January 14, 1969, black students learned just how far school officials were willing to go.

In a New York Times article titled, *Union Asks School to Shift Negroes*, Saltzman, speaking on behalf of his UFT constituents, called upon the Board of Education to involuntarily transfer 1,100 African American students out of Lane and into other schools throughout Brooklyn to ensure a 50/50 racial balance. To justify, what he would later claim was, his “first costly blunder of the campaign,” Saltzman noted increasing levels of student violence, “including a ‘rash of extortion, vandalism, larceny and numerous acts against other students.’” In the January 10th edition of the same paper, Saltzman had revealed his belief that black students were in a “conspiracy” in which Lane had become “a target school for a black take-over.”⁴⁴² Despite the clear overreaction that such a statement implied, Lane had certainly witnessed increasing bouts of high school student activism from late November onward.

For example, when ATA member and Lane alumnus, Leslie Campbell toured the school on December 11, black students, “as if it had all been planned in advance...headed for the exits...[in] a mass exodus...and in a matter of minutes most classrooms had only a fraction of the register actually present.” Rather than acknowledge the students’ excitement over Campbell’s presence or recognize this event as an example of defiant political protest, Saltzman reduced these students’ activities to the “demonic influence wielded by Leslie Campbell over Lane’s black students.”⁴⁴³ Saltzman included similar sentiments in his official letter of complaint which he posted upon the bulletin board in

⁴⁴² “Union Asks School to Shift Negroes,” *New York Times* (14 January, 1969), 10; Maurice Carroll, “Teachers Demand Police Patrol Inside a School,” *New York Times* (10 January, 1969), 43; Thomas F. Brady, “Lane School Plea Disowned by UFT,” *New York Times* (15 January 1969), 30; Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 35.

⁴⁴³ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 22.

the teacher's cafeteria. In addition to noting Campbell's controversial political tactics and anti-UFT record, Saltzman also admonished school administrators' decision to allow the beleaguered alumnus access to the school building.⁴⁴⁴ Having somehow discovered Saltzman's posted letter, members of Lane's ASA/Black Coalition quickly drew up their own counter-argument, noting that "Leslie Campbell and Rap Brown are the type of people this faculty needs to meet the needs of the black students." Moreover, they argued, "the white militant reaction to Leslie [was] proof positive that they do not give a damn about black kids." Addressing their message to "all you white racist Jewish pigs," Lane's black student population had certainly been agitated by Saltzman's clear overreaction and dramatic analysis of the day's events.⁴⁴⁵

Occasional acts of in-school vandalism and violence, however, also took place throughout December of 1968 and early January of 1969. In *Race War in High School*, Saltzman notes that "by mid-December...the deterioration [of Lane] was complete...as gangs of black youths, many wearing berets and insignia of the Panthers roamed the halls, ringing fire alarms, breaking windows, setting fires, and assaulting any white youth who dared go into a lavatory...that was not under the supervision of an adult."⁴⁴⁶ In response to such claims, white student activist and Lane alumnus, Ira Schwartz noted much more cordial race relations, even with random student demonstrations and occasional acts of in-school violence. According to Schwartz, who attended Lane from 1966 to 1970, "there weren't race riots in the late sixties, there were race riots in the late

⁴⁴⁴ Letter to Peter A. Todaro from Harold Saltzman, (11 December, 1968), found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁴⁴⁵ The Black Coalition, F.K. Lane High School, "To All You White Racist Jewish Pigs" Flier, (Circa, December, 1968), found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 58; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁴⁴⁶ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 23.

fifties,” noting further that “we didn’t have fights over race in the sixties, in the late sixties.” Schwartz did, however, note the level of animosity faced by Lane’s black student population during this time period. Indeed, as would become clearly evident in the weeks and months following January 20th, “community residents didn’t like the idea that the school kids came from as far away as East New York, which at the time was primarily non-white.”⁴⁴⁷ As Saltzman’s January 10th and 14th press releases indicate, he “didn’t like the idea” much either.

Almost immediately, UFT President Albert Shanker distanced himself, as well as the organization he administered, from Saltzman’s public statements, reportedly stating in a telegraphed response that the teachers’ union “cannot support any call, as reported in the press today, for immediate transfer of 1,100 black students.”⁴⁴⁸ Nevertheless, despite Shanker’s disapproval, African American students would, within a matter of weeks, be transferred and/or eliminated from the rolls at Franklin K. Lane. While Saltzman’s public request for the 1,100 transfers had more than likely prompted an increased level of student violence culminating with the January 20th attack on Frank Siracusa, this and other incidents of violence added a sense of legitimacy and urgency to Saltzman’s initial appeal. Indeed, on January 22nd, school administrators, Board of Education officials, and Mayor John Lindsay’s office approved a plan to involuntarily drop, expel or transfer roughly 650 of Lane’s African American and Latino students. Many of these students, as Saltzman would later explain, were either “truants who were over the age of seventeen,” students who were known as “ghosts’ ... who were officially on the school register but had disappeared,” and “drop-ins’ ... who would come to school for a few days and then

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Ira Schwartz by Neil P. Buffett, (11-12 March, 2009);

⁴⁴⁸ Brady, “Lane School Plea Disowned by UFT,” *New York Times*.

stay out for weeks, sometimes even months, at a time.” The dismissal of this latter group seemed the most pertinent, since these students, the teacher alleged, only reported to school for the purposes of joining student protests or creating “turmoil” at their leisure. With such students deleted from the registry and banned from the premises, school order could thus be maintained with a student population of 4,350 rather than 5,000.⁴⁴⁹

Although these dismissals would later be reversed, actions such as these only further alienated Lane’s Black and Hispanic student population, a group that, by the beginning of 1969, already felt out of place and wholly unwanted by white teachers and the local white community.⁴⁵⁰ In its November 1969 report on race relations at Lane, researchers from the Metropolitan Applied Research Center (M.A.R.C) noted the significance that each played as both a cause and a consequence of school violence, student unrest, and teen activism.

Racial unrest has been clearly shown...to have been aroused by an increasingly hostile white community, by UFT chapter leadership with close connections to an anti-black extremist community group, and by weak school administration. Black and Puerto Rican students have been flagrantly discriminated against by the police, by certain teachers and by certain school administrators. They have been harassed in the school and on the streets, subject to suspensions, arrests and injuries.

“The thrust of the hostile approach,” M.A.R.C. officials explained, was “directed toward transforming the school – now and increasingly, predominantly Black and Puerto Rican –

⁴⁴⁹ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 45, 63; Leonard Buder, “Clark Calls Lane’s Ouster of 700 A Violation of Students’ Rights,” *New York Times* (20 March, 1969), 42; Interview with Ira Glasser by Neil P. Buffett, 16 February, 2009).

⁴⁵⁰ Will Lissner, “City Concedes Error On Student Ouster,” *New York Times* (26 April, 1969), 1; Leonard Buder, “Clark Calls Lane’s Ouster of 700 A Violation of Students’ Rights,” *New York Times* (20 March, 1969), 42; Interview with Ira Glasser by Neil P. Buffett, 16 February, 2009); “Students’ Ouster to Go to U.S. Court,” *New York Times* (23 March, 1969), 35; “Student Dismissals Questioned by Clark,” *New York Times* (18 April, 1969), 36.

into a white majority school.”⁴⁵¹ In 2009, Michael Long, former member and founder of the Woodhaven-Cypress Hills Civic Association, inadvertently echoed M.A.R.C’s 1969 précis. Noting that while the organization had not been formed “to fight black activism,” its founders *had* organized to “ultimately have the school redesigned” in an attempt to halt white flight from Franklin K. Lane. To this end, Long and the civic association, along with Harold Saltzman and local UFT members, campaigned for school district rezoning throughout 1969 and beyond.⁴⁵² Knowing this, members of Lane’s African American Student Association began a campaign of their own.

* * *

Roughly one week after the Siracusa burning and two weeks after New York City Police Officers were stationed in the school, Franklin K. Lane administrators, faculty and staff met on January 28th to discuss race in what was rapidly becoming a divided high school.⁴⁵³ In what proved to be a fruitful and open dialogue which acknowledged the inherent racisms that plagued the school as well as the local community, black and white teachers listened as colleagues offered both conservative and liberal assessments of the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to Lane’s racial polarization. As one white teacher pointed out, however, only two of three parties were present for the discussion, as students had not been invited to participate in the workshop. Moreover, the same teacher

⁴⁵¹ The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, “Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Précis, found in the Papers of Ira Glasser, (Former) Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, accessed at the Offices of the New York Civil Liberties Union, New York, NY.

⁴⁵² Interview with Michael Long by Neil P. Buffett, (2 June, 2009); See Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, Chapter 4.

⁴⁵³ Carroll, “Teachers Demand Police Patrol Inside a School,” *New York Times* (10 January, 1969); Robert Walsh and Judson Hand, “Assign Police to B’klyn School,” *Daily News* (11 January, 1969); Robert Walsh, “Teachers Join Police on Patrol,” *Daily News* (14 January, 1969); George Todd, “‘Lane HS Now Like Prison,’ Says Coed: Trouble at Lane HS Brings Cop Patrol,” *Amsterdam News* (18 January, 1969).

noted the philosophical chasm that years of discrimination had created between student and teacher. “Mr. U,” as he is noted in the meeting minutes, explained.

“There has been a rapid social change. A generation gap exists between most students and teachers... This is a white society; it is a white problem. Times have changed from the integrationist period of the early ‘60s. Now there is a lack of good faith: students lack good faith in teachers. Black teachers frequently command more listening power with black students than do white teachers. And our students are not unique. Students accept less now; they question things more and more, demand more. It’s queer that there are no students here. It takes more and greater visible signs from us for blacks to accept us as concerned human beings. We should openly demonstrate more faith in students; for example by giving them more power in making school policy.

Although, not all instructors agreed, as many questioned how race played any role in the type of education that students, in an integrated school such as Lane, received. In response, several instructors discussed the various academic and non-academic “tracks” students were placed upon, with one teacher noting that “general and commercial students are primarily black,” a fact which “the student realizes.”⁴⁵⁴ Within weeks, expanded policy-making power as well as the abolition of student tracking would be two of the ten demands put forward by the school’s African American Student Association.

Just as faculty members had met in late January to discuss race relations at Lane, students at Franklin K. Lane were also offered an opportunity to sit down with one another to discuss racial tensions in their school. Unlike their teachers’ workshop, however, the students’ conference was scheduled as an off-site event, to be hosted over the weekend of March 7-9 in suburban Stony Brook. Located roughly fifty miles east of New York City, what would be labeled the “Lane Human Relations Weekend,” included an integrated group of eight faculty members and thirty-three students, many of whom had already been identified as student activists. While the weekend had been originally

⁴⁵⁴ Bruce Noble, “Minutes of Lane Faculty Relations Workshop,” (68 January, 1969), as quoted in Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 78-80.

conceived as an inter-racial dialogue and began as such, on early Saturday morning, the majority of black participants allegedly broke off from their white counterparts to discuss Franklin K. Lane on their own. Throughout the rest of the weekend, as their white peers looked on from afar, black students aired their grievances as they drew up a list of ten “non-negotiable” demands for in-school racial equality. In addition to their demands, the students also imposed a two-week timetable, beginning on Monday, March 10th, within which the stated demands were to be met. While the list had been given to Mary Cohen, the lead adult chaperone of the Stony Brook event, the teaching faculty, according to Harold Saltzman, were not notified of its issuance until the following Monday, one week prior to “Black Monday,” the students’ March 24th deadline for action.⁴⁵⁵

In many ways, the majority of the demands put forward by Lane’s Chapter of the ASA resembled those that had been articulated by student activists in Malverne, Bellport, and similarly-situated communities throughout the nation. Just like on suburban Long Island, Lane students demanded more black administrators and more black educators. Unlike their suburban counterparts, however, Lane’s ASA also demanded that both be “proportional to the student body,” a change that, if made, would have significantly altered the administrator-faculty-staff composition from majority white to majority black. In addition, ASA members also demanded the abolition of the “general course of study,” the inclusion and expansion of “the black man’s true role . . . into all areas of study,” the “destruction of all books which do not show the black man’s true role in the world,” the “immediate removal of any/all personnel who are not employed by the New York City Board of Education,” the abolition of “senior dues,” more “black student

⁴⁵⁵ Memorandum from Harold Saltzman to Morton Selub, (18 March, 1969), found in the Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 127, Folder 5; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 80-82.

representatives,” and the restructuring of the “General Organization...in order to truly represent the student body.” Interestingly enough, the students’ second listed demand required the “immediate dismissal of Harold Saltzman, Chapter Chairman of the United Federation of Teachers.”⁴⁵⁶

Distressed by his prominence in the students’ document, Saltzman quickly penned a memorandum on behalf of the UFT, addressed to Lane Principal, Morton Selub, enquiring whether any official action would be taken to either subdue the “militants” activities or to prevent a March 24th “disruption” if the student demands were left unmet. Fearing a student outburst of unparalleled proportions on this latter date, Saltzman listed several pointed questions for Selub to consider, many of which seemed to reveal the borderline hysteria that had consumed Franklin K. Lane High School, and quite possibly Harold Saltzman, since the UFT strike had ended in November. He queried as follows.

Have the police authorities on the precinct and city levels been notified? Has the District Superintendent of Schools been apprised? Has the Mayor’s representative assigned to our area been contacted? Have you met with the youngsters who presented the demands? Have they been made aware that they will be held strictly accountable and subject to penalties of the law for damage to person or property resulting from violence here on Monday? Have the parents of the militant leaders been brought in for a general discussion? Have any local community agencies been reached? Has the Lane Parents Association been sought out for help? Has a timetable of conferences been established for the remainder of the week to resolve the problem?⁴⁵⁷

As this list of questions suggests, Saltzman and many of his colleagues had clearly not “demonstrate[d] more faith in students” or shared an interest in “giving them more power in making school policy” as their colleague, “Mr. U,” had suggested in January. Despite

⁴⁵⁶ Franklin K. Lane Chapter of the African American Student Association, “Demands,” (10 March, 1969), found in the Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 127, Folder 5; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; Richard J.H. Johnston, “Police Become Reminder of Tension at Troubled Lane High School,” *New York Times* (1 April, 1969), 40.

⁴⁵⁷ Memorandum from Harold Saltzman to Morton Selub, (18 March, 1969), found in the Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 127, Folder 5; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

the hysterics, however, on March 24th, rather than fall victim to rampaging black students, Franklin K. Lane remained silent as “most of the 4,300 students,” white *and* black, stayed home. Regardless, Saltzman later noted, that “the architects of disruption...had won a stunning victory” through the various forms of “psychological warfare” that student activists had employed throughout the preceding two weeks as they had pressed for their demands.⁴⁵⁸

For the remainder of the spring term, Franklin K. Lane High School witnessed little if any student-initiated protest activity, save the occasional act of violence or illegality, which any large high school with four to five thousand students may have experienced at this time. While a strengthened police presence at Lane certainly could have contributed to this temporary reduction in activism, expanded opportunities for city-wide student activism should also be considered as an impetus for this decrease. For many, organizing against the Vietnam War became just as, if not more, important than Civil Rights and Black Power, as alumni Ira Schwartz explained in 2009.

There was a lot of interest in the war. And, actually, that helped break down some of the friction among groups, because everybody was concerned that as soon as they would leave school they would immediately go into the service. So, there was some mutual interest at the time to demonstrate against the war... We had the African American group, I mean, there were a variety of groups that discussed, among other things, the effect that the war was having on us.⁴⁵⁹

For students concerned with the war, New York City put them in close contact with a variety of adult-led and student-friendly anti-war organizations, including the Student Mobilization Committee, the High School Student Mobilization Committee, the War Resister’s League, the Communist Party’s Du Bois Clubs, as well as the Fifth Avenue

⁴⁵⁸ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 83; Noble, “Minutes of Lane Faculty Relations Workshop,” (68 January, 1969), as quoted in Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 78-80; Kenneth Gross, “Lane H.S.: Barricades and Blackboards,” *New York Post*, (26 March, 1969).

⁴⁵⁹ Interview with Ira Schwartz by Neil P. Buffett, (11-12 March, 2009).

Peace Parade Committee. Throughout the spring and summer, New York City teens worked as members of these organizations as well as on an individual basis to protest the War in Vietnam.⁴⁶⁰

During this same period, high school students organized en masse against the New York City Public School System and in promotion of student rights throughout the city. In its March-April edition of the *High School Free Press*, the New York High School Student Union (NYHSSU) invited agitated students to participate in its city-wide student initiative, the “Spring Offensive,” which was planned to run from April 21st to May 19th. Appealing to their peers’ sense of isolation, editors explained that while there was little if anything a student could accomplish on his/her own, there were “thousands” of other likeminded students throughout the city who were “down to fight.” To focus student efforts, union leaders listed its city-wide program proposal of ten universal demands, as a blue-print for teen activists to work from within their schools or their communities. This list of demands included, among others, “no more suspensions; no cops in schools; an end to general and commercial diplomas; open admissions to college; no military recruitment in school;” and, “community control.” Moreover, union leaders implored “offensive” participants to use their time wisely, noting that “this spring there may be more people outside of school than inside.” They continued.

We got to make sure that when we we’re “absent from school” this spring that we’re not just wasting time and ending up screwed by the schools again. We want

⁴⁶⁰ See Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke up? American Protest Against the War in Vietnam, 1963-1975* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984); Swerdloff interview; Interview with Bruce Trigg by Neil P. Buffett, (16 October, 2008); Interview with Maxine Orris by Neil P. Buffett, (25 October, 2008); Interview with Jamie Friar and Wendy Weiss Friar by Neil P. Buffett, (1 November, 2008); Interview with Ellen Frommer by Neil P. Buffett, 10 November, 2008); Interview with Mia Rublowska by Neil P. Buffett, (17 November, 2008); Interview with Robert Newton and Howard Swerdloff by Neil P. Buffett, (14 December, 2008); Interview with Laurie Sandow by Neil P. Buffett, (23 December, 2008); Interview with David Fenton by Neil P. Buffett, (15 January, 2009); Interview with Wendy Fisher by Neil P. Buffett, (22 January, 2009); Interview with Alan Barnes by Neil P. Buffett, (27 January, 2009).

to use that time to make damn sure that next fall we're not in the same lousy position we're in now: this spring we're going to begin the fight to make the building they call schools useful.⁴⁶¹

While Franklin K. Lane did remain relatively calm throughout the Spring Offensive, save one incident involving six students and an overturned cafeteria table, it is worth noting that only seventy percent, or 3,000, of the school's 4,300 member student body was in attendance on "any given day."⁴⁶² While these students could have certainly been home, it is much more likely that they spent much of the spring in other activist circles throughout New York City.

One such circle which students at Lane and elsewhere in New York City were not joining en masse at this time, however, was the budding environmental movement that would eventually flower and take on national significance in the months and years following the first Earth Day in April, 1970. Having been inspired to become politically active by late 1960s civil rights, student power, and anti-war fervor, many of these students – the majority of whom graduated from high school prior to the early 1970s groundswell in ecological awareness – were much less concerned with the environment as an organizing issue than they were with expanding individual rights and saving lives. As Lane alumnus Richard Byrd noted in 2011, while the movement was certainly "in its nascent phase" in the late 1960s, "students' "day to day struggles against the blatant racist order at Lane kept [them] in a constant survival mode" throughout their high school years.⁴⁶³ Similar to their counterparts in Malverne, Byrd and his peers had much more

⁴⁶¹ New York High School Student Union, "Spring Offensive," *New York High School Free Press* (March-April, 1969), 4-5, found in the Underground Newspaper Collection, microfilm collection, Frank Melville Jr. Library, Stony Brook University.

⁴⁶² Kenneth Gross, "Lane HS: Barricades and Blackboards," *New York Post* (26 March, 1969); Leonard Buder, "2 Schools in City Shut by Protests," *New York Times* (22 April, 1969), 1.

⁴⁶³ Email communication from Richard Byrd to Neil P. Buffett, (13 March, 2011).

personal stake in the promotion of racial equality, student rights, and bringing about a swift end to U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia than they did in engaging in environmental protection.

This did not mean, however, that Byrd and his colleagues in the African American Student Association and the New York High School Student Union were unaware of their local environment or the myriad threats to its permanence. Despite having grown up in an urban setting, Byrd and his family routinely traveled to upstate New York or down south in order to “commune in a less technological enclave.” Although, as a young man, Byrd did not necessarily need to leave the confines of the city in order to “get ‘closer to nature,’” especially since he, his family and many of his teenaged contemporaries also experienced nature in various urban parks and coastal beaches. Thinking back on his relationship with the natural environment, the former student activist noted that he, in fact, saw “nature whether in an urban or rural setting” and as a “universal” and an “all encompassing force.” While he would eventually develop a “concern for the environment” in the months leading up to the first Earth Day, the eventual “movement was not center stage” in his role as a high school student activist.⁴⁶⁴

The same can be said of New York High School Student Union co-founder, Howard Swerdloff, who, like Byrd and the hundreds of politically-active students at Franklin K. Lane, were more fully committed to social justice campaigns than those which pertained to the natural environment. Again, this did not mean that Swerdloff and his counterparts in the NYHSSU were not, at least, queued in to the issues which would eventually ground widespread environmental awareness from the spring of 1970 onward. As the teen activist wrote in his 1969 critique of American life, as a child, “I would go

⁴⁶⁴ Email communication from Richard Byrd to Neil P. Buffett, (13 March, 2011).

into [Queens'] Cunningham Park every afternoon and look at America's glory – I collected flowers, leaves, rocks, shells, salamanders.” At this young age, for him, “freedom was chasing a squirrel down steep gullies and catching minnows with a shoe box and flour-and-molasses bait.” In the summer of his seventeenth year, however, Swerdloff returned to his childhood playground to find “the best part...cut down.” Rather than find the fields he had previously explored, the jaded youth found “silver fences and day-glow traffic signs and six lanes of asphalt run through Minnow Lake.” At the same time, he discovered that “Pea Pond ha[d] no more fish and the sky [had become] dark with exhaust and smoke.” For Swerdloff, the march of American progress had trampled upon one of the natural landscapes he had treasured as, what he would have described, a naïve youngster who “used to be the biggest patriot in the country.”⁴⁶⁵ While this experience and others like it did not lead him or his counterparts to become environmentally active, the doubts they inspired about post World War II American society and the fallacy of American Exceptionalism certainly fueled their involvement in activist circles elsewhere.

Black Nationalism, Civil Rights and Police Brutality at Franklin K. Lane

By most accounts, the new school year in 1969 began much like the previous year had concluded, without incident and without a continuation of in-school political activity. To be sure, the school's African American Student Association began the new academic year with the knowledge that their March campaign had been successful, having pressured administrators to implement several of their demanded changes. While Harold

⁴⁶⁵ Howard Swerdloff, “Life in These United States,” in Diane Divoky, ed., *How Old Will You Be in 1984?: Expressions of Student Outrage from the High School Free Press* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 291-293.

Saltzman and a New York City Police presence were retained, school officials did expand the Social Studies curriculum to include African American History and Culture courses, allowing black students priority registration for the initial three sections offered. In addition, the Social Studies Department was provided a variety of new materials on black history to assist the new, black African American Studies teacher, Ronald King, who was also given the post of assistant to the assistant principal. Along with his white colleague, Robert Lubetsky, who had studied African History at Syracuse and was fluent in Swahili, Green also served as co-advisor to the school's African Culture Association, which, for all intents and purposes, was also the school's ASA Chapter. Having forced school officials to adopt these measures, students returned to Lane in September without a newly-defined and/or agreed upon political agenda. On October 21st, however, the school's African American Student Association found the motivation they needed for a resurgence of their political struggle.⁴⁶⁶

On that Tuesday morning, room 248, the classroom where Green and Lubetsky taught their sections of Black History, became "ground-zero" for what would become the ASA's newly revitalized campaign, in which the American Flag would, by weeks end, be replaced by the Black Nationalist Flag. On October, 21 both flags were raised together, and class discussion "centered on whether or not the flag should replace the stars and stripes." According to Saltzman's account, "most of the youngsters...were willing to accept some form of compromise with the majority favoring the retention of the American flag." He continued.

⁴⁶⁶ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 119, 124; Interview with former Franklin K. Lane Faculty Member (Anonymous) by Neil P. Buffett, (30 April, 2009); See also The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, "Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Events of Oct. 21-Nov 13.

But the militants had other ideas. Comprising about a third of each of the three black studies groups, they were determined to win their point. The American flag had no place in room 248, they insisted, and the flag of the black nation must replace it! The lines were being drawn.

Whether only one third of the class was *militant* and in favor of replacing the flag is not fully clear, especially since the beleaguered Social Studies teacher had very little, if anything, to do with either the African American Studies Course or the political leanings of the students who enrolled. What is clear, however, is that on October 22nd, students removed the flag, replaced it with their own, and “occupied” room 248 for the remainder of the day, refusing to disband “until the flag question was resolved” to their satisfaction. When school opened again on the following day, the more than seventy students made their way to room 248 and once again held an impromptu sit-in and refused to leave.⁴⁶⁷

Despite several compromise proposals offered by school principal, Morton Selub, including the option of displaying both flags, student activists still refused to vacate the room. In frustration, these students allegedly “struck out, venting their hostility and destroying those objects in the classroom which were part of the ‘oppressive’ system against which they were rebelling,” including various maps, light fixtures, globe, and a windowpane. After failing to convince school administrators, the agitated students opted to take their protest throughout the school, carrying the Black National Flag throughout the school hallways. According to press accounts, the relatively small group of activists grew as the students marched, reaching about two hundred, “before parents of the key militants arrived to take their children home.” While New York City Police Officers were, as they had been for months, present in the school during the demonstration, they

⁴⁶⁷ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 123-124;

did not intervene, recognizing the students' activities as "a matter of internal discipline."⁴⁶⁸

To Harold Saltzman's chagrin, police action was not forthcoming on Friday, October 24th either, as student protestors once again demonstrated throughout the school, concentrating their efforts on the school's lunch room. Despite several five-day suspensions that Principal Selub had dispensed to various ASA leaders on Thursday, enough teen politicians had returned on Friday morning, carrying with them a selection of homemade political fliers which called their peers to action. While several student leaders were absent, the remaining ASA members met in the school lunchroom, and according to Saltzman, "the riot erupted in the cafeteria on signal...[with] a look of the eye, a nod, bang...it was on again."⁴⁶⁹ Press reports of the morning events indicated that while "tables and chairs were overturned" "no injuries had been reported," a point which the Lane's UFT Representative would later counter in his memoir. At noon, after demonstrating throughout the school, the roughly eighty to ninety participants marched out of the building in protest. Except for two teenagers who were arrested for "inciting" the "riot" action, no other arrests were made, despite the alleged destructive nature of their actions. By that evening, however, Mayor John Lindsay, who would be on the ballot for re-election just eleven days later, ordered police officers to, in the future, "provide full assistance and...deal promptly and firmly with any individual seeking to disrupt the

⁴⁶⁸ Iver Peterson, "Racial Disputes Erupt in Two City High Schools," *New York Times* (24 October, 1969), 26; Judson Hand, "Invading Blacks Rip Up Two Cafeterias," *Daily News* (24 October, 1969), B1; Emile Milne, "Principal of Lane HS Fears More Race Trouble," *New York Post* (24 October, 1969); Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 125; See also The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, "Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Events of Oct. 21-Nov 13.

⁴⁶⁹ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 128.

educational process.”⁴⁷⁰ On Friday, October 31st, the suspended leaders’ first day back in school since the 24th, they would comply.

While “Baby Day” at Franklin K. Lane had been traditionally held in June, for the 1969-1970 senior class, this unique senior celebration had been scheduled to take place on Halloween. While all seniors were allowed to participate, and, for one day, wear baby clothes to school, typically, only white students took advantage of this opportunity. According to the Metropolitan Applied Research Center’s report on Lane, what would be later described as the October 31st “melee,” was “stimulated by [black students’] contempt” for the event, which allowed students to wear “a diaper, skate in hallways, suck lollipops, squirt water guns, and so on.” At the same time, in response to Mayor Lindsay’s pledge for more school security, roughly one hundred police officers had been stationed in Lane to prevent future political activism, be it violent or not. As M.A.R.C.’s report suggests, this enhanced police presence, and the tense atmosphere to which student leaders were returning, reminded them of the events of a week before, which they regarded as “unjust and discriminating.” By mid-morning, what black students would later describe as “a police riot,” began in the school cafeteria.⁴⁷¹

According to student witnesses, problems first arose when a black male student was jostled in the hallway outside of the cafeteria, “by three deans and a policeman...for failing to display his program card” upon request. At this, several students ran to his aid, but were prevented from exiting the cafeteria by the police. The M.A.R.C report

⁴⁷⁰ Lawrence Van Gelder, “2 Students Held on Riot Charges as Lane High Unrest Continues,” *New York Times* (25 October, 1969), 25; See also The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, “Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Events of Oct. 21-Nov 13.

⁴⁷¹ The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, “Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Events of Oct. 21-Nov 13; See “The Real Story: Police Riot at Franklin K. Lane,” Student Flier, (Circa. November, 1969) found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

continued, citing the case of Beverly Dixon, a black student who was reportedly beaten by police.

...Police charged the milling students who tried to get out of the cafeteria...One white student squirted a policeman in the face with a water gun; another grabbed a policeman's arms from behind but neither was hit nor arrested. During this period, Beverly Dixon was injured. A number of students on the scene say she was first knocked to the floor of the cafeteria by a policeman who had charged the crowd. A student standing close to her reports that she saw a policeman hitting her in the cafeteria with his closed fist. Then, students say, he took her behind the stairs, after her shoes were removed and tossed aside and beat her. Beverly says that four policemen participated in the assault in the hall. A Black community leader and a Black teacher later told M.A.R.C. [they] saw her sitting in a grade advisor's office, and reports she was bleeding from the head and mouth. Selub also, saw her bleeding from the mouth. She was then taken to the precinct and charged.⁴⁷²

Incidents such as this allegedly provoked more random acts of student upon student violence, ultimately prompting Principal Selub to close the building at noon. Despite the school closure, however, chaos continued to reign in the streets surrounding the school as black students were chased by police throughout the neighborhood. As Marilyn S. Johnson notes in her work on police violence in New York City, tensions between political activists and the police escalated significantly throughout the 1960s, "after thirty years of relative peace on the streets." Activists at Franklin K. Lane were certainly not immune to this resurgence of brute police force.⁴⁷³

In an ASA flier titled "Police Riot at Franklin K. Lane," black student leaders described the events of October 31st from the students' perspective, noting the extremes to which police officers went to disperse Lane's black students. Having been forced out of the school building, black students encountered "hundreds of police" officers, many of

⁴⁷² See also The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, "Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Events of Oct. 21-Nov 13.

⁴⁷³ Douglass Robinson, "Lane H.S. Students Battle the Police," *New York Times* (1 November, 1969), 23; Byrd interview; Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 144; Marilyn S. Johnson, *Street Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 255.

whom allegedly kicked, prodded and “attempt[ed] to provoke a fight.” While many of the students managed to flee the scene, others, including Ronald Green and Willie Baptiste – both of whom were “manacled and thrown through a place glass window...by police” – were not so fortunate.⁴⁷⁴ Upon reflection, both Harold Saltzman and former Lane activist, Richard Byrd, corroborated this latter act of police brutality. Unlike Saltzman, however, whose account clearly lays blame at the feet of student “militants,” Byrd noted how, regardless of the fact that students “were the victims of brutality” and police violence, “we were the ones who were treated as the criminals and charged with the whole idea.”⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, as Byrd indicated, ten students were ultimately arrested, including Dixon, Green, and Baptiste, despite the apparent physical abuse they incurred.⁴⁷⁶ By that afternoon, calm had once again returned to Franklin K. Lane High School, after all remaining students had been chased away, or for some, beaten, by those who had been assigned to protect them.

Although, that did not mean that the African American Student Association had conceded. Within hours, black student leaders began organizing members of the black community, their parents included, to stand alongside them in opposition to school administrators and the city officials who had encouraged police to use physical force. On Monday, November 3rd the majority of students, black *and* white, stayed home with only three hundred and twenty-five students choosing to attend. While many white students remained at home due to the events of the previous week, November 3rd also happened to be Black Solidarity Day, a celebration day for which all black students were encouraged

⁴⁷⁴ “The Real Story: Police Riot at Franklin K. Lane,” Student Flier, (Circa. November, 1969); The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, “Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Events of Oct. 21-Nov 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Saltzman, *Race War in High School*, 144; Byrd interview.

⁴⁷⁶ “The Real Story: Police Riot at Franklin K. Lane,” Student Flier, (Circa. November, 1969).

to remain absent.⁴⁷⁷ Rather than attend school, several black students, along with their parents and other community members, met at noon for a press conference to express their reaction to the “police riot.” In a telegram addressed to Mayor John Lindsay, black community members chastised his offices’ “arrogant disregard for black and Puerto Rican parents, students and community.” Arguing that his office “ignore[d] parents” but continually met “with administrators and teachers,” the telegram’s authors demanded that the mayor “take positive steps to eliminate the police state in Franklin K. Lane and punish the atrocities committed by the police and the UFT.” Concluding their appeal, adult members of the black community urged the mayor to stop “appeal[ing] to the UFT bigot vote” and thus stop using their children “as political pawns for [his] election.” For John Lindsay, who had prided himself on his ability to connect and work with white *and* black New York, such criticism denotes the level to which racial tensions in New York City had risen throughout the latter 1960s.⁴⁷⁸ Nevertheless, this criticism would fall on deaf ears, as a police presence would remain at Franklin K. Lane for the remainder of 1969 and into the early 1970s. This unpopular reality would continue to incite student reaction in the form of political activism, and in some cases, the occasional violent outburst.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ The Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) Corporation, “Conditions at Lane High School, October-November, 1969, (Circa. 1969), Events of Oct. 21-Nov 13; Larry Kleinman, “Cops on Guard As Riot-Torn Lane Reopens,” *New York Post*, (3 November, 1969).

⁴⁷⁸ Flier, “Parents and Community Organize,” found in The Records of the United Federation of Teachers; Wagner 022; Box 126; Folder 32; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; See also Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York*,” (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

⁴⁷⁹ Paul L. Montgomery, “Lane High School Consolidating Sessions to Tighten Security,” *New York Times* (4 November 1969), 1; Douglas Robinson, “Fire Bomb Hurlled in Cafeteria As Lane High School Reopens,” *New York Times* (6 November, 1969), 19; Bert Shanas, “Students Fight and Rampage Through Lane HS,” *Daily News* (6 November, 1969), 7; Leonard Buder, “Police Infiltrate City High Schools,” *New York Times* (7 November, 1969), 29; Emile Milne, “Police Guard Stays, Lane HS Chief Says,” *New York Post* (7 November, 1969); Emile Milne, “Lane HS Cafeteria Feeds the Tension,” *New York Post* (8 November, 1969), 8; “Assaults Disrupt Lane High School,” *New York Times* (26 November, 1969), 29.

In 2009, a former Lane instructor who wished to remain anonymous deconstructed student-faculty relationships as they related to student activism, revealing the basic root of the very tensions which encapsulated Franklin K. Lane in the late 1960s. While many of his former colleagues, he explained, were “blatant racists” and “not very nice to the African American students,” he noted that, “in fairness...they were operating in a cauldron.” Without fully “understand[ing] what was going on” in a place like Lane, he noted, teachers such as Saltzman, Siracusa and others had “nothing to help [them] figure out how to navigate it, other than to rely on [their] antiquated way of thinking about things.” In his estimation, these teachers’ “assertion of authority and control would produce exactly the wrong effect on kids [they] were trying to influence.”⁴⁸⁰ Ultimately, as this instructor’s comments suggests, administrators and faculty members at Franklin K. Lane did not fully understand and/or acknowledge the legitimacy of their students’ motivation for politically and socially organizing in school or throughout the City of New York.

While school administrators did, in the spring of 1969, adopt some of the ASA’s stated demands, they approached their students’ Black Nationalist identity and Black Power ideology from the perspective of adult educators in a disproportional power relationship. For more seasoned faculty members such as Harold Saltzman, students were minors and, when in school, were subject to school regulation and faculty instruction. Questions of a political or social nature were to be left to elected officials and members of the voting public. Although, for students, many of whom strongly identified with and were inspired by the political and social struggles of their community, this philosophy was anathema to not only what they were raised to believe about American Society, but

⁴⁸⁰Interview with former Franklin K. Lane Faculty Member by Neil P. Buffett, (30 April, 2009).

what they were taught in Social Studies classrooms such as Harold Saltzman's. This clear hypocrisy was not lost on high school student activists at Franklin K Lane, in New York City, or even on nearby Long Island.

Still, as this chapter has explored, despite the various similarities between Bellport, Malverne and Brooklyn, high school student activists in New York City were uniquely inspired by the urban landscape upon which they were born, raised and educated. At Franklin K. Lane, high school student civil rights activism proved much more confrontational and violent than it had in either location on suburban Long Island. Having been exposed to much more extreme levels of racial discrimination and socio-economic hardship, students such as Richard Byrd and his peer members of the ASA understood their political activism as much more than simply a campaign for racial equality. These students also recognized their political activity – be it civil rights, anti-war, student power, or the promotion of community control – as one for the very survival of not only the African American community on the whole, but for themselves as individuals as well. Unlike on suburban Long Island, this realization – whether naïve or not – fueled a much more intense, militant and, at times, violent debate between white, black and Latino neighbors in schools and communities upon the late 1960s Brooklyn landscape.

This difference also inadvertently prevented African American and Latino students at Franklin K. Lane from engaging in high school student environmental activism. As Lane alumnus Richard Byrd explained, minority students at Lane and elsewhere in New York City were far too busy promoting civil rights, student power and a ceasefire in Vietnam for them to participate in environmental activism, especially in the

years prior to 1970. Even after the first Earth Day, Lane students still remained organizationally absent from the environmental dialogue which rapidly increased in popularity as the years progressed. While reasons for this absence are not wholly clear, it is likely that – similar to Malverne – Lane students were not exposed to the type of hands-on, field-based science curriculum which students in Bellport and at John Dewey had experienced with Art Cooley, Dennis Puleston, Lou Siegel or Harold Silverstein. At the same time, these students understood the mainstream environmental movement as a principally white, middle to upper-class venture that did not center upon their more concrete, equality-based concerns. Without the personal desire to actively engage in environmental protection and without the foundational scientific experiences to cultivate such interest, it is not surprising that students from Malverne and Franklin K. Lane opted to focus their political and activist energies on issues that, at least to them, seemed more personally and communally-relevant.

Conclusion

As noted in the previous chapter, African American students at Franklin K. Lane High School focused their organizational energies on promoting racial, ethnic and socio-economic equality in their school as well as in their home communities. Similar to their civil rights counterparts on Long Island, however, black student activists at Franklin K. Lane did not actively participate in the budding environmental movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As reported by student leaders in all three locations, the issues of racial discrimination, ethnic bias, and class disparity were far too pervasive in their personal lives for them to justify their involvement in any other social and political activity. For these students, the majority of whom were residents of disadvantaged minority neighborhoods, demonstrating for educational equality and community uplift appeared, at least on the surface, to be much more relevant than environmental action. Consequently, minority students in Bellport, Malverne and at Franklin K. Lane did not organize on behalf of their local environments. Rather, in the weeks and months which followed the first Earth Day in 1970, these students continued to involve themselves in civil rights and social justice campaigns alone.

That being said, this does not necessarily mean that minority communities at large were not, at least to some degree, concerned about environmental health in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As the famed Environmental Justice advocate and scholar, Robert D. Bullard has noted, the question of whether minority communities were environmentally active or not depends largely upon how one defines the terms “environmentalism” and “environmental action.” In *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots* (1993), Bullard asserts that “people of color, individually and collectively,

have waged a frontal assault against environmental injustices that predate the first Earth Day in 1970.” These campaigns, “however, were not framed as ‘environmental’ problems – rather they were seen as addressing ‘social’ problems.” This included a wide variety of issues such as “unpaved streets, [a] lack of sewers and indoor plumbing” as well as the “systematic neglect of garbage collection and sanitation services” in minority communities. For African Americans throughout the 1960s, he concluded, these and other issues “were environmental problems” and they have remained so even in more contemporary times.⁴⁸¹ For Bullard, then, black and minority activists who organized around these types of issues may not have been considered “environmental” activists by definition, but they were viewing and engaging “environmentally-related” problems through a socially-conscious, civil rights lens.

While members of various minority communities may have participated in such “environmental” pursuits in the years prior to environmental racism becoming widely acknowledged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, high school student civil rights activists in the abovementioned case studies did not. For these students, their in-school political activism focused primarily upon issues related to educational bias and racial discrimination within their schools and throughout their school districts. Unlike civil rights advocates elsewhere – be they young or old – activists in Bellport, Malverne and at Franklin K. Lane did not organizationally engage “environmentally-related” issues such as waste disposal or neighborhood pollution even if these problems may have, at times, existed within their communities. Even in suburban Bellport, which in addition to civil rights also produced a vibrant youth-led environmental movement, African American and

⁴⁸¹ Robert D. Bullard, *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 9.

Latino youth did not find common cause with members of Students for Environmental Quality (SEQ). For minority youth in Bellport, the activities undertaken by SEQ from the fall of 1970 onward were too abstract and too unrelated to their personal circumstances as disenfranchised residents of a racially, ethnically and socio-economically divided community.

As many scholars have noted, feelings and beliefs such as this were pervasive within minority communities in the years leading up to and following the first Earth Day in 1970. It was during this period that issues such as “wilderness and wildlife preservation, resource conservation, pollution abatement, and population control” came to dominate the agenda of the budding Environmental Movement. According to Robert Bullard’s work on environmental racism in the American South, these issues, which typically attracted and inspired white, middle to upper-class Americans, were of little or no interest to African American and Latino communities.⁴⁸² Rather than working on these early environmental issues, African Americans and other minorities involved themselves “in civil rights activities...[and] saw the Environmental Movement as a smoke screen to divert attention and resources away from the important issue of the day – white racism.” For most of these social justice advocates, the “key-environmental issues of the period...were not high priority items on the civil rights agenda.” Over time, this reality informed many black and Latino Americans’ decision to spend more time working on issues related to racial, ethnic and socio-economic equality.⁴⁸³

As history has proven, this decision was certainly not in vain. While many non-white Americans may have remained absent from the budding Environmental Movement

⁴⁸² Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 1.

⁴⁸³ Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie*, 26.

– as it was defined then, by its principle supporters – their strong commitment to social justice advocacy led to significant achievements within the arena of local, state, and national civil rights. This included, among many others, successful movements for voting rights legislation, open housing ordinances, education equality, access to public accommodations, expanded social welfare programs, and equal employment opportunities for qualified candidates. At the same time, environmental activists labored to conserve natural resources, preserve wetlands and endangered ecosystems, lobby for clean air and clean water legislation, limit organic and inorganic pollutants, as well as initiate school, neighborhood and workplace recycling programs. While some instances of inter-racial and inter-ethnic collaboration on these latter issues did exist prior to the advent of environmental justice, they were few and far between.⁴⁸⁴ Quite possibly, it is exactly what these environmental concerns represented that may have, consciously or subconsciously, contributed to civil rights activists’ avoidance of them while they strove for economic and political equality.

While civil rights activism in the post-World War II period was certainly geared towards earning racial and ethnic minorities equal access to social and political rights, these rights, if and when achieved, were also intended to allow racial and ethnic minorities unfettered access to the marketplace as equal consumers. With equal access to the postwar consumer economy, which from its inception was based upon mass production of consumer items, racial minorities would, over time, open up previously segregated suburbs and, after decades of enduring second-class citizenship, enjoy the full

⁴⁸⁴ See Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Justice: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 11, 14; While Hurley’s analysis of Gary notes cross-racial collaboration between African American and White laborers, he notes that such collaboration was “infrequent” and that examples such as the one in Gary were “by no means typical.”

benefits of the “American Dream.” The fruits of this dream, however, are what ultimately led millions of white, middle to upper-class Americans to begin questioning mankind’s relationship with the natural environment. Having long enjoyed and benefited from full and free access to the postwar consumer marketplace, many white Americans began to re-examine the efficacy of a synthetic world based upon mass production and conspicuous consumption – both of which led to excess waste and polluted air and water alike.⁴⁸⁵ By the end of the 1960s, this growing concern for local, state and national environments led many to begin advocating for environmental change. As noted above, this did not typically include racial and ethnic minorities, many of whom, by the first Earth Day in 1970, were just entering, or still trying to break into, the postwar consumer marketplace as free agents and equal competitors. Knowing this, it is no wonder that most civil rights advocates in the late 1960s and early 1970s chose not to become environmentally active. For racial and ethnic communities hoping to achieve economic security and the fruits of social mobility, such a move would have been counter-intuitive at best. For middle to upper-class whites, the choice was much easier to make, since most had *already* benefited within the postwar consumer society.

Ultimately, then, the history of white privilege and racial and socio-economic injustice in America played an integral role in deciding who would participate in the early environmental movement and who would not. Had common cause been more routinely established in the years prior to environmental justice – as they sometimes were in places like Gary, Indiana – both movements may have benefited from cross-racial and inter-ethnic coalitions and been able to more successfully tackle or prevent instances of

⁴⁸⁵ See Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 6.

environmental racism much earlier. While late 1960s and early 1970s civil rights activists certainly contributed to their own absence from Earth Day-inspired environmentalism, early environmental activists also played a significant role leading to this end. As noted in the environmental case studies in this dissertation, high school student environmental activists focused most, if not all, of their efforts on the more traditional, middle-class inspired movement issues. While members of racial or ethnic communities may, at times, have benefited from a public beach “clean-in,” the preservation of a local river, or the maintenance of a tidal wetland, such projects – which were certainly commendable and valuable in an ecological sense – were virtually unrelated to civil rights or social justice concerns. Just as students at John Dewey High School did not labor for environmental health in the downtrodden neighborhoods of East New York, members of Students for Environmental Quality in Bellport did not focus their activism on the less affluent neighborhood of North Bellport. In order for black or Latino students in either setting to have joined in locally-based environmental pursuits, these activities and their aims would have had to have *meant* something to them personally. As Robert Bullard has noted, “it was one thing to talk about ‘saving trees’ and a whole different story when one talked about ‘saving low-income housing’ for the poor” or any other civil rights or social justice issue of the day.⁴⁸⁶

The same can be said of the wider Environmental Movement during this time period. Just as high school student activists led environmental campaigns that alienated racial and ethnic minorities, so too did the more traditional, adult-led organizations such as, among others, the Environmental Defense Fund, the Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society. While focusing much of their attention on issues unrelated to social advocacy

⁴⁸⁶ Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie*, 26.

and civil rights, these organizations and others created an atmosphere in which racial and ethnic minorities did not see common cause with their resource, recreation and wildlife-based platforms – all of which spoke to their level of affluence as middle to upper-class organizations. Even in more contemporary times, when social justice advocates and traditional environmental action organizations have coalesced to lobby for environmental justice, they have done so from very different social, cultural, and socio-economic positions. As Bullard has noted, “the crux of the problem is that the mainstream environmental movement has not sufficiently addressed the fact that social inequality and imbalances of social power are at the heart of environmental degradation, resource depletion, pollution, and even overpopulation.”⁴⁸⁷ Therefore, more mainstream environmental organizations and, by extension, their members in local communities throughout the nation need to recognize the multi-faceted nature of environmental problems that impact not only themselves, but those that impact racial and ethnic minorities as well.

As the case study communities in this dissertation highlight, however, such nuanced approaches to civil rights and environmental activism did not guide social and political activity in Bellport, Malverne or Brooklyn. In similar communities elsewhere, this may have certainly taken place; future scholars should work to uncover instances of cross-racial and inter-ethnic environmental activity in the years leading up to and immediately following the first Earth Day. This should be done not only with a focus on more traditionally-acknowledged, adult-led civil rights and environmental activism, but it should highlight the contributions of young and old alike. While this study uncovered no minority participation in its two principle examples of environmental action, this does not

⁴⁸⁷ Bullard, *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 23.

mean that movement crossover did not take place in similar community settings elsewhere in the nation. As noted above, civil rights advocates did, at times, concern themselves with environmentally-related, social justice issues such as unsanitary conditions and unequal municipal services in minority neighborhoods. While activities such as these were typically construed as civil rights work, the environmental implications of such activism cannot and should not be ignored. By re-examining what exactly environmentalism means and what environmental activists do, scholars in the field may unearth even more connections between late 1960s and early 1970s civil rights and environmental movements.

In more contemporary times, this connection has already been established through varied analyses of the Environmental Justice Movement and its assault upon environmental racism in communities of color.⁴⁸⁸ With the vast majority of landfills, waste-incinerators, nuclear test sites and industrial plants in such areas, racial and ethnic minorities have combined both a civil rights and an environmental ethos to battle for cleaner and safer environments in their home communities. While early environmentalism was clearly not as racially and ethnically diverse as Environmental Justice would become, it is more than likely that civil rights activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s were, to at least some degree, concerned about their local environments. The key question for future scholars to ask, then, is whether these activists individually or collectively acted upon these environmental concerns or not. And, if they did, how did

⁴⁸⁸ See Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie*; Bullard, *Confronting Environmental Racism*; Martin V. Melosi, "Environmental Justice, Eco-racism, and Environmental History" in Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 120-132; Eileen M. McGurty, "Identity Politics and Multiracial Coalitions in the Environmental Justice Movement," in Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 133-149; Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington: Island Press, 1993), 260-269; See also footnotes seven and eight.

they construe their work and how did they define themselves and their movements within their own place and time? For civil rights activists in the case study communities noted above, not only did they not see any connections between their work and that of early environmentalists, they did not engage in any environmentally-related social justice advocacy. The same is true of high school student environmentalists in Bellport and in Brooklyn; for student activists in both settings, their ecology-based activism was devoid of any linkages or connections to civil rights or social justice. While there is no denying that possible opportunities for movement cross-over could certainly have existed in all four locations noted throughout this study, such bridges were not built in these places at these times.

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