
Race, Reaction, and Reform: The Three Rs of Philadelphia School Politics, 1965-1971

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*Race, Reaction, and Reform:
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NOVEMBER 17, 1967. BLACK Friday in Philadelphia. The student demonstration and subsequent riot at Philadelphia's school board headquarters that day were relatively minor in comparison to the racial disturbances that rocked other cities in 1967. There were no deaths or serious injuries, and damage to property was minimal. But while it may not have been obvious at the time, there was one major casualty. Black Friday dealt a fatal blow to two years of profound school reform initiated by a young Harvard-trained superintendent named Mark Shedd and the man who hired him, septuagenarian school board president Richardson Dilworth. Perhaps Philadelphia's most beloved former mayor, Dilworth had hoped to do for the city's public school system what he had done for city government. As Democratic mayor from 1955 to 1962, he attacked corruption in city hall—the legacy of nearly seventy years of unchallenged Republican rule—and helped transform a decaying downtown into a national model for urban renewal. What Dilworth and Shedd had initiated in Philadelphia signified “the most dramatic revolution in a city school system in the postwar period,”

according to the authors of a United States Department of Education study.¹ Unfortunately, the revolution never took hold. The events of November 17, 1967, crystallized a white, working-class opposition to school reform that Shedd and Dilworth proved unable to overcome.

J. William Jones, former public relations director of the Philadelphia Board of Education, recalled November 17, 1967, as “the most devastating day of my life—I actually physically broke down and cried at the end.”² Jones’s office window overlooked the courtyard of the board’s fort-like, U-shaped administration building at Twenty-First Street and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. That morning, 3,500 black high school students left school and converged upon the administration building to demand better schools, more black teachers and principals, courses in African culture and African-American history, permission to form African-American clubs in the schools, and the right to wear African clothes to school. These students had decided to take new school superintendent Mark Shedd at his word. At forty-one Shedd was not only the youngest superintendent that anyone in Philadelphia could remember but also the most unconventional. Earlier that year Shedd challenged a meeting of student council presidents to apply pressure to his own school bureaucracy—which before Shedd’s arrival was so inbred and so resistant to change that one observer had likened it to an “arthritic turtle.” He urged the students to draft their own proposals for urban studies programs and take them to their social studies teachers. If the teachers were unwilling to try the student suggestions, they should continue

Copies of Mark Shedd’s speeches were provided by former Shedd assistant J. William Jones. I would like to thank Jones, Shirley Shedd, Thomas Minter, Ralph Sloane, and Wendell and Carolyn Pritchett for meeting with me and providing the oral histories that were crucial to my research. I am particularly indebted to Louise Jones of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania for giving me access to the Richardson Dilworth Papers; when I began my research, Dilworth’s papers were a new collection and had yet to be formally catalogued by HSP archivists. I would also like to thank Margaret Jerrido of the Temple University Urban Archives, the two anonymous reviewers selected by *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB)*, and the following individuals who critiqued early drafts of the master’s thesis from which this essay is adapted: Michael Zuckerman, Thomas Sugrue, Michael Katz, Theodore Sizer, and Diane Ravitch.

¹Marilyn Gittell and T. Edward Hollander, “The Process of Change: Case Study of Philadelphia,” in *The Politics of Urban Education*, ed. Marilyn Gittell and Alan G. Hevesi (New York, 1969), 222.

²J. William Jones, interview by author, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Aug. 5, 1994.

fighting up each rung of the bureaucratic ladder, if necessary going straight to the board of education.³

The demonstration began peacefully, but by nine a.m. it was obvious that turnout would far exceed the 350 students originally anticipated by school administrators. Eventually Shedd agreed to meet with thirty student leaders to discuss their grievances. "They were very well behaved," Shedd told *Philadelphia Bulletin* reporter Fred Hamilton. "They wanted things that weren't totally unrealistic. We heard their demands and then went into a conference session to give them an answer."⁴ Police Lieutenant George Fencil, head of the Civil Disobedience Squad, was in charge of keeping the peace outside the Board of Education building. At around eleven a.m., two students climbed onto the roof of a parked car, breaking the car's radio antenna in the process. The size of the crowd, along with an increase in noise and movement, convinced Fencil to radio for help.

At the time Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo was at city hall, seven blocks away, where he was attending the swearing-in ceremonies for 111 new police sergeants and corporals.⁵ Rizzo grew up in South Philadelphia's Little Italy, the eldest son of a beat cop. In eleventh grade, following his mother's death, he dropped out of high school, and after a brief stint in the navy he joined the police force at age twenty-two. Whether the offenders were drunken sailors, counterculture hippies, or Black Power activists, Rizzo had little tolerance for anyone creating a public disturbance. Rising through the ranks, he earned a reputation as a no-nonsense cop who swung first and asked questions later. It was a style that suited the times, and in May 1967 he was appointed police commissioner, only months after Shedd had been named the new school superintendent. There remains much debate over Rizzo's treatment of blacks. To some he was a racist, while others view him as more of an equal-opportunity bully. Whatever the case, Rizzo certainly had particular contempt for black nationalists, and according to Shedd assistant Ralph Sloane—who had a cousin in the police force—Rizzo was never shy about voicing his opinions: "It was very clear who Rizzo thought the bad guys were, and he started to make statements around the police force that it was

³ Peter Binzen, "Philadelphia: Politics Invades the School," *Saturday Review*, Feb. 5, 1972, 46; William Grant, "Philadelphia Schools Aiding Blacks," *Detroit Free Press*, Feb. 28, 1969, 2-A.

⁴ Fred Hamilton, *Rizzo* (New York, 1973), 79.

⁵ Joseph R. Daughen and Peter Binzen, *The Cop Who Would Be King: Mayor Frank Rizzo* (Boston, 1977), 114-17.

that nigger-lover Shedd that was the problem.”⁶ Since his appointment as police commissioner, Rizzo’s experience with the public schools had generally been limited to breaking up fights between students; given this perspective he was sure to oppose policies he believed undermined adult authority. The first time Sloane encountered Rizzo was at the scene of a confrontation between black and white students at South Philadelphia High School, a month before Black Friday. “This great big Chrysler pulled up and out popped Rizzo with his assistant,” Sloane said. “He took his baton and stuck it up his sleeve. Rizzo walked around at these things with a baton, and he could just drop it and use it to smash the shit out of you. He said, ‘Who’s here from the Board of Education?’ Even though I was just twenty-five years old, I was the one from the Board of Education. So he called me over, and he held my tie and lifted me up and said, ‘We’ve had enough of this sickology shit.’”⁷

When FencI’s call came in on November 17, Rizzo packed the newly promoted officers into buses and sped them to the scene. What happened next is disputed. The *Inquirer’s* lead story the following day claimed that students began throwing bottles and stones at police. Others, including students and school administrators who were at the scene, denied this. “The kids I saw were not violent or disorderly,” said David Richardson, a bystander who was on his way to the nearby Philadelphia Free Library when he got out of his car to see what was going on. “They were just milling around. I never saw any broken windshields or bricks and bottles which the kids were supposed to have thrown. In fact, the only violence I saw was shown by the police.” Police may have panicked when the crowd surged toward an area where two policemen were attempting to make an arrest. “Rizzo,” the *Inquirer* reported, “said two policemen were on the ground when he waved his nightstick at a formation of more than 100 officers and shouted for them to go to their rescue. Within minutes,” the story continued, “Winter St. in front of the school headquarters building was littered with the injured—students, police and spectators—along with scattered

⁶ Ralph Sloane, interview by author, Norwalk, Connecticut, May 19, 1994; Binzen, “Philadelphia: Politics Invades the School,” 48; S. A. Paolantonio, *Frank Rizzo: The Last Big Man in Big City America* (Philadelphia, 1993), 28-85.

⁷ Sloane, interview. Some of the news articles cited do not include page numbers. In those cases, the articles were copied from the *Philadelphia Bulletin* clip files at the Urban Archives, not from standard microfilm.

school books and papers. The air was filled with screams, and the high school students, both boys and girls, fled in panic.”⁸

“A cop chased two black girls right outside of the window of the administration building where we were looking out, and just proceeded to beat the crap out of them with a nightstick,” Jones recalled in a 1994 interview. “They were cowering down, and he was hitting them in the back of the head. They were screaming, and he was beating on them.”⁹ Sixteen-year-old Paula Webster told a reporter from the *Philadelphia Tribune*, Philadelphia’s twice-weekly black newspaper, that she was “knocked to the ground by police officers, beaten on the head with blackjacks and [had] her earrings ripped from her pierced ears at the height of the wild melee.” Other teens told similar stories:

Dozier Smith, 17, who said he was not participating in the demonstration, told of being set upon and beaten by at least a half dozen policemen as he attempted to gain entrance to the Board of Education Building. Smith, who is employed by the school system as a part-time maintenance assistant, said he had come to the building only to collect his paycheck. “I tried to explain that to the officers, but . . . no one would listen to me,” Smith said. “A cop told me, ‘shut up, nigger,’ and hit me on the head with his blackjack.”¹⁰

At one point, Shedd sent two of his assistant superintendents, Ralph Sloane and Frederick Holliday, outside to see if they could talk with Fencl. But by then it was too late. “It had changed from ‘let’s talk about the issues’ all of a sudden to a nightmare situation, all within five minutes,” recalled Sloane, today the school superintendent for Norwalk, Connecticut; Sloane had been a twenty-five-year-old student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Shedd’s alma mater, when Shedd hired him in June 1967. “Fred and I were right next to each other—he was my height [about 6’3”], black—and we started moving towards the police. One of the cops raised his baton and hit Fred on the head. Fred went down. I bent down to see if Fred was all right.” He was, although Holliday’s topcoat tore when he fell. “I stood up and the police were coming at us, and I remember that the cops

⁸ George Ingram, “Police Rout 3500 Unruly Pupils at Black Power School Protest,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 18, 1967, 1.

⁹ Jones, interview.

¹⁰ “Cop Brutality Protests Flood Tribune Office,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1967, 1.

looked at me, looked at Fred, and looked at me again, and they opened the line [to let us through]. . . . Then they closed in on the kids behind us." Later, when Holliday—who would go on to become Cleveland's school superintendent—complained to Rizzo about the damage to his coat, the police commissioner responded by giving him the name of his tailor in South Philly.¹¹

At the end of the day, fifty-seven people had been arrested and twenty treated for injuries, including five police officers. None of the injuries was serious, although many of the battered students undoubtedly fled before ambulances arrived. After police drove the students from the scene of the demonstration, the fleeing teenagers "coursed through center city, beating some pedestrians and terrorizing others," the *Inquirer* reported, "smashing windows and battling police." According to Jones, the student rampage provided Rizzo with an after-the-fact justification for his officers' brutality—particularly in context of the ghetto riots that had rocked cities such as Detroit and Newark that July. Philadelphia had been one of the few northeastern cities spared by the summer's deadly riots, yet few—white or black—doubted the potential for serious violence in the City of Brotherly Love. "I can't absolve the kids all the way . . .," Jones said. "They went up 23rd Street and broke windows. Anyone white they could find, they knocked them down. That gave Rizzo all the ammunition he needed to tell people he was right."¹² Interviewed during his successful campaign for mayor in 1971, Rizzo remained unrepentant: "Look, I thought we handled ourselves well. We broke it up before it got out of hand. It might have been much worse if we had just stood by. I believe it is easier to blow out a match than extinguish a forest fire."¹³

After the riot had ended, Rizzo returned to the administration building to speak with Shedd. The two met alone, and not surprisingly the meeting was tense and brief. "He was livid," Shedd recalled in an interview with *Bulletin* reporters Joseph Daughen and Peter Binzen, authors of one of the three Rizzo biographies written to date. "His face and neck were red. He said directly to me, 'Get those fucking black kids back to school. This is my town. No softie from the outside is going to come in and screw it up. If you don't keep those kids in school, I'm going to run your ass out of Philadelphia

¹¹ Sloane, interview; Daughen and Binzen, *Cop Who Would Be King*, 116.

¹² Jones, interview.

¹³ Hamilton, *Rizzo*, 80.

if it's the last thing I do."¹⁴ Rizzo fulfilled this promise four years later after he was elected mayor. During his campaign, Rizzo and his supporters used Shedd as a scapegoat. He told audiences: "I used to say Shedd wouldn't last eight minutes after I'm elected. Now I say he won't last eight seconds." Rizzo alleged that entire schools had been taken over by unruly students and that teachers were being terrorized by juvenile delinquents. Actually, during Shedd's five-year tenure Philadelphia lost fewer days due to student disruptions than any of the nation's other large urban school systems. Also, teacher assaults—which had risen sharply in the mid-1960s—leveled off after Shedd's arrival. Still, according to Daughen and Binzen, audiences usually cheered Rizzo's jabs at Shedd even more enthusiastically than his pledge not to raise taxes. Seeing the writing on the wall, Shedd resigned before Rizzo took office.¹⁵

What happened? How did a man who was widely recognized as the best urban school superintendent in the country wind up a political pariah? And what does Shedd's failure say about the prospects for school reform today? In seeking answers to these questions, the November 17 riot serves as a useful starting point because that day's events—and the fallout from them—embody so much of what went wrong for Shedd and Dilworth. On that day Philadelphians came to realize what school insiders and the city's black community had known all along—that school policy is not apolitical, and thus any attempt at significant reform will have real winners and losers. Power struggles were not new to the Philadelphia school system in the late 1960s, but for a half-century conflicts had been internal disputes with little meaning for the school system's constituents. In the eyes of many, Shedd was taking a century of conventional wisdom and turning it on its head. One of Shedd's first public actions as superintendent was his decision to rehire a young English teacher fired by the principal of Dobbins High School. The teacher, Steven Harlem, had distributed copies of a student-written magazine that contained essays on controversial topics, such as race, sex, and mistreatment of students by the school staff. (The student population at Dobbins, a vocational school, was predominantly black, while the principal and 80 percent of the teachers were white.) Principal William Donovan

¹⁴ Daughen and Binzen, *Cop Who Would Be King*, 119.

¹⁵ Richardson Dilworth to the editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 20, 1970, Richardson Dilworth Papers (hereafter, Dilworth Papers), box 44, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Daughen and Binzen, *Cop Who Would Be King*, 175-76; Binzen, "Politics Invades the School," 48.

demanded that Harlem confiscate the magazines. Harlem refused and he was fired. When Shedd heard what happened, he not only reinstated Harlem but congratulated him: "He is the kind of teacher we must not only tolerate but encourage in the school system. He had the guts to take a few chances and venture into rugged terrain in an effort to get students deeply involved in learning. The gamblers and the mavericks must have a place in the system, for they are so often the ones who come up with the new and better idea. If dissent and critical thinking are primary values in a [d]emocratic society they must also be primary values in a school system."¹⁶ Such talk won Shedd praise from the black community, but it also led one critic to say that Shedd put "kids over teachers and black kids over everybody."¹⁷ Shedd might have taken issue, but the essence of the critique was accurate. Both Shedd and Dilworth had consistently advocated that any effort to reform Philadelphia's public schools had to start with empowering the black student majority.

Stung by growing evidence that the school system was failing, teachers and administrators at first seemed receptive to their new superintendent's call for radical change. In his first address to administrators and principals, on May 18, 1967, Shedd called for principals to have greater say over hiring and budgets, and in exchange they would be more accountable for the performance of their schools. Shedd wanted schools to become more responsive to students. Responsiveness, he said, meant making sure a student "perceives that there is some relationship between the variety of experiences he has in school and that the sum of his experiences combine to give him the tools he needs to control his own destiny. . . . In short, we have to turn kids on." Shedd talked a lot about "turning kids on," and his meaning was just as subversive as his choice of words: "It should be perfectly clear to anyone who reads the daily roster of violence, hatred and despair which fill the newspapers that this country needs a social revolution—a revolution in human values and human relationships. If this does not occur, I see no reason for bothering to educate our children. And if this is to occur, the schools must be the cauldron, whether we like it or consider it our traditional

¹⁶ John Brantley Wilder, "Fired Teacher Is Rehired; Let His Pupils Study Up on Sex & Race Problems," *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 27, 1967, 1; Rose DeWolf, "The Passing Scene," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 22, 1967.

¹⁷ Peter Binzen, "Mark Shedd's Big Problem: He Gambled on Ideas and Lost Out on Allies," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Nov. 21, 1971, 1.

role or not.” For schools to advance this “social revolution,” educators needed to completely rethink the way they went about teaching: “Nothing frightens me more than the possible impact on a barely articulate child—whose crying need is for self-expression—if he enters a classroom with a harsh emphasis on absolute order and, above all, absolute silence.” Creating a curriculum that is more responsive “no doubt . . . implies dealing honestly with some concerns of children—identity, self-esteem, peer group demands—as well as some hot topics: race, politics, sex, hostility, the system. It means talking about life as it is—not presenting a fictionalized account of what it should be . . .” In order for schools to become more connected to students’ lives, Shedd argued, educators needed to emphasize an “affective curriculum,” which he contrasted to the traditional cognitive curriculum. He described the affective curriculum as “a style, a quality of relationship, an atmosphere, a perspective, which must permeate the entire system and, most important, must exist within the classroom. . . . Learning—like the school system—is basically a human and social experience. If learning is to be relevant to living, that experience must mirror life.”¹⁸ Shedd took his vision a step farther when he addressed the district’s teachers on September 11. Shedd persuasively argued that the school system’s inherent resistance to change and new ideas made it “the enemy.” “‘Something is happening,’” he said, quoting a Bob Dylan song, “‘and you don’t know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?’ You and I are the Mr. Joneses of Bob Dylan’s world, and we must try to figure out just what is happening—and what to do about it. For many of our drop-outs, our tune-outs and our low achievers—in short, the students who need us most—are singing the same song. What we should not do, it seems clear to me, is simply order these alienated youngsters to cut their hair. This would be to attack the symptom, not the cause. We cannot meet discontent with dogmatism.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Mark Shedd, “Address to the Staff,” Philadelphia, May 18, 1967.

¹⁹ Mark Shedd, “Speech to the Assembled Staff,” Philadelphia, Sept. 11, 1967. Although Shedd’s vision seemed radical, his views had much in common with those espoused by John Dewey a half-century earlier. The patriarch of the modern public schools, Dewey believed that every school should become “an embryonic community life” and that a school’s curriculum should “reflect the life of the larger society.” He rejected the rigid, lockstep schools of the nineteenth century, which he believed relied excessively on student passivity, rote memorization, and drilling. These schools suppressed children’s imaginations and innate curiosity, according to Dewey. Democracy, he said, “is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” Since democracy rejects external authority and relies on “voluntary disposition and interest,” schools must create conditions under which individuals can profit from their diverse perspectives and discover and act on common purposes.

Founded in the 1940s, the Philadelphia teachers' union did not win collective bargaining rights until 1965. Before Shedd's arrival, the union was one of the few voices that had consistently pressed for reform and dared to challenge the change-averse bureaucrats who ran the school system. Thus it should come as no surprise, then, that Shedd's September 11 speech won rave reviews from most teachers. Many were so excited that afterwards they stood atop their chairs to applaud their new superintendent. Their enthusiasm soon faded. Many teachers—particularly younger ones—were thrilled that they would no longer be hamstrung by rigid curricula and outdated reading lists. But veterans in the union leadership concluded that Shedd's desire to promote "dissent" in order to get students "turned on" to education posed a serious threat to classroom order and teacher professionalism. The union's reaction to the November 17 riot is revealing. In a letter to Dilworth, Frank Sullivan, president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), argued that the disturbance could have been avoided but for "the timidity of principals" who had been "hesitant about swift, determined action to deter rowdy elements." As a result of the administration's failure to rein in the students, the "safety of teachers was menaced . . . by disruptive elements in our schools who thrive on disorder and the opportunity to inflict hurt on others. . . . [M]any of the pupils who left their schools on Friday, November 17 were habitual truants and disciplinary cases and were not those particularly interested in the teaching of history or any other subject." While Sullivan describes injuries sustained by a few teachers that day as "humiliating," he made no mention of the beatings endured by many of the student protesters.²⁰

²⁰Wendell and Carolyn Pritchett, interview by author, Aug. 23, 1994; Frank Sullivan to Richardson Dilworth, Nov. 22, 1967, Dilworth Papers, box 43. Shedd must bear some blame for the friction between his administration and the city's teachers. As Diane Ravitch points out in *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York, 1983), 263-64, teachers are primarily concerned with teaching good citizenship and managing their classrooms in ways that make learning possible for students who want to learn. Thus reforms aimed at promoting student self-expression contradicted teachers' fundamental objectives. Moreover, Shedd's attitudes towards teachers were clearly prejudiced by the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' unabashed defense of several instructors charged with making undeniably racist remarks to students. Convinced that racism was rampant among school faculties, he forced teachers and principals to attend "sensitivity retreats" where they were subjected to verbal abuse and intimidation by black community activists. And in what may have been the last straw for some teachers, Shedd initially took the side of black nationalists who sought to have a white social studies teacher, George Fishman, transferred out of West Philadelphia High School. Fishman, a respected educator who had authored numerous articles on civil rights and black history, became the target of a month-long protest after one

In the days that followed Black Friday, there were numerous calls for Rizzo's ouster, mostly from the black community and from white liberals in upscale neighborhoods such as Chestnut Hill, Rittenhouse Square, and Society Hill. Georgie Woods, a popular black disc jockey, called on Mayor James Tate to fire Rizzo. "Unless the lawlessness of the police is curbed in their contact with negroes," Woods said, "riots can be ignited in the winter as well as the summer." The Philadelphia branch of the American Civil Liberties Union also sided against Rizzo and the police; Executive Director Spencer Coxe declared, "if clubbing children is Rizzo's way of dealing with the civil rights movement, Philadelphia needs a new police commissioner." A civic group called the Chestnut Hill Pipe Line even offered to set up defense funds for the students who were arrested and raise money to pay the medical bills of those who were injured.²¹ On Sunday about 800 black community leaders met in a West Philadelphia church to organize a boycott of both the public schools and white merchants. The boycott sought Rizzo's removal, as did a federal lawsuit filed by Rizzo opponents; both went nowhere. Rizzo had the overwhelming support of white ethnics in the city's working-class neighborhoods—particularly the Northeast and South Philadelphia—and two weeks earlier these neighborhoods had been crucial to Mayor Tate's narrow, 11,000-vote victory over Republican challenger Arlen Specter.

Tate was a political survivor, motivated by power more than ideology, and initially he saw the November 17 riot as an opportunity to get rid of Rizzo, whom he shrewdly perceived as an emerging political rival. Ironically, Tate had derided Specter for not pledging to rehire Rizzo during their final debate. "The implication was clear," Rizzo biographer and *Inquirer* reporter S. A. Paolantonio wrote of Tate's debate strategy. "Specter was a tool of the

of his students, Richard Lawrence, claimed he was racist because he did not include enough black history in his courses. Fishman had flunked the student the previous semester after Lawrence attended only four classes in five months. Yet Shedd and West Philadelphia High School principal Walter Scott—a white Shedd appointee—initially sided with black activists, even permitting them to stage protests outside Fishman's classroom. Castigated in the press for his position, Shedd backed off only when it became evident that the teachers' union was prepared to strike if Fishman was transferred. For a comprehensive discussion of teacher and administrator resistance to Shedd's reforms, see Jon Birger, "Race, Reaction, and Reform: The Three R's of Philadelphia School Politics, 1965-1971," M.A. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1995, 45-49, 71-84.

²¹"Disc Jockey Asks Mayor Tate to Act," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1967, 1; "Rizzo Is Praised, Criticized," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 18, 1967, 6; "Negroes, Whites Join Hands in Blasting Police Tactics," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1967, 2.

liberal forces who would rather see the city burn.” Tate, on vacation in Florida at the time of the November 17 riot, called Deputy Mayor Charles Bowser to discuss what public position he should take. “Tate said to me, ‘Now we got him. Now we can get rid of Rizzo,’” Bowser recalled. “I said, ‘Mayor, you’re crazy. They’re calling for Rizzo’s removal already and the phones have not stopped ringing all morning. People are supporting the police.’” Neither Tate nor the organizers of the failed boycott should have been surprised. In October, an opinion poll published by the *Philadelphia Bulletin* showed that Rizzo had an astonishing eighty-four percent approval rating. (Interestingly, blacks approved of Rizzo almost as overwhelmingly as did whites, despite the fact that dating back to Rizzo’s days as a police captain in predominantly black West Philadelphia in 1952, local black leaders such as Cecil Moore of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had accused Rizzo of blatant racism and outright cruelty in his police work in black neighborhoods.) Only three percent of those polled disapproved of Rizzo’s performance as police commissioner. Rizzo might have been a bully, but he was their bully. “Night after night,” Paolantonio wrote of the tense summer of 1967, “the scene was the same on the city’s television screens—Rizzo, with his helmet on, rushing from one hot spot to another, wading into a crowd, snuffing out disturbances. Then, the film would cut to Detroit or Newark, to the fires, to the lost lives, and lost cities.”²²

Not wanting to get behind public opinion, Tate came out strongly in favor of Rizzo. “The board has . . . failed to curb Black Power activities in the schools,” the mayor said. “I wish the school officials would refrain from attacking our police department. . . . Our police should not be made the whipping boys for the inadequacies of the school board.” The following day, the *Inquirer’s* lead editorial praised Tate’s stand: “If the school board and school officials . . . had been more effective in maintaining discipline in the schools, trouble might have been averted without the necessity for police action. . . . [Commissioner Rizzo] merits a public vote of thanks for his fortitude in taking personal command, and assuming full responsibility, at

²² Paolantonio, *Last Big Man*, 89, 90-93.

a time when a show of vacillation or weakness could have led to much worse violence."²³

Like Shedd, Dilworth blamed police for inciting the riot. He blasted three conservative school board members—William Ross, Robert Sebastian, and William Goldman—who had blamed the riot on “adult agitators.” These black leaders, the three board members claimed at a November 20 meeting, had turned otherwise docile students into “the pawns of pressure groups.” The accusation was a clear attempt to marginalize the grievances of the black students. Dilworth acknowledged that many of the organizers were adults—one was even on the city payroll. However, he said, if these adults had gone “up to a nice prosperous community like Chestnut Hill, they wouldn’t have [had] much luck with agitating because the children of Chestnut Hill have nothing to revolt about. The children of the ghetto [do].” Dilworth understood that the racial politics of 1967 were radically different from those of 1962, the year he stepped down as mayor to make an ultimately unsuccessful run for governor. There was no longer any use, he argued, in talking of black and white unity and universal love “because we darn well don’t love each other. This is a time for delicacy, tact, and finesse . . . I don’t think the people in this city realize how explosive the race situation here is. . . . The easiest thing in the world we could have done was to call Rizzo and his riot squad and say, ‘You handle this.’ We’d have been inviting riot and disorder such as this city has never seen.”²⁴

In the ten days following the riot, the letters to the editor which poured into the *Inquirer* ran almost two to one in favor of Rizzo and against Shedd and Dilworth. “Black Flags—African dress—this for American children?” read one letter, signed “Anirate Taxpayer.” “Furthermore, if these children

²³Jeremy Heymsfeld, “Tate Assails Board for Shunning Police Help on Black Power,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 19, 1967, 1; “A Matter of Law and Order,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 20, 1967, 16. The *Inquirer* editorial was particularly critical of Dilworth. This is noteworthy only because Dilworth was a close friend of *Inquirer* publisher Walter Annenberg and was also friendly with *Inquirer* editorial page director Harold J. Wiegand, whose editorials were usually supportive of Dilworth and Shedd. For more information on the relationship between Dilworth and news media, see Dilworth Papers, boxes 33, 44. Dilworth made a point of responding with a personal note to every article or editorial written about the school system.

²⁴William Thompson, “Negroes Demanding Rizzo Ouster, to Boycott Schools, White Stores,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 20, 1967, 1; “3 Board Members Disagree with Dilworth, Back Rizzo,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 21, 1967, 1. Dilworth made a concerted effort to stay informed on racial issues. Box 36, Dilworth Papers, contains hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles on racism and blacks in America.

were such 'an excellent bunch of kids,' they would have been in their classrooms and not marching through the streets during school hours. . . . A salute to Commissioner Rizzo for his handling of the affair."²⁵ Shedd never backed down from his support of the student demonstrators and his denunciation of police tactics, even after it became clear to others that the stand he took on November 17 had undermined his administration's political position in the city. Fallout from the riot "reverberated throughout the school system," according to Thomas Minter, a black assistant superintendent Shedd hired in 1968. "There was a certain feeling that Shedd was giving the school system to the blacks."²⁶ Minter's view was widely shared, yet in 1969 Shedd told a reporter from the *Detroit Free Press* that he believed the riot actually provided a boost for his administration: "It was the beginning of our credibility in the black community. . . . When Negroes saw school people take the lumps right along side them, when they saw one teacher protect a black boy from a clubbing with his own body . . . then they began to believe we were serious."²⁷

Shedd's convictions were grounded in a moral code one might expect from the son of a New England Methodist minister. There was a time, in fact, when Shedd had considered following his father into the clergy: "I decided that while the ministry was a great calling, it would permit me to serve only one segment of society."²⁸ Instead, after serving two years in the navy, 1945-46, Shedd enrolled at the University of Maine and graduated in 1950 with a degree in history. He took a job teaching high school in Bangor, Maine, and eventually became an elementary school principal before leaving for the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he received his doctorate in 1960. In many ways Shedd was part of a dying breed of educators who drew their early inspiration from Protestant religion. As David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot argue in *Managers of Virtue*, even as Progressive Era reform shifted the emphasis of education from moral uplift to social efficiency, America's leading educators maintained a common set

²⁵ "Appalled Taxpayer," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 30, 1967, 40. Judging from letters to the *Tribune*, Rizzo's actions on November 17 disappointed many black Philadelphians who had once supported him; the *Tribune's* letters to the editor ran three to one against the police commissioner.

²⁶ Thomas Minter, interview by author, New York City, June 6, 1994.

²⁷ Grant, "Philadelphia Schools," 2-A.

²⁸ Rose DeWolf and John Gillespie, "See Mark Shedd. See him run. See him run the school system," *Philadelphia Magazine*, June 1969, 138.

of values grounded in their Protestant upbringings:

Charles Judd—dean of the School of Education at the University of Chicago . . . was one of a cadre of leaders in education whose fathers were Protestant clergymen . . . Judd had originally planned to become a minister before shifting to psychology. Many other key educators testified to the importance of their early evangelical training in their later careers, whether they remained as church members or abandoned formal religion.²⁹

At Harvard, Shedd's faith in providence and his commitment to public service fused with the liberal idealism that was permeating the graduate school of education. Theodore Sizer, who in 1964 became dean of the school at age thirty-one, had been a classmate of Shedd. According to Sizer, during the late 1950s the graduate school of education began to shift away from its long-time collaborations with suburban school districts in Newton and Concord and "pushed very hard" to get practice teaching placements and internships in Boston and Cambridge: "[T]here were those, an increasing number, who got the Kennedy itch and wanted to go off and 'save the poor,' with all that naiveté and arrogance and generosity and good feeling that lay behind that." According to Sloane, he and his Harvard classmates were convinced they were "the best troops we've got" in the battle to save big city schools: "Harvard created that mentality—whether or not we knew any more than people who came from Chicago or Vanderbilt. . . . At age 25, [we were] being sent out to be an *aide de camp* to the big city superintendents, taking jobs that we shouldn't have had for another 20 years. Today I wouldn't hire myself if I walked in the door looking and acting and knowing what I knew [then]. I would say, 'You need some more seasoning. Go back and teach for a while.'"³⁰

Even before he became Philadelphia's superintendent, Shedd had garnered a national reputation as a crusader for school desegregation. His first job as a superintendent was in Englewood, New Jersey, a fashionable, racially mixed suburb of New York City. In 1962 the school district's former superintendent chose to resign rather than implement a state-ordered

²⁹ David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York, 1982), 115.

³⁰ Sloane, interview; *Reflections on the Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1948-85: An Oral History Recorded on the Occasion of Harvard's 350th Anniversary* (Cambridge: Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1988) 169-70.

desegregation plan. Five years after Shedd took over, no Englewood school had black enrollments of more than fifty percent or less than thirty-eight percent. By working closely with community groups and Englewood's business leaders, Shedd managed to avoid the racial strife often associated with desegregation efforts. In fact, it was Shedd's forthrightness dealing with race that originally brought him to Dilworth's attention. At the 1966 meeting of the American Association of School Administrators, Shedd shocked his colleagues by calling on the AASA to censure superintendents who failed to make substantial gains towards integration.³¹ "Mark was not a political scientist," said Sloane, when asked if Shedd ever feared a white backlash to his progressive views on race:

He didn't do those kind of analyses. He was the son of a Methodist minister and, I think, the grandson of a Methodist minister. His approach to power was messianic. He really believed he was right. . . . Mark Shedd was the closest thing to John Kennedy that my generation knew—young, handsome, Harvard-educated, fighting the bureaucracy, standing up for the oppressed, taking on the ogres like Rizzo in the world. . . . I remember having lunch with him in August 1967—it was still very warm—at the Museum of Art outdoor cafe . . . and we were looking north. There had been some fire that night up in North Philadelphia. . . . It involved some racial incident that had caused the police to go in. I remember saying, "Mark, this is a tough political situation." He did one of those things that I used to call the Peter O'Toole look. Did you ever see *Lawrence of Arabia*? Well, that was Shedd. Shedd looked across the burning part of Philadelphia, and said, "Don't worry, the people will prevail." I thought, Well, okay. When you're twenty-five, you're not going to question that.³²

Shedd's years in Philadelphia provided numerous tests of faith. Separated from his first wife when he was appointed, Shedd's personal life instantly became a source of gossip. He was linked romantically to Trudy Haynes and Edith Huggins, two attractive, black television reporters in Philadelphia. "Without saying anything, it said it all," *Philadelphia Magazine* wrote of the rumor. "It said that Shedd's doing too much for Negroes and it must be

³¹ John Corr, "Prospects for City's Schools: Shedd—A 'Cool Young Tiger,'" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 14, 1967; Henry S. Resnik, *Turning on the System: War in the Philadelphia Public Schools* (New York, 1970), 110.

³² Sloane, interview.

sex.”³³ The rumors—clearly aimed at destroying Shedd’s credibility—were baseless, according to both Jones and Shedd’s second wife, Shirley, whom Shedd met on vacation in Maine in 1968. In fact, Jones said newspaper reporters told him the rumors were being spread by Tony Zecca, a boyhood friend of Rizzo and also a Tate deputy. Shedd refused to comment, realizing that dignifying the story with a response would only play into the hands of his enemies. “It never bothered him,” Shirley Shedd said in a 1994 interview. “I think he was flattered. But he wanted to keep his private life as private as possible.”³⁴ Shedd needed to keep his personal life private in order to protect his four children. His first wife had a history of mental illness, and they eventually divorced when her doctors informed him that she was unable to cope with marriage and motherhood.³⁵

Shedd and his family had to deal with near-constant harassment by Rizzo’s police. His phones were tapped. Plain clothes police officers followed Shedd wherever he went and even parked outside his home at night. “I’d go out and say goodnight to them,” Shedd said in an interview following his resignation in 1971. Ten days after the November 17 riot, Shedd scheduled a secret meeting with black student leaders. “To shake the cops,” he said, “I started in a school board car from my house, made a couple of stops and then went to Fred Holliday’s house. I ducked in the back door of Holliday’s place, got in his car and scrunched down in the front seat while he drove to the meeting. For six or eight hours the police had no idea where I was. But that was unusual.” Upon returning from a vacation in Maine in 1968, Shedd discovered that his home had been broken into; nothing was stolen, but someone had rifled through his desk and file cabinet. According to Shirley Shedd, later that week one of her husband’s aides overheard two policemen bragging about breaking into their house. Shedd took it all in stride, refusing to be frightened or aggravated by Rizzo’s scare tactics. (For the record, Rizzo denied all of Shedd’s allegations.) “That’s just the way he was,” Shirley Shedd said. “He was a hopeless optimist. He always believed that things would work out.”³⁶

While they shared a common outlook on most issues, Dilworth was not

³³ Rose DeWolf, “What They Said Before He Wed,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 22, 1968; DeWolf and Gillespie, “See Mark Shedd,” 151.

³⁴ Shirley Shedd, interview by author, South Yarmouth, Maine, June 30, 1994; Jones, interview.

³⁵ Mark Shedd file, Dilworth Papers, box 45.

³⁶ Shirley Shedd, interview; Daughen and Binzen, *Cop Who Would Be King*, 122-27.

as idealistic as his young superintendent. Shedd may have been confident that truth and justice would prevail, but Dilworth couldn't share his optimism. He had too many years of hard politics under his belt. In 1959 Dilworth had been considered possible presidential or vice-presidential timber, only to be defeated three years later in his race for governor. He knew from experience how quickly power could slip away and understood that his and Shedd's prospects for success depended as much on political skill as principle or virtue. In a letter he wrote a week after the riot, Dilworth informed a friend in Washington—a lawyer who represented the school district in federal matters—that he had grave doubts about the future of school reform in Philadelphia:

Our Police Commissioner, who was originally known as "The Cisco Kid," because of his sensational tactics when he was a Police Captain and a Police Inspector, is . . . a skillful police tactician, and last summer, when it was imperative to reelect the Mayor, he handled the situation with great delicacy and finesse. However, now that the Mayor is reelected—and Mr. Rizzo feels he is responsible for that reelection—he is giving full vent to his basic philosophy, which is, "Knock their brains out."

At the moment he is virtually a folk hero here in Philadelphia, and 90% of the white community is cheering him on and hissing us.

It would have been very easy for us to hide behind the Police Commissioner . . . , but it would have meant the return to school of thousands upon thousands of sullen blacks, unreceptive to learning because of their sullenness, and all awaiting an opportunity to break out all over again.

We chose the hard road, and do not yet know whether our tactics will succeed. . . . It is clear that if we have another outbreak and another march on the Administration building, the public may very well demand our resignation, on the ground that you cannot temporize with crime, and the overwhelming majority of the whites believe any meetings with the militant young Negroes are criminal.³⁷

Dilworth himself was one of the most colorful and intriguing politicians of his generation. Known for his charm and self-effacing humor, he was also a merciless campaigner and a hard-hitting public speaker. After Dilworth died from a brain tumor in 1974, friend and one-time Republican rival Thacher Longstreth remembered Dilworth as "the best mayor Philadelphia

³⁷ Richardson Dilworth to Stanley Bregman, Nov. 24, 1967, Dilworth Papers, box 35.

ever had." But Longstreth, whom Dilworth defeated for mayor in 1954, also recalled Dilworth's darker side: "He had the most instinctive thrust for the jugular of any man I've ever known." Dilworth's candor got him into trouble so often that he confessed—two decades before Texas governor Ann Richards appropriated the line—to having been born with "a silver foot in my mouth." After Dilworth spoke to a suburban Main Line audience on the merits of forming a regional school district, a man in the back of the auditorium angrily announced that he had the right to "live with my own kind and have my children go to school with my own kind." Dilworth was so enraged, he blurted out, "It wouldn't do any harm if a few Main Liners got mugged. It would teach them the facts of life." As mayor, he once characterized a heavy-set city councilman "as that big tub of guts, that mountain of lard." The same man who described the suburbs as "a white noose choking the city" also visited black North Philadelphia and reported that he "couldn't find a sober man or woman to talk to." Questioned about white Northeast Philadelphia parents' reaction to a school integration proposal, Dilworth replied: "I've been through a lot of this in South Philadelphia and I thought those Italian mothers were about as rugged as you can get, but they're nothing compared to the Jewish ones up there. . . . It's a little frightening and really quite depressing."³⁸

Dilworth was born to one of Pennsylvania's wealthiest and most socially prominent families. He was listed in the *Social Register* and had a well-earned reputation for being a connoisseur of food and fine wine. A 1968 letter he wrote to a childhood friend reveals a youth of unusual privilege: "I know of no more pleasant years than those summers in Southampton, prior to our entry into World War I. I remember how wonderful your mother always was to us and the bridge lessons we used to have in your house which always led to such rows. . . . I also remember the night of Ailsa Mellon's coming-out party, when I collapsed, drunk, on the ballroom floor while dancing with her. I remember my mother raising hell with me, and her chief complaint was that this almost certainly meant that the distinguished Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew W. Mellon, would never come to her

³⁸Dr. Harry M. Hoffman to Richardson Dilworth, Sept. 19, 1968; Dilworth to Hoffman, Sept. 23, 1968; Dilworth Papers, box 43. Gerald McKelvey, "Tumor Is Fatal to Ex-Mayor, Reform Leader" and "Sparkplug of City Rebirth," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 24, 1974, 1-A; "A Master of the Hard-Hitting Phrase," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 24, 1974, 5-A; Rose DeWolf, "The Passing Scene," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 14, 1967.

house again.”³⁹ When America entered World War I, Dilworth interrupted his undergraduate studies at Yale University to enlist in the marines. Injured in action, he was awarded the Purple Heart. During the war Dilworth had promised a dying comrade that he would visit the man’s fiancée when he returned to America. That brought Dilworth to Philadelphia where the fiancée, Elizabeth Brockie, lived. They fell in love and married in 1922. Dilworth’s parents disapproved of the union and refused to underwrite his studies at Yale Law School. Undaunted, Dilworth worked in a Pittsburgh steel mill and later in the Oklahoma oil fields. Eventually his family relented, and he entered Yale, where he edited the school’s law journal and graduated cum laude in 1926. After settling in Philadelphia, Dilworth became a successful lawyer, helping to establish a prominent city law firm that still bears his name. He reentered the Marine Corps during World War II, at age forty-three, and returned from Europe with a Silver Star and a Presidential Unit Citation. His first foray into politics in 1947 was unsuccessful, but his campaign for mayor marked the first strong Democratic challenge to the city’s Republican machine in seventy years. He was elected city treasurer in 1949, district attorney in 1951, and finally mayor in 1955.⁴⁰

As mayor, Dilworth paid little attention to the city’s schools. “We had so many other things that we had to do and nobody worried much about the schools,” he said in a 1967 interview. “We just didn’t realize how neglected they were becoming.”⁴¹ Dilworth’s attitude was typical for big-city mayors of his era. The legacy of a half-century of Progressive Era reform, schools were supposed to be “above politics,” and involvement by mayors would have been condemned as meddling. By the 1950s the democratizing impulses of the progressive education movement had dissipated. Progressive education no longer embodied the ideals that John Dewey and other educational leaders had begun promoting in the 1890s. These men and women had sought an end to elitism in the schools and a renewed effort to fulfill Horace Mann’s original vision for public education: as “the balance wheel of the social machinery.” Mann believed universal schooling could prevent the fragmentation of society by providing each citizen with a common education

³⁹ Richardson Dilworth to Mrs. R. S. Humphrey, Nov. 11, 1968, Dilworth Papers, box 43.

⁴⁰ McKelvey, “Tumor Is Fatal to Ex-Mayor, Reform Leader” and “Sparkplug of City Rebirth,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 24, 1974, 1-A.

⁴¹ Jorene Coffay, “Community Support for the Schools: Recent Trends in Philadelphia School Bond Elections,” M.A. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1970, 28.

grounded in Protestant, Republican values. Lawrence Cremin describes progressive education as “the educational phase of American Progressivism writ large.” Educational progressivism was “an effort to cast the school as a fundamental lever of social and political regeneration.” The influence of psychology, public health, social sciences, and vocational programs upon school curricula was unmistakable, but just as important was “the radical faith that culture could be democratized without being vulgarized, the faith that everyone could share not only in the benefits of the new sciences but in the pursuit of the arts as well.”⁴²

By the 1950s, however, social efficiency advocates began to dominate the movement, drowning out earlier progressives who had emphasized education’s democratizing capacities. “Shorn of its roots in politics and society,” writes Diane Ravitch, “pedagogical progressivism came to be identified with the child-centered school; with a pretentious scientism; with social efficiency and social utility rather than social reform; and with a vigorous suspicion of ‘bookish learning.’”⁴³ While enthusiasm for radical curriculum reform eventually died out, the political reforms achieved by progressives survived. The result, according to Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, “blend[ed] reform structures with a conservative content.”⁴⁴ Tyack and Hansot argue that the professionals who became education’s new leaders believed that “they knew how to bring about a smoothly running, socially efficient, stable societal order in which education was a major form of social engineering.” This new system of governance was particularly evident in urban school systems:

There the new advocates of professional management and their allies among elite business and professional groups waged political battles to destroy the old ward-based and lay management of schools and to replace it with a new corporate model of decision making. Under that corporate model, small central school boards elected at large from the city and composed of “successful men” were expected to act as policy-making bodies that delegated actual management to trained superintendents. When administrative progressives succeeded in doing this by changing city charters—which they usually did—they often

⁴² Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York, 1961), vii-x, 22, 88.

⁴³ Ravitch, *Troubled Crusade*, 46.

⁴⁴ Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (Berkeley, 1985), 148.

blocked the political channels by which the cities' working-class and ethnic communities had traditionally expressed their political interests in education. In the process they also enhanced the power of cosmopolitan elites.⁴⁵

In Philadelphia the charter change occurred in 1905.⁴⁶ Under the new school charter, a central school board comprised of fifteen members ran the school system. The board members were selected by the judges who served on the Court of Common Pleas. This process was designed to insulate the board from party politics, but the effect was quite the opposite. The judges, themselves political appointees, looked to the city's political leaders for guidance on whom to appoint. The school board that emerged, according to Marilyn Gittell and T. Edward Hollander, "was comprised of members of the Philadelphia business community, who were less concerned with educational policy than they were with avoiding controversy and limiting school expenditures to acceptable levels." Because the idea of an apolitical school system had widespread acceptance among the public, school board members sought to avoid controversy at all costs. Major decisions were resolved in nonpublic executive sessions, and the votes that were cast in public were almost always unanimous. Because of the strong influence of the city's business leaders—whose main concern was keeping taxes in check—the school system was perpetually underfunded. "The result was austerity capital and operating budgets throughout the postwar period, with a consequent deterioration in school plant and in the quality of instruction. A second consequence was . . . the emergence of the business manager as the most powerful person within the school system."⁴⁷

That business manager was Add Anderson. Anderson was a tenth-grade dropout whose first school system job was as a five-dollar-a-week office boy. In 1936 he became business manager, a post that gave him almost complete control over the school system until his death in 1962. Technically, the business manager and the school superintendent possessed equal power. In

⁴⁵Tyack and Hansot, *Managers of Virtue*, 107. For a more detailed discussion on the collapse of the progressive education movement, see Andrew Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960* (Chicago, 1993) or Patricia A. Graham, *Progressive Education from Arcady to Academe: A History of the Progressive Education Association, 1919-1955* (New York, 1967).

⁴⁶Vincent Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community* (Philadelphia, 1979), 34-35.

⁴⁷Gittell and Hollander, "Process of Change," 218-21.

practice, however, Anderson was in total control. As one *Inquirer* columnist wrote:

He was in charge of budget, supplies and janitors. But somehow Add also took charge of education. Because any principal who didn't play ball with Add found he didn't get any supplies, didn't get replacements for broken windows, didn't get any custodial service. . . . Add just took charge of the system. Janitors got paid more than teachers. Principals took orders from janitors and not the other way around.

Add was a friend to politicians. He kept the school budget (and thus the tax rate) low. And that's the way the politicians wanted it.

Add was the guy who turned down a plan to supply free meals to undernourished children with food from the federal government because he said it would cost the school district money to cook it.

Add was the man who advised the school board they could save \$10 million by replacing older teachers with beginners who could be paid less. . . . However, did a ward leader have a constituent in need of a job? Call Add. The school board always had room for one more. Did [the] City Council have a favorite architect or builder? Add would be more than happy to consider him.

Despite obvious deficiencies in Philadelphia's schools, there was no way of knowing just how bad they were because the board of education had refused to administer national standardized tests. So, when J. Harry LaBrum, who served as school board president from 1961 to 1965, insisted that Philadelphia's schools were "second to none," there was little his critics could say to prove otherwise.⁴⁸ When citizen groups began to push for reform and outside review of the city's schools, LaBrum was adamantly opposed. "When it becomes necessary to involve the citizens, we'll involve them," LaBrum announced. "We're not going to have a citizens' committee . . . interfere with the internal affairs of the Board of Education. . . . We're not going to abdicate to any outside group."⁴⁹

Eventually, however, the reform impulse ushered in by Dilworth in the 1950s began to infiltrate school board politics. Under pressure from the public, LaBrum agreed to hire William Odell, a Stanford University

⁴⁸ DeWolf and Gillespie, "See Mark Shedd," 76; Peter Binzen, *Whitetown, U.S.A.* (New York, 1970) 146, 273-76.

⁴⁹ Doris Wiley, "Labrum Won't 'Abdicate' to Citizens' Committees," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, April 11, 1963; DeWolf and Gillespie, "See Mark Shedd," 76.

education professor, to conduct a survey of the Philadelphia public schools. The survey cost \$125,000 and took eighteen months to complete. When the results were released in 1965, even board critics were shocked by the bleakness of Odell's findings. "The report card on the Philadelphia schools is in," a *Bulletin* editorial announced. "We are flunking. . . . The system, as they show in great detail, is in trouble." According to the study, eighty-eight percent of Philadelphia's school children were receiving an inadequate education, and overall pupil achievement lagged a half year or more behind students in most other cities. The school system's dropout rate was twenty-seven percent. Sixty-six of the city's schools needed to be replaced because they had been built before 1907 and did not meet the city's fire codes. Elementary school students scored lower on IQ tests after four years of school than they had as preschoolers. Black students were faring particularly poorly: fifty-six percent of black boys and forty-two percent of black girls were in the bottom quarter of their classes, in comparison to only fifteen percent of white boys and ten percent of white girls.⁵⁰

Only two months after Odell's report was released, voters approved a referendum that replaced the old fifteen-member board with a nine-member one appointed by the mayor. Although this was hardly a return to ward-based control, the new setup did make the schools more politically accountable by making the mayor responsible for naming the board. The civic groups which had sponsored the ballot measure put pressure on Mayor Tate to appoint Dilworth to the board. Dilworth was an obvious choice. He had a proven record and would add stature to the new school board. The only problem was that Tate and Dilworth didn't get along. Tate was envious of Dilworth's popularity and, like many, he was put off by Dilworth's brash, aristocratic manner. Still the two were able to reach a political accommodation. Dilworth promised not to challenge Tate in the 1967 mayoral primary; in exchange the mayor agreed to name Dilworth to the board as well as ensure that the other appointees would vote Dilworth board president.⁵¹

⁵⁰"School's Report Card," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, March 11, 1965; J. William Jones, "88% of Pupils Shortchanged, Whittier Says," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Nov. 12, 1964; J. William Jones, "School Expert Rejects Campus, Pairing Plans in Rebuilding Here," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Jan. 15, 1965; "Many IQs Dip After 4 Years of Schooling, Report Says," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Jan. 22, 1965; J. William Jones, "One in 3 Is Under Par, School Report to Show," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Feb. 22, 1965; William Odell, *Philadelphia's Public Schools: Educational Survey* (Philadelphia, 1965).

⁵¹DeWolf and Gillespie, "See Mark Shedd," 76-77; Gittell and Hollander, "Process of Change," 222; Resnik, *Turning on the System*, 17-18.

In December 1965, Dilworth's board was sworn in, and he immediately set to work. He knew the school system was seriously underfunded and that improvement would be expensive. Realizing that the public would demand justifications for large tax increases, Dilworth utilized what one might call negative public relations. "My job in essence, . . . after December of '65, was to show everybody how bad the schools were—a rare position for a PR guy," said Jones, who in July 1965 gave up his job as the *Bulletin's* education reporter to become school system information officer. "Dilworth . . . wanted me to give out the worst information I could find about the schools . . . so we could, A, pass construction bond issues to build new schools and, B, convince the politicians on the city council and in Harrisburg to come up with increased operating funds." Jones worked closely with his successor at the *Bulletin*, a twenty-four-year-old, Harvard-educated reporter named Richard de Lone. De Lone wrote a blistering series of articles on a week's experience as a substitute teacher. In the series he blasted racist teachers, apathetic principals, and what he believed was a failing school system. The series drew angry reactions from teachers and school officials, but thrilled Dilworth, who eventually befriended the young reporter.⁵²

This friendship led to Shedd's hiring. De Lone knew Sizer from his days at Harvard, and when Dilworth began searching for a new superintendent, de Lone advised him to get in touch with the graduate school of education's dean. (Dilworth was already partial to hiring someone from Harvard—in his personal notes on the negatives of one candidate, Dilworth scribbled that the applicant was "not a product of Harvard School of Education.") Sizer gave Dilworth a list of twelve possible candidates, and Mark Shedd's name was at the top of the list. Meanwhile, de Lone covered the 1966 AASA convention for the *Bulletin*, and when he returned he phoned Dilworth to tell him about Shedd and the speech he had given. "A little known fact," Jones said, "is that Rick de Lone drove Richardson Dilworth up to Englewood, New Jersey, and the two of them talked to Shedd. Dilworth came back and told the board he'd found a superintendent." In his first major appointment, even before he'd arrived in Philadelphia, Shedd hired de Lone as his top assistant and speechwriter.⁵³

⁵² Jones, interview.

⁵³ Dilworth Papers, box 35; Jones, interview; DeWolf and Gillespie, "See Mark Shedd," 77; Binzen, *Whitetown*, 284–85.

Fallout from the November 17 riot did not put an immediate halt to Dilworth's and Shedd's reform efforts. From 1967 to 1971 Shedd's administration pressed forward, but as time passed it encountered stronger and stronger resistance from teachers, administrators, and, most importantly, the city's working-class whites. Still, Shedd's administration had enough success for *Time* magazine to describe him in 1971 as "one of the nation's most progressive and innovative school officials."⁵⁴ Here are some highlights.

Increased funding. Without more money, very little could have been accomplished. Before Dilworth and Shedd took over the school system, Philadelphia ranked second to last in teacher-pupil ratio, and seventh among the nation's eleven largest school districts in expenditure per pupil. In 1965, for example, Philadelphia spent \$447 per pupil, in comparison to \$728 for New York City, \$515 for Newark, \$508 for Washington, D.C., \$454 for Detroit, and an average of \$656 for Philadelphia's suburbs.⁵⁵ Under the leadership of Dilworth and Shedd, the Philadelphia school district's annual operating budget increased 141 percent between the 1965-66 and 1971-72 school years, from \$151 million to \$365 million. While taxpayers were forced to bear the bulk of these increases, Shedd and Dilworth were adept at securing federal aid; between 1966 and 1970, federal funds for the Philadelphia School District doubled, from \$27 million annually to \$54 million.⁵⁶

Much of the additional funding went to hiring additional teachers and improving teacher salaries. Philadelphia's salary scale was well below the national average, but even more importantly there was a significant gap between teacher salaries in Philadelphia and those in the city's suburbs. In 1959 veteran teachers were paid \$6,100 a year in Philadelphia, compared to \$8,000 a year in Upper Darby and \$9,800 in Jenkintown. As a result, Upper Darby had ten applicants for every opening, while Philadelphia had 1,500 vacancies which the district was forced to fill with noncertified permanent substitutes. The teacher shortage, along with pressure from the PFT, prompted the board to negotiate contracts that increased average salaries from \$7200 a year in 1965 to \$12,500 in 1971; wage increases alone cost the

⁵⁴"Ousting a Reformer," *Time*, Dec. 20, 1971, 58.

⁵⁵Wilson Riles, *The Urban Education Task Force: Final Report of the Task Force on Urban Education to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare* (New York, 1970), 51; John Corr, "Still 'A Long Way to Go' After the Optimism of 1967," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 14, 1969, 1.

⁵⁶Dilworth Papers, box 46.

district \$57 million between 1970 and 1972.⁵⁷

Along with the huge increases in the district's operating budgets, Shedd and Dilworth embarked on a six-year, \$500 million building program. Responding to the physical plant shortcomings outlined in the Odell report, the building program financed three new high schools, four middle schools, twenty-five elementary schools and seventy-seven major additions. The district also spent another \$53 million on renovating existing schools.⁵⁸

Improved test scores for elementary and middle school students. One of Odell's major findings was that sixty percent of the school district's students came to school unprepared to learn due to factors linked to socioeconomic standing and home life. Accordingly, kindergarten, Head Start, and other compensatory and early childhood programs became priorities for Shedd's administration. In 1965 the school district had a part-time kindergarten program which, due to lack of space, could only serve 20,000 of the 25,000 students who were eligible. By 1971 kindergarten was full-time, and the waiting lists had been eliminated. New reading programs were also developed for grades one through four. As a result, there were modest but consistent improvements in reading and other test scores for students in grades two through eight. In some cases, improvement meant merely slowing the rate of decline for students who had been falling farther behind each year. In other cases, real advances made by seventy-five percent of students were offset statistically by the continued academic regression of the bottom twenty-five percent. While the improvement in test scores never approached the revolutionary upturn Shedd had envisioned—Philadelphia students continued to lag behind national averages—the improvement nonetheless represented clear progress for a school system that served so many disadvantaged students.⁵⁹

The standardized testing program was in itself a breakthrough. Since before

⁵⁷ John Corr, "Phila. a National Example of Change," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 16, 1969, 1; Frederick McCord, Peter Binzen, and Philip Schaeffer, "Philadelphia's Zooming Suburbs," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Sept. 25, 1959, 1; Mark Shedd, "Testimony to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity," Washington, D.C., Sept. 21, 1971.

⁵⁸ Shedd, "Five Year Progress Report," Dilworth Papers, box 46.

⁵⁹ Shedd, "Five Year Progress Report"; John Gillespie, "Pupils Raise Test Scores in Basic Skills," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, May 14, 1968; John Gillespie, "Phila. Pupils Fare Poorly in National Tests," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, January 13, 1969; John Gillespie, "Public Pupils Here Still Lag Behind Nation," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Feb. 12, 1970; Linda Loyd, "School Test Score Rise Hailed," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 27, 1972.

1965 there had been no way for school officials to gauge how well students were progressing or how they compared to national norms.

More students going to college. The percentage of high school graduates going on to college increased from thirty percent in 1966 to forty percent in 1970.⁶⁰

More black administrators and principals. Shedd used the city charter's "5 percent rule"—which permitted department heads to appoint five percent of their managers without consulting either seniority lists or civil service test results—to remedy decades of discrimination against black candidates for administrative posts. (This strategy so angered white administrators that at one point they threatened to join the Teamsters' Union to stop it.⁶¹) By 1970, twenty percent of the school system's principals were black, in comparison to seven percent in 1960.⁶² This was perhaps Shedd's most lasting legacy. He gave a generation of prominent black educators their starts, grooming the future superintendents of Boston, Cleveland, Harrisburg, Oakland, Wilmington, and Philadelphia. "He recognized that here was a school district that had a majority of blacks in its population, but had very little input coming from the black community," said Santee Ruffin, a former Gratz High School teacher whom Shedd promoted to vice principal and then principal of Germantown High School. "He felt that black students needed to see blacks functioning as administrators."⁶³

Innovative programs. There were scores of them. By today's standards some of them—magnet schools, team teaching, computer education, foreign language instruction for elementary schoolers, etc.—may seem a bit mundane, but at the time these were cutting-edge innovations. Two programs in particular received the largest share of national attention. One was the Parkway Project. This "school without walls" attempted to combat student restlessness by holding classes throughout the city. The Parkway Project signed up local institutions—most along the mile-and-a-half long Benjamin Franklin Parkway—to assist in the teaching of classes related to their

⁶⁰ Shedd, "Five Year Progress Report."

⁶¹ Binzen, *Whitetown*, 211.

⁶² "Basic Education Stalemated Despite Extensive Efforts," *Bulletin*, Dec. 6, 1970, sec. 2, 3; DeWolf and Gillespie, "See Mark Shedd," 148; Peter Binzen, "Phila. School Board Says Its Policy on Integration Is Among Best in U.S.," *Bulletin*, Nov. 20, 1960, sec. 1, 3.

⁶³ Lori Cornish, "Mark Shedd Remembered," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1986, 1-A; Inga Saffron, "Friends Remember Shedd for His Legacy," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 24, 1986, 2-B.

profession or business. Mathematics, electronics, and chemistry were taught at the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia's renowned science museum. Art history was taught at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Moore College of Art, biology at the Academy of Natural Sciences, physical education at the YMCA, and journalism at the offices of the *Bulletin* and the *Inquirer*. Although old guard administrators grumbled that the Parkway Program was little more than a public relations ploy, it received rave reviews from students, parents, teachers, and outside observers.⁶⁴

The Philadelphia School District's other showcase was the Pennsylvania Advancement School. The school originated in North Carolina, but when it ran into political problems in its native state, Shedd convinced director Peter Bittenweiser to relocate to Philadelphia. The Advancement School took seventh and eighth graders who hated school and in fourteen-week sessions tried to transform these underachievers into students passionate about learning. Located in an abandoned warehouse, the school had few conventional classrooms, and teachers were encouraged to experiment with new ideas and methods, many of which filtered down to the traditional schools. "One could spend a day at the Advancement School," wrote one observer, "and find out just about everything new that was happening in the world of education." Some parents were skeptical of the informal, unstructured environment and the emphasis on fun and games, but the Advancement School seemed to work. "He never talked about the other school," reported one parent. "He doesn't shut up about this one." The most persistent criticism of the program—aside from its exorbitant \$2,000 per student cost—was the lack of connection between the Advancement School and the traditional schools students returned to after their fourteen weeks were up. "They turned me on; then they put me back and let me get turned off again," one student complained.⁶⁵

These experiments won praise and press clippings for Shedd and his staff, but there was skepticism locally, much of it sincere. "I don't think Shedd understands the problems of big city education," said Celia Pincus, a senior

⁶⁴ Katrina Dyke, "Parkway: Informality, Opinions, Pupil Power," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, April 30, 1970, 3; Henry Resnik, "High School With No Walls—It's a Happening in Philadelphia," *Think*, November-December 1969, 33-36.

⁶⁵ John Corr, "Pennsylvania Advancement School: Dropout Candidates Turn On," *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, Jan. 19, 1969, 6-10; John Gillespie, "The Idea Is to Get These Kids Turned On," *Sunday Bulletin Magazine*, March 10, 1968, 4-9; Resnik, *Turning on the System*, 57-78.

PFT official and former union president. “We’ve gone through one experiment after another. I have not seen one program that will effect results for all 300,000 school children in Philadelphia. There may have been small successes for 150 children here, 50 children there, and so on. But this is very costly. We’ve got to decide whether we can get that kind of money to put these pilot programs into general practice. We can’t afford to boast of a successful program affecting 150 children when we have 300,000 children to deal with.”⁶⁶ Pincus’s view was probably prejudiced by the fact that the most innovative teachers—the ones most likely to be awarded special grants by the district—tended to be recent college graduates, individuals who did not identify strongly with the union. Still, she had a point. Imposing large-scale, top-down reform on a school system as large as Philadelphia’s proved immensely difficult. As Michael Katz argues, top-down reform is “a complicated, subtle, perhaps even superhuman task” because the “managerial class has supplied institutions with a built-in capacity to mobilize resistance to serious reform.” For this reason Katz somberly concludes that “attempts to change or radically improve the quality of schooling by systemwide directives [will] almost always fail.” Absent the political will to dethrone the managerial class or create a more equitable social order, the best hope for improvement “is reform undertaken at the level of the individual school.”⁶⁷ It’s not surprising then that Shedd’s most noteworthy innovations involved implementing new programs, rather than reworking the traditional, day-to-day lesson plans used in most classrooms.

Ever the idealist, Shedd assumed that creating an environment conducive to change would eventually transform the entire system. For that reason test results and educational outcomes were secondary in importance to social empowerment and “turning on” young minds to learning. “Honestly, I don’t even remember a discussion on test scores,” Sloane recalled.

It just wasn’t the issue. It was a much more general thing. It was, ‘We’ve got to make a difference in the lives of kids.’ . . . This whole emphasis on outcomes is a relatively new phenomenon. At the time, equality was viewed as an access and treatment issue, rather than as an outcome issue. . . . I think Mark’s assumption was that one changed attitudes by sermonizing, ‘You must do this.’ His speeches were evangelical in nature. The thought was that the climate would

⁶⁶ DeWolf and Gillespie, “See Mark Shedd,” 147–48.

⁶⁷ Michael Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, 1987), 118–35.

eventually filter down. We never got down to the classroom level, except at the experimental level. The Advancement School, the Parkway school— yea. But there was such an entrenched bureaucracy that we never got to deal with issues like, What is [the] nature of the reading instruction? . . . I've been [superintendent of the Norwalk school system] for 11 years, and I don't think we seriously were able to get down to that level till three or four years ago. It took seven or eight years arranging the parts, . . . getting the right people in leadership. And this is a dinky little place—I've got 11,000 kids. . . . In many cases it was changing principals. . . . I had to wait for people to die or retire or move out to some other place.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, Shedd and Dilworth were never able to build a solid base of political support among parents. There was little to unite the parents whose children were benefiting from the disparate mix of programs that Shedd had initiated; also, the students who were being helped most tended to come from disadvantaged families who wielded little political clout. As a result, the public's assessment of Shedd and Dilworth came to be based less on the purely educational aspects of their reforms and more on their politics. And their politics clearly favored the black majority in the school system over the white majority in the city's electorate, a fact made clear for many by their handling of the November 17 riot. While the Black Power movement terrified many whites, Dilworth perceived it as progress. "There is, of course, great fear in the white community about the Black Power movement, and too many of us whites like to look at its militant and destructive aspects rather than its constructive possibilities," Dilworth said in a 1968 speech before the American Philosophical Society. "The Black Power movement has within it the power to create a spirit of unity, confidence, pride and purpose in the black community. This is essential if the black man is to establish himself as a first class citizen."⁶⁹

Such talk—however enlightened—tended to reinforce the growing racial paranoia of many working-class whites. "Niggers is takin' over," a patron at a Kensington bar told Binzen. "Look at this," the man continued, pointing at a headline—"Romney Visits N. Phila"—in the afternoon paper. "Them politicians. Comin' here to visit the nigger slums. They're all the same.

⁶⁸ Sloane, interview.

⁶⁹ Dilworth Papers, box 32.

They'll do anything for votes."⁷⁰ Obviously, by the late 1960s, the spread of white, working-class racism and resistance to liberal politics was a national phenomenon, and Philadelphia was hardly the only city where political battles ended up being fought in the public schools. Only in Philadelphia, however, did the leadership of the public school system side so decisively with the black community and others challenging the status quo. Consequently, Shedd and Dilworth became a target of the forces of reaction in Philadelphia.

School reform failed in Philadelphia—as it would in other cities—because it inevitably became linked with racial politics. Ideally, this shouldn't have happened since the shortcomings of urban schools were not inherently linked to racial discrimination. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, the 1966 federal study better known as the Coleman Report, was originally commissioned to demonstrate a link between racial discrimination and educational outcomes. But after two years of study, James Coleman and his colleagues concluded that race made little difference in predicting student achievement and that white and black students, though thoroughly segregated, attended comparable schools.⁷¹ Binzen validates Coleman's findings in his 1970 book, *Whitetown, U.S.A.* Binzen concludes, based upon test scores and his own firsthand evaluations, that the segregated schools in Northeast Philadelphia's depressed white neighborhoods were just as miserable as the segregated schools in North and West Philadelphia's black ghettos. The only difference was that while black parents were pressing hard to improve ghetto schools, white parents—obsessed with racial purity in the schools and generally fearful of change—were content with the inferior education their children received. The prospect of forced busing made "whitetoners" all the more committed to preserving the status quo. Although "noise, dirt, and confusion created chaotic conditions" at many of the schools in Northeast Philadelphia, white parents opposed temporary transfers to newer, less crowded schools because "they feared race mixing." Binzen argues that "whitetonner" thinking reflected what Margaret Mead, writing in *The School in American Culture*, termed "The Little Red Schoolhouse Ideal." "Embedded in the Ideal," according to Mead, "is the notion: 'What was good enough for me is good enough for my children.'" At a school board meeting in Northeast

⁷⁰ Binzen, *Whitetown*, 122-23.

⁷¹ James Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C., 1966), 3-23, 290-313.

Philadelphia, Binzen heard a parent utter those very words.⁷²

Proving the link between white racism and opposition to school reform is tricky. Because the Philadelphia school board was appointed, not elected, there was no direct way for voters to express approval or disapproval of school board policies. While the mayor was responsible for naming the board, election results from mayoral campaigns are not sufficient to prove a causal link because mayoral campaigns involve too many issues unrelated to school policy. Jorene Coffay, in a 1970 master's thesis, makes a convincing argument that one can measure public support for district leadership by looking at the results of school bond elections. Five bond issues were put on the city ballot between 1966 and 1969, all of them linked to the \$500 million building program. Even though the building program was seemingly apolitical and benefited neighborhoods throughout the city, many voters—unable to vote board members out of office—used bond elections as referendums on school policies, according to Coffay.⁷³

Of the five bond issues studied by Coffay, the first three—in 1966, 1967, and 1968—were approved by voters. The fourth in May 1969 was defeated. Following this defeat, the school board cut their bond request by \$30 million, and the revised proposal passed in November 1969. Coffay's analysis of the two 1969 votes reveals that the best predictor of "no" votes in a given ward was the presence of "white backlash" sentiment, as measured by the percentage of votes cast for George Wallace in the 1968 presidential election. (Coffay compared Wallace voting to eight other variables in each ward—including home ownership, median income, black registration, children in the public schools, and Democratic registration.) Ward 45, for example, which comprises Kensington and Richmond, had both the lowest percentage of "yes" votes for the May 1969 bond issue (21 percent), as well as the highest percentage of votes cast for Wallace in 1968 (15 percent). Based upon her statistical analysis, Coffay concludes that "whites [who] voted against the bond issue . . . were, in fact, motivated to a high degree of 'white backlash.' This relationship reveals the resentment of whites concerning the school system's increasing response to Negro needs and the general polarization of Negroes and whites in the city."⁷⁴

The May 1969 bond issue was defeated by heavy turnout in "no" voting

⁷²Binzen, *Whitetown*, 36-37, 54-55, 145-48.

⁷³Jorene Coffay, "Community Support for the Schools," 1970, 1-17.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 45-137.

white wards; the city's black wards supported the bond, but turnout there was low. Ironically, some of the heaviest outpourings of "no" votes came from white areas where schools were the most overcrowded. Even though these neighborhoods had the most to gain from school district spending on new schools, they opposed the referendum because they distrusted Shedd and Dilworth. A consultant who conducted an analysis of the election for the board of education reached a similar conclusion: "There was a feeling that the black community was getting all the improvements at the expense of whites. At the same time there was a feeling that Shedd and Dilworth did not listen to the [white] parents."⁷⁵ A comparison of the May 1969 bond election and November 1971 mayoral campaign between Rizzo and Longstreth further supports Coffay's finding of a link between "white backlash" and opposition to school reform. In 1971, thirty-four of the thirty-seven wards that had voted "no" in May 1969 supported Rizzo; in addition, only one of the thirty-five wards that supported Rizzo hadn't also opposed the May 1969 bond issue. Rizzo made Shedd a major campaign issue, so, based on Coffay's findings, it makes sense that there would be a strong correlation between voting for Rizzo in 1971 and voting "no" on the May 1969 bond issue.⁷⁶

A series of racial disturbances at Bok Technical High School in October 1968 provide further evidence of how race had permeated Philadelphia school politics. Bok was located at Eighth and Mifflin streets in the heart of Italian South Philadelphia. In 1968, the school's student population was eighty-five percent black, with sixty percent bused in from North and West Philadelphia. Neighborhood residents would claim that the school's racial imbalance was the source of conflict, but Bok's enrollment had been more than seventy percent black since the mid-1950s. Until 1968 "the community managed to live in peace" with the school, according to *Bulletin* reporter John Gillespie. But in October of that year, the knifing of a white student outside the school touched off a week-long showdown involving white protesters, Bok students, school officials, and police.⁷⁷ As it turned out, the

⁷⁵ Binzen, *Whitetown*, 296-97.

⁷⁶ "How Rizzo and Longstreth Shaped Up Ward by Ward," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 3, 1971, 4; "How the Wards Voted on the School Bond," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 22, 1969.

⁷⁷ John T. Gillespie, "Schools, Communities Go to Work, Seek Solutions to Racial Disorders," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Nov. 6, 1968, 48.

black teenager arrested for the stabbing was not a Bok student.⁷⁸ By the time this was known, however, the conflict had already spiraled out of control. In the days following the stabbing, black students complained that in retaliation whites in the neighborhood were harassing them, both verbally and physically, on their way home from school. "One day about four of us were coming down Ninth Street," said Larry Williams, a fifteen-year-old black Bok student. "A bunch of whites, ten or twelve guys older than we were, came over with sticks and began swinging at us. . . . We started running and a couple of them threw cans and bottles at us. A couple of times they yelled 'nigger' at us." Black students subsequently staged a protest to complain about the harassment. Word of their protest spread, and, in response, by the end of the following school day over a thousand white residents gathered outside Bok to stage a counter-protest. Armed with homemade signs—"All the Way With Wallace," "White Power is Best," and "Down with Bok"—the white protesters shouted "Burn Bok" and taunted black students as police loaded the teens onto buses. "You should have seen them white women," Kenneth Jackson, a sixteen-year-old student from West Philadelphia, told the *Inquirer*. "They were cursing and spitting at the cops and the priests. They were so wild the cops had to take us from the school on buses; then they say how bad we are."

Rizzo won praise for deftly defusing what could have been a violent confrontation—although some black leaders noted Rizzo used far more restraint with the white protesters than he ever had in his dealings with black protesters. After sending the students home on school buses, Rizzo pleaded with the white protesters to return to their homes. "Do it for me and go ahead home," he said. According to a *Tribune* reporter on the scene, Rizzo's presence seemed to calm the crowd and many began to disperse. Fearing further conflict, Shedd kept Bok closed on Thursday and Friday, allowing tempers to cool.⁷⁹

White racism was certainly not the only factor that contributed to the demise of school reform in Philadelphia. There were others, namely shifting

⁷⁸ Richardson Dilworth to Harold Wiegand, Oct. 31, 1968, Dilworth Papers, box 44.

⁷⁹ Frederick McCord, "Ten Days of Disorders: Pupils, Neighbors and Faculty Describe Crisis," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Oct. 20, 1968; " 'All the Way With Wallace' Heard Amid Tumult at Bok," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Oct. 12, 1968, 1; "Group Tells Gov. Shafer That Negroes Were Beaten but Whites Befriended," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Oct. 22, 1968, 5.

demographics, the decline of the city's economic base, white class conflict, resistance from within the school system, and the black community's failure to generate significant political support for Shedd and Dilworth. Nonetheless, recognition of other influences that worked against Shedd and Dilworth's reform efforts should in no way be interpreted as a departure from this article's thesis that white, working-class resistance—expressed mainly in racial terms—was the decisive factor in ending five years of unprecedented school reform in Philadelphia. Each of these other factors had a racial component; veteran white administrators, for instance, resented Shedd's efforts to name more blacks to top posts. And, as Michael Katz argues so eloquently, historians who reject cause-and-effect explanations in favor of multivariate analysis run the risk of marginalizing their scholarship. Katz specifically takes issue with the claim of Carl Kaestle and Maris Vinovskis that "education itself is so complex that it cannot be treated as a single variable and then pegged to a single historical development out of which all other concerns flow." Katz counters that such thinking represents a "disengagement of social science from concern with critical analysis" of public policy:

Although social institutions always relate in complex ways to their contexts, interdependence is an interpretative strategy that signals a retreat from any attempt to find a principle or core within a social system. Its world lacks a center, a driving force. Social development comes simply from the reciprocal effects of the many factors operating within a complex network. It becomes impossible to say what gives coherence or shape to any social system. Hence the levers of change remain obscure and no basis exists for moral judgment.⁸⁰

Taken alone, any one of the other factors presented a significant obstacle to meaningful school reform, and, as a result, Shedd was never going to achieve the revolutionary changes he initially envisioned for the Philadelphia schools. Still, were it not for the emergence of white, working-class resistance to school reform—a resistance that propelled Frank Rizzo's mayoral campaign—Shedd and his successors could have continued to make gradual, modest progress. But when white voters began to draw a link, albeit a mistaken one, between social unrest and school reforms aimed at empowering

⁸⁰ Katz, *Reconstructing*, 140; Carl Kaestle and Maris Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1980), 233.

students, the prospects of Shedd and Dilworth dimmed dramatically.

In Philadelphia, as elsewhere, public concern about spiraling school budgets was heightened by the decline of the city's economic base. The demise of manufacturing in Philadelphia began in the first two decades of the twentieth century with the loss of the fine garment and textile industry to competition from the South and abroad.⁸¹ The overall decline in the city's economy accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1958 and 1963, the number of manufacturing jobs in Philadelphia slipped from 298,500 to 264,900; between 1970 and 1980, the city lost another 140,000 of these high-paying jobs. Philadelphia's retail sales dipped two percent between 1958 and 1963; at the same time the city's suburbs experienced a thirty-five percent increase. All of this contributed to a 12.4 percent decrease in the city's assessed evaluation between 1956 and 1971. Translated into 1994 dollars, the total value of city property dropped from \$19.6 billion to \$17.2 billion. The property value of the average home in Philadelphia actually increased between 1961 and 1966, indicating that almost all of the decline in assessed valuation was due to a drop in the value of commercial property.⁸² As a result, homeowners were forced to bear a larger share of the city's tax burden.

Even though Philadelphia was spending less on education than its suburbs, both per capita and per student, before the Shedd-Dilworth era, the average city resident paid higher taxes than the average suburbanite. In 1965 Philadelphia averaged \$147 in per capita local taxes in comparison to an average of \$110 for the city's suburbs; in addition, Philadelphians paid an average of 7.4 percent of their annual income in local taxes, in comparison to 4.9 percent for those living in the suburbs. The reason for this gap is that Philadelphia, like most cities, spent more than sixty cents of every tax dollar on noneducational municipal services, such as fire and police departments, trash collection, health and welfare programs, prisons, and public transportation. In the suburbs, where there was less demand for these

⁸¹ Philip Scranton, *Figured Tapestry: Production, Markets and Power in Philadelphia Textiles, 1885-1941* (Cambridge, 1989), 11.

⁸² Riles, *Urban Education Task Force*, 30-37; Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontiers: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985), 267; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Governments: 1957* (Washington, D.C., 1958), 5:119; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Governments: 1972* (Washington, D.C., 1973), 64.

services, seventy cents of every tax dollar collected was spent on schools.⁸³

Historian Jeffrey Mirel has argued that one cannot understand the decline of urban schools without considering the declining financial resources available to school systems. In *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System*, Mirel focuses on financial issues in explaining both the failure of school reform in Detroit in the 1960s as well as the overall decline of the Detroit school system since World War II. According to Mirel, historians have too often overlooked the role of material resources in the history of urban education: "In a sense, we have been considering schooling as an abstraction, as an enterprise unrestrained by material demands and uninfluenced by the actual conditions in which educational policymakers, community activist groups, teachers, parents, and students must operate." While Mirel sees economic factors as decisive in the decline of Detroit's school system since World War II, he also acknowledges that "the amount of resources that school systems have is often a good indication of the level of commitment that a community . . . has for public schools."⁸⁴ That said, the amount of money Philadelphia spent on public schools cannot be explained independent from issues of race because a white voter's "level of commitment" is undoubtedly influenced by the racial composition of the school system he or she is being asked to support.

Shifts in the city's demographics contributed to the growing tax burden on Philadelphia's white working class and also exacerbated preexisting racial tension in the city. Even though whites composed sixty-six percent of the Philadelphia's 1,948,609 residents in 1970, white students accounted for only thirty-six percent of the enrollment in Philadelphia's public schools. The reason? Philadelphia trailed only Pittsburgh in private and parochial school enrollment: forty percent of the city's school children were in non-public schools, compared to sixteen percent nationally. Also, between 1940 and 1970 Philadelphia's black population increased 160 percent, and many blacks began moving into predominantly white communities that were less than receptive to their arrival. During that same period, the city's white population decreased twenty-three percent, as the population of the city's

⁸³ Riles, *Urban Education Task Force*, 43-53.

⁸⁴ Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor, 1993), xii-xiii.

suburbs—which were almost entirely white—grew by 126 percent.⁸⁵ “The move to the suburbs was almost self-generating,” as Kenneth Jackson argues in *Crabgrass Frontiers*:

As larger numbers of affluent citizens moved out, jobs followed. In turn, this attracted more families, more roads, and more industries. The cities were often caught in a reverse cycle. As businesses and taxpayers left, the demand for middle- to upper-income dwelling units in older neighborhoods declined. At the same time, population increases among low-income minorities . . . produced an increase in the demand for low-income housing. The new residents required more health care and social welfare services from the city government than did the old, but they were less able to pay for them. To increase expenditures, municipal authorities levied higher property taxes, thus encouraging middle-class homeowners to leave, causing the cycle to repeat.

Racism, Jackson says, provided “an extra incentive” for whites to flee.⁸⁶

South Philadelphia, for example, experienced a sixteen percent drop in its white population between 1960 and 1970, from 190,292 to 160,638; at the same time the area’s black population increased four percent, from 66,368 to 68,712. The changing demographics undoubtedly increased the racial paranoia of the area’s white residents. This may explain why Bok High School’s neighbors, who had once coexisted peacefully with Bok’s black students, suddenly became so militant in 1968. Another explanation involves the influence of the antiwar and civil rights movements upon white ethnic communities. According to Binzen, before the 1960s Philadelphia’s working-class whites had historically deferred to authority. “To be able to talk back to Authority—this is something that I have to get used to,” a Kensington machinist told Binzen. “And this is one of the things that retards me as a leader—that I cannot talk to Authority without any feelings of fear or . . . respect. . . . The colored are evening up a big score. They’re getting a lot more attention. My feeling is that we don’t squawk enough.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Enrollment in the Philadelphia Public Schools: Ten Year Summary, 1966–1975* (Philadelphia, no date), 11; Thomas Dye, “Urban School Segregation: A Comparative Analysis,” in *The Politics of Urban Education*, ed. Marilyn Gittell and Alan G. Hevesi (New York, 1969), 101; Binzen, “Philadelphia: Politics Invades the School,” *Saturday Review*, 49; Howard Chudacoff and Judith Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society* (3d ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1988), 269.

⁸⁶ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontiers*, 284–85, 289–90.

⁸⁷ Binzen, *Whitetown*, 138–40.

Disaffected whites saw the victories achieved by civil rights and antiwar protesters, and concluded that the tactics of civil disobedience might help them get their own grievances addressed. White antibusing protesters in Boston, for instance, drew inspiration from the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr., according to historian Ronald Formisano:

The kind of communities that had been unlikely to organize any kind of protest as late as the 1950s discovered a decade later a willingness among some of their residents to organize, to protest in the streets, and to fight for their interests. Repercussions from the 1960s were felt very quickly in Boston in the neighborhoods of the “silent majority” and of the hitherto passively obedient working class. . . . Those who had shaken their heads at rebelliousness a short time before were saying, “Maybe we should do like the blacks do.” Indeed, one group of mothers and children blocking the big trucks on their way to Logan Airport sang “We Shall Overcome.”⁸⁸

In *Boston Against Busing*, Formisano attacks the conventional wisdom that blames the Boston busing crisis on white, working-class racism. He compares this argument to the “redneck myth,” which allowed southern elites to blame lower-class whites for violence and discrimination in the Jim Crow South and thus wash their hands of any moral responsibility:

When racial strife moved north, the myth adapted and became the urban redneck myth. It continues to provide the comforting reassurance that the lower classes of American society are primarily responsible for racism, both overt and institutional. . . .

One consequence of the some, not-too-much desegregation that tends to be imposed on the lower classes is that the white, working class screams and acts out its frustrations in public. Neighborhood militants and racists are catapulted into influence and to the forefront of media attention, while an aura of shame begins to infect the atmosphere. This allows the rest of society, particularly middle-class liberals, to feel morally superior to the “racists” in South Boston.⁸⁹

Formisano’s class-based explanation of white backlash is relevant to the

⁸⁸ Ronald Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 143-46, 162-65.

⁸⁹ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 233-34.

plight of school reform in Philadelphia. As in Boston, the key decision makers in Philadelphia did not represent the city's white working class. Even though working-class whites composed a plurality of the city's population, they could claim only one kindred spirit on the school board, veteran labor leader William Ross. Ross, who consistently opposed Shedd and Dilworth's reform efforts, became board president in 1971 under Mayor Rizzo.⁹⁰ Also, Dilworth's financial independence and family background proved to be less of a political asset as school board president than it had been as mayor. In his mayoral campaigns, Dilworth's wealth made him seem less susceptible to corruption, less likely to become beholden to party bosses. Whether he could relate to the typical Philadelphia voter was not an issue. As school board president, however, his wealth proved to be a political liability. Dilworth's personal papers reveal a lifestyle that was incomprehensible to most Philadelphians: a receipt for a \$6,061 Mercedes-Benz, numerous invitations to dinner parties and black-tie affairs, a membership card for the Racquet and Tennis Club on Park Avenue in New York City, and dozens of bills from some of Philadelphia's finest restaurants. There's even a \$11.04 bill from an electrician Dilworth hired, according to the letter accompanying the bill, "to replace burned-out bulbs in your residence."⁹¹

Dilworth's Washington Square home—today the headquarters of the Philadelphia County Dental Society—was located in the heart of Society Hill. With its restored colonial townhouses, historic landmarks, and quiet, tree-lined streets, Society Hill is now one of Philadelphia's most fashionable neighborhoods. Few of its residents know that their neighborhood takes its name not from the high society types who may reside there, but from the Free Society of Traders, to whom William Penn deeded the land 300 years ago. Until the 1950s, in fact, Society Hill had been a working-class neighborhood with a significant black population; just to the west, down Spruce and Pine streets, is the ward W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about in *The Philadelphia Negro*.⁹² As mayor, Dilworth viewed Society Hill and several other Center City neighborhoods as prime locations for redevelopment. Symbolizing his own commitment to urban renewal, Dilworth moved to

⁹⁰ Binzen, "Politics Invades the Schools," 46; Thomas Hine and Howard Shapiro, "Ross Will Head School Board, Shedd Attends His Last Meeting," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 7, 1971, 23.

⁹¹ Dilworth Papers, boxes 43, 44.

⁹² Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 3-19; Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900* (Cambridge, 1986), 21-22.

223-225 South Sixth Street in 1957. This gesture alone, however, would not have been a sufficient catalyst for the gentrification of Society Hill were it not for the hundreds of millions of dollars in federal aid made available by the 1949 Taft-Ellender-Wagner Housing Act. The act authorized the Federal Housing Authority to subsidize slum-clearance and gentrification. In Center City Philadelphia, urban renewal precipitated a sixty-seven percent drop in the black population, from 10,536 in 1940 to 3,506 in 1970. Relative to Philadelphia's overall black population, the number of blacks affected by urban renewal in Society Hill and throughout Center City was minimal. Still, Center City was the only predominantly white area of Philadelphia that saw its black population drop between 1960 and 1970.⁹³

This fact made Dilworth susceptible to charges of hypocrisy when he blamed the decline of urban schools on the migration of civic-minded whites to the suburbs. These suburbanites were people who, according to Dilworth, "had taken a real interest in our public school system. That interest vanished with their departure to the suburbs, and the school system was sadly ignored here as it has been in virtually every other large Northern city for the past 45 years."⁹⁴ The remedy prescribed by Dilworth and Shedd was a regional school district that would integrate—both physically and financially—Philadelphia's school system with those of the outlying suburbs. According to the ex-mayor, there was only one reason suburbanites would resist such a plan: "It's fear. Yes the whole resistance is based on fear. Why the average reasonably prosperous, white middle-class resident is delighted to shake the dust of Philadelphia from his shoes in [the] late afternoon and get back to what he calls the quiet peace of the white suburbs."⁹⁵

While Dilworth's analysis has much historical validity, in the minds of suburbanites as well as those who had fled downtown for Northeast Philadelphia, Dilworth's statements smacked of hypocrisy. "Is it fair that you live in a \$60,000 home in Society Hill, and I only live in a \$30,000 home in the *suburbs* which you call a dirty word?" asked "Mrs. J. K. of Melrose Park" in a January 1971 letter to Dilworth.

⁹³ *Population Characteristics: 1960 & 1970 Philadelphia Census Tracts* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1972), 12-13; Daughen and Binzen, *Cop Who Would Be King*, 194; Chudacoff and Smith, *Evolution*, 269-72.

⁹⁴ Richardson Dilworth to Mrs. Fred Wile, Dec. 8, 1967, Dilworth Papers, box 43.

⁹⁵ Dorothy Roak, "Dilworth's Dilemma: Getting Suburbs 'Involved' in City," *Main Line Times*, March 17, 1967, 1.

After all, you pushed all the deprived and poor out of your neighborhood and now want to ship them into the suburbs, so your affluent life can be in peace and quiet, and shift your responsibilities into the suburbs, who pay for everything they use in the city including city wage tax, which is not paid by urban residents who work in the suburbs. . . . It does not pay to work hard, save for 15 years, pay taxes, obey laws, and get no more in life than the opposite. . . . You went to private schools and I went to the Kearny School which was not right—you should have insisted that I come to your school for free as you insist now since all your family attended private schools and I could not afford to go to private schools. Why didn't you speak up then? I did not feel I was entitled to go to the schools in the wealthy sections as they paid more taxes. But what I did do was studied a lot trying to learn as much so I could make good on my own, as we lived in a ghetto area but kept our home clean and not one of seven in our family ever committed a crime.⁹⁶

Dilworth had a ready answer for those who criticized him for having sent his own children to private school. "I certainly have made it very plain that I and our children all received our education in private schools and private colleges," he wrote, responding to an inquiry from a Bala Cynwyd resident. "In fact, all of our children, after completing elementary school, received their secondary school education and their university education in New England—where I also received my education—because I believe that New England has the best schools and the best universities in the United States. Had I been a resident of Montgomery County, our children still would have been educated in that way because we were fortunate enough to be able to afford to give them that kind of education." There is no reason to doubt Dilworth's sincerity; still, his reply reveals an arrogance and a profound lack of sympathy for those parents who chose to move to the suburbs so that their children might attend better schools. Dilworth seemed unwilling or unable to recognize that many parents who considered moving to the suburbs were motivated by the same impulse that prompted Dilworth to send his own children to private boarding schools—a desire to provide their children with the best education possible. Racism was surely a factor in the exodus to the suburbs, but one wonders if it was any less of a factor in the decision to target neighborhoods like Society Hill for urban renewal. The Bala Cynwyd resident who wrote to Dilworth complained that if the school board

⁹⁶ Mrs. J. K. of Melrose Park to Richardson Dilworth, Jan. 19, 1971, Dilworth Papers, box 48.

president had sent his own children to private school, "I hardly think you are in any position to do any planning for others." Dilworth disagreed, failing to perceive any incongruity between the education he chose for his own children and the regional school district he sought to impose on families who had made comparable choices: "I cannot see that this has anything to do with what is essential to the welfare of the entire Philadelphia area," he said.⁹⁷

Dilworth was equally dismissive of Dr. Harry Hoffman, a Northeast Philadelphia dentist who wrote him to protest a school board desegregation plan. Hoffman claimed that the plan posed "an unnecessary risk for my children. . . . I pay several thousand dollars a year in taxes in Philadelphia, and should this busing materialize, I will join the great migration to the suburbs, for I will not permit my children to be used as pawns to satisfy some self-appointed guardians of race relations in public education." In his reply Dilworth made no attempt either to empathize with Hoffman or to win him over. In the suburbs, Dilworth shot back,

busing is considered a matter of status. The further the child is bused, the more exclusive is the area. . . . I think we would all be much better off if we talk frankly. What your letter really means is that you are determined your children shall have no association of any kind, under any plan, with Negro children, and if the state imposes any such plan upon Philadelphia, you will promptly move to the suburbs. I can only say that you can run just so far, and . . . then you are going to have to keep on running. I do not believe the suburbs can very much longer maintain a white noose around the necks of our large cities.⁹⁸

From today's vantage point, it is clear that Dilworth possessed as acute an understanding of America's urban crisis as any politician of the postwar era. As he warned, social ills that were once uniquely urban phenomena are today finding their way into once-safe suburban communities. Dilworth's prescience was remarkable, but at the time his blunt talk alienated significant segments of Philadelphia's white population, people who would later become the core of Rizzo's constituency. Nonetheless, this acknowledgment still does not prove Formisano's thesis that white backlash had its roots in class

⁹⁷ John Bottger to Richardson Dilworth, March 13, 1967, and Dilworth to Bottger, March 16, 1967, Dilworth Papers, box 35.

⁹⁸ Dr. Harry M. Hoffman to Richardson Dilworth, Sept. 19, 1968, and Dilworth to Hoffman, Sept. 23, 1968, Dilworth Papers, box 43.

resentment. For while Ross may have been the only school board member in Philadelphia who represented working-class whites, these people had no meaningful representation whatsoever under the old, pre-1965 system. Also, although Dilworth had sent his own children to private schools, Shedd made a point of sending all four of his own children to Philadelphia public schools, each of which happened to be predominantly black. Perhaps the biggest problem with applying Formisano's thesis to Philadelphia is the fact that so much of his argument relative to Boston is based on the fact that Boston's liberal elites refused to consider a metropolitan busing program that would include suburban school systems.⁹⁹ Formisano even contends that "suburban liberals" not blacks "constituted the principal enemy of the anti-busers."¹⁰⁰ In Philadelphia, both Shedd and Dilworth had been longtime proponents of a metropolitan school district that would unify the city school system with its suburban neighbors. In fact, Shedd opposed busing exclusively within Philadelphia for many of the same reasons that Formisano believes busing ultimately failed in Boston. If busing was implemented only within city boundaries, there would be "an insurrection" among working-class whites, Shedd said. "If you limit busing to the city, you are only going to hasten the exodus and you will have a Newark or Washington within a year."¹⁰¹

Based upon Formisano's logic, there should have been some support for a metropolitan solution among Philadelphia's working-class whites. After all, if white backlash was really prompted more by class resentment than racism, a parent from Northeast Philadelphia should have been willing to send his child to an integrated school as long as parents from the suburbs were forced to do the same. There is simply no evidence, however, to indicate such sentiment actually existed in the city's white, working-class communities. Perhaps the flaw in Formisano's conclusion is his assumption that the decisive resistance to a metropolitan solution came from middle- and upper-class suburbanites—people he describes as "cosmopolitan liberals."¹⁰² While it is beyond the scope of this study to question his findings for Boston, the majority of suburbanites who wrote angry letters to Dilworth seemed to have had far more in common with the friends and relatives they had left

⁹⁹ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 229-32.

¹⁰⁰ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 178-79.

¹⁰¹ Tom Hine, "Running City's Schools Is 'Impossible' but Mark Shedd Isn't Giving Up Yet," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 3, 1971, 1.

¹⁰² Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 229-39.

behind in Philadelphia's ethnic enclaves than with the "cosmopolitan liberals" who had abandoned the city a generation or two earlier. This claim is buttressed by Paolantonio's assertion that Rizzo had as much support in the suburbs as he did in the city itself.¹⁰³ Divisions between ethnic, working-class whites and cosmopolitan, WASP elites probably did affect the level of support for Shedd and Dilworth in some neighborhoods, but class issues were not what ultimately drove Philadelphia's working-class whites to side with Rizzo.

Despite all the efforts Shedd and Dilworth undertook to empower black students and involve the black community in school affairs, Philadelphia's black community never really embraced them.¹⁰⁴ The black wards' low voter turnout during the bond referendums demonstrated that while black voters supported what Shedd and Dilworth were doing, their support was shallow. Perhaps this shouldn't have come as a surprise. The two black school board members—George Hutt and Rev. Henry Nichols—were well-regarded in the black community, but neither was considered a leader of Cecil Moore's stature. A more important problem was that, in light of the civil rights movement's ideological shift towards black nationalism during the latter half of the 1960s, blacks were unlikely to rally around white leaders. Stokely Carmichael's warning that white liberals "perpetuate a paternalistic, colonial relationship" rang true for many. Moore had actually opposed Shedd's hiring, arguing that a school district with a predominantly black enrollment should have a black superintendent. Shedd, Moore said in 1966, "wouldn't know a Negro from an Eskimo."¹⁰⁵

In *Civilities and Civil Rights*, William Chafe recounts how Greensboro civil rights leaders who had once been passionate advocates of school integration fought to save the city's all-black schools once the political victory for integration had been achieved. "The 1954 decision," one black activist in Greensboro said in 1971, "was based on aspirations for quality education. Integration was only a tactic."¹⁰⁶ As both Formisano and Ravitch

¹⁰³ Paolantonio, *Last Big Man*, 248.

¹⁰⁴ Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 201.

¹⁰⁵ Richard de Lone, "3 Considered By Board for Whittier's Job," *Philadelphia Bulletin*, Nov. 19, 1966, 1; Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, 1984), 355.

¹⁰⁶ William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1980), 229.

point out, many school desegregation proponents recognized that forced busing was educationally harmful yet supported it because of the symbolic victory forced integration represented.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the black community's support for Shedd and Dilworth was more tactical than truly heartfelt. For example, at the same time that the community control movement was at its peak in New York City, Philadelphia's black community opposed a proposal to create an autonomous model school district in North Philadelphia, composed of thirty-one schools which would have been run by a locally elected, fifteen-member school board. Shedd's plan was rejected by black parents who considered it "another experiment with Negroes and an attempt by the school board to sidestep its responsibilities for educating all the children."¹⁰⁸ Many blacks believed better schools would only be achieved once they secured political power within the school system. "The ability of black leaders to bring about a favorable change in the conditions in the public schools," writes black historian Vincent Franklin, "rested on the amount of political power wielded by the black community."¹⁰⁹ Both the affective curriculum—which granted students more opportunity for self-expression—and Shedd's push for increased community involvement provided blacks with greater influence within the school system. While blacks had reason to endorse these elements of Shedd's agenda, they were less supportive of other purely pedagogical reforms because it was not clear how these innovations would advance the cause of political empowerment.

The primacy of race in school politics was not unique to Philadelphia. During the 1960s and early 1970s, racial conflict was at the center of urban school politics across the country.¹¹⁰ How did race come to eclipse class, ethnicity, and religion—political interests which throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had actively vied for influence over public education? Diane Ravitch offers one potential answer in *The Great School Wars*, her history of the New York City public schools. According to Ravitch, since the creation of public school systems in the early nineteenth century, the public school has been "the battleground where the aspirations of the newcomers and the fears of the native population met and clashed." She interprets the civil rights movement's push for equal access and better

¹⁰⁷ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 224; Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade*, 180-81.

¹⁰⁸ DeWolf and Gillespie, "See Mark Shedd," 153-54.

¹⁰⁹ Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 193.

¹¹⁰ Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 180.

treatment by school officials as just another in a series of attempts by minority groups to seize political power from those in the political establishment. The concurrent migrations of Puerto Ricans and southern blacks to New York in the post-World War II period created problems for the public school system that were nearly identical to those it had faced with Irish and then eastern European immigrants in the nineteenth century. "Once more, the public schools were faced with spiraling enrollments, crowded and deteriorating buildings, academic retardation, vandalism, and a cultural conflict between teachers and pupils. In the 1890s, the reformers blamed the ward trustees and decentralization for inefficient administration and poor education; this time the reformers would castigate the professional staff and centralization."¹¹¹

There are two major problems with Ravitch's argument. First, in equating Progressive Era reformers with 1960s civil rights activists, she glosses over the fact that these two sets of reformers represented opposing political interests. The Progressives sought reform in order to undermine the influence immigrants exerted through ward-based management of the public schools; the reformers of the 1960s wanted to restore the influence of political interest groups by making the professional class, anointed by the Progressives, more responsive to public demands. The other problem with Ravitch's argument is her failure to recognize that political influence over public education represented something far more significant to blacks than it did to nineteenth-century immigrants. For white immigrants, control over the school system meant securing the spoils of patronage or perhaps foreign language instruction for their children. Equal access to public schooling was never questioned for these ethnic groups as it was for blacks.

Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir offer a better explanation of why efforts at school reform in the 1960s and 1970s became so entangled in racial politics. According to these authors, the reforms of the Progressive Era resulted in the domestication of class and ethnicity in school politics. By the 1960s working-class, ethnic whites had become so co-opted into a system which granted almost all control of public schools to professional educators that there was no longer any basis for resistance on ethnic or, more importantly, class grounds. The school systems' professional class successfully exploited the split identity of the American working class. "At work, the

¹¹¹ Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, xxix, 240.

working class was formed as labor, represented by trade unions,” they write. “Off work it was mobilized by a decentralized party system, stressing territorial and ethnic rather than class identities and the delivery of services to their residential communities.” This split identity was created by the elimination of property barriers to white, male suffrage before the onset of market capitalism. Capitalism would create new, less tractable class divisions, but because American workers “had already been mobilized by political parties into the state as voting citizens,” these divisions were muted. Whereas western Europe’s working class—initially denied the vote—had resisted state schooling, perceiving it as an elitist imposition, in the mid-nineteenth century American workers joined in political coalitions favoring public schooling because here public schools were local institutions controlled by elected municipal officials.¹¹² Because of this split identity, school administrators were able to narrowly define the interests of working-class whites. They appeased ethnic interests by initiating foreign language instruction in the schools, and responded to labor’s demands by offering vocational programs that would undercut management-run training schools. By the 1930s these accommodations had diminished the interest of working-class whites’ in the day-to-day administration of the public schools.

No longer did an influential minority stand outside the new arrangements. Reformers, business, and the Catholic hierarchy all had a voice in the new arrangements presided over by a professional educator. Even labor, whose political fortunes were at a low ebb, was not excluded. Its influence over vocational education went unchallenged, and labor participation in teachers’ affairs expanded as the teachers’ union grew. . . . Schools would now be more receptive to the church’s and labor’s most narrow organizational objectives within a reform structure that granted professionals ultimate control over schooling.¹¹³

While blacks may not have constituted an influential minority in the 1930s, the mass migration of blacks from the South to the northern cities after World War II altered the political landscape. Suddenly urban school systems were being asked to accommodate a large minority group that had never accepted the legitimacy of the professional class. Making the situation

¹¹² Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 41-57.

¹¹³ Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 148-49.

more complicated was the fact that blacks could not be appeased in the same way white ethnics had been. For blacks the fight for equal access to public schooling was central to “the larger effort for full and equal membership in American society,” Katznelson and Weir write. “Thus the targets of black demands felt all the more imperiled because, contrary to the fragmentary, issue-specific character of school politics as usual, black school struggles were linked to a wider, more global set of concerns. The view of most Americans that education was the key to opportunity (a belief shared by blacks, who placed a high priority on schooling) underscored this relationship and raised the stakes even higher. The result was a dialectic of white resistance and intensified black activity that became increasingly unruly.”¹¹⁴ Under these circumstances, the failure of the Shedd-Dilworth reform effort in Philadelphia may have been inevitable. Their push for community involvement threatened administrators’ and teachers’ sense of professionalism and the white working class’s sense of security. Taught to embrace the status quo, working-class whites correctly perceived the black challenge, and Shedd’s accommodation of it, as a threat to a system that favored them. Although whites may not have been well-served by their schools, they fared better than blacks, and as long as this remained so, whites were likely to remain content.

David Roediger has argued that the source of white working-class racism was the “‘public and psychological wages’ whiteness offered to a desperate rural and often preindustrial population coming to labor in industrializing American cities.” Insecure about their ability to adapt to urban life, these white immigrants clung to an identity that contrasted them with ex-slaves who were associated with a backwards, pre-industrial lifestyle.¹¹⁵ Likewise, Philadelphia’s working-class whites clung to the illusion that they were better off than the city’s blacks. In Kensington the social and economic deprivations were comparable to those of Philadelphia’s black ghettos, yet residents of the Northeast Philadelphia neighborhood refused to face up to their problems. “What’s the matter?” they would ask the social workers and government planners who came to help. “Aren’t we good enough for you?” Social workers were stumped: “Kensingtonians are psychologically unable to face up to their social, cultural, and economic deprivation,” said one

¹¹⁴ Katznelson and Weir, *Schooling for All*, 180–81, 190.

¹¹⁵ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1991), 95, 137.

municipal official. "Pride prevents them from taking advantage of social services. For them to accept these services might be to admit that they're not all they claim to be." "Kensington doesn't want us," another official reported. "It refuses to admit it's a poverty area. It won't go into programs with Negroes."¹¹⁶ Thus any attempts to either improve white schools or help black schools were sure to be resisted by working-class whites obsessed with preserving the status quo. When Rizzo announced in October 1968 that "there's too much outsider influence in the school system today" and that the schools should be "controlled by the teachers and the Board of Education, not a bunch of teenagers," the city's white ethnics had found their champion.¹¹⁷

Rizzo went on to serve two terms as mayor, from 1972 to 1980. He made two unsuccessful attempts to reclaim the mayor's office in 1983 and 1987. In 1991, in the midst of a third comeback bid, Rizzo died following a massive heart attack. Dilworth retired from public life in 1971, succumbing to a brain tumor three years later. In 1972 Shedd returned to Harvard, where he taught for two years. In 1974 he was appointed commissioner of education for Connecticut; serving in that capacity for nine years, his main legacy was a new state aid system that funneled the greatest amount of money to the state's poorest districts. Shedd was diagnosed with leukemia soon after he left Connecticut. Up until his death in 1986, he taught at the University of Southern Maine's School of Public Policy and Management.

When Shedd was forced to step down as Philadelphia's school superintendent in December 1971, some of his former supporters claimed that Shedd only had himself to blame. He didn't keep his promises, they said. He never got rid of the entrenched bureaucracy. Even the *Inquirer's* editorial board, once quite supportive of Shedd, was noncommittal in evaluating his legacy. "Only the passage of time, and the relative success or failure of his successor," the paper editorialized, "will permit the achievements and the disappointments of Superintendent Shedd to be evaluated objectively and in perspective."¹¹⁸

With the passage of time, Philadelphia's schools grew worse and worse,

¹¹⁶ Binzen, *Whitetown*, 80-103.

¹¹⁷ Daughen and Binzen, *Cop Who Would Be King*, 127-29.

¹¹⁸ Binzen, review of *How 2 Gerbils, 20 Goldfish, 2,000 Books and I Taught Them How to Read*, by Steven Daniels, *Philadelphia Magazine*, November 1971, 38-44; "Shedd Goes, But Problems Stay," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 7, 1971, 10.

and the Shedd-Dilworth years looked better and better. When Shedd died on November 17, 1986—ironically the nineteenth anniversary of Black Friday—a lead editorial in the *Inquirer* finally offered the proper evaluation the paper declined to provide in 1971. The editorial credited Shedd and Dilworth with giving

the schools efficient and cost-effective administration, rid[ding] the system of political patronage employees who were unqualified or unproductive, and revitaliz[ing] academic programs and curriculum with greater emphasis on early childhood education. They also implemented policies that aimed at easing racial tensions in the schools.

Those were turbulent times, but they also were years of impressive progress in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, it was short-lived. . . .

During the eight years of the Rizzo administration the public school system regressed both administratively and academically—a long and painful decline that did not end until . . . the early 1980s. Public confidence was restored with the appointment of reform-minded school board members and [Shedd protégée] Constance E. Clayton as superintendent.

The editorial concluded by recalling Shedd's 1971 ouster as "a tragic blow to public education in Philadelphia—a blow from which the schools have begun to recover only in recent years."¹¹⁹ In the days that followed, no letters to the editor challenged the paper's wistful remembrance of Shedd's years in Philadelphia. The *Philadelphia Daily News's* editorial on Shedd's passing was equally nostalgic. "Mark Shedd was here for only five years, but he had a lasting and indelible impact on Philadelphia. . . . What a five years they were!"¹²⁰ "Because of Mark," said Clayton, whom Shedd had appointed to her first administrative post, "the school district is a better place for children."¹²¹ Unfortunately, Clayton's reforms—many inspired by Shedd—fell well short of expectations. By the time she left office in 1993 there was little to distinguish the Philadelphia school system from all the other troubled urban school systems in the United States. "The schools are failing," said Rotan Lee, president of the Philadelphia Board of Education, in 1994.¹²²

"If we divorce school subjects from the guts and hopes of human beings,"

¹¹⁹ "Mark Shedd Remembered," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 20, 1986, 26-A.

¹²⁰ "The Shedd Legacy," *Philadelphia Daily News*, Nov. 19, 1986.

¹²¹ Saffron, "Friends Remember Shedd," 2-B.

¹²² Dale Mezzacappa, "The Challenge to Reformers," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 1994, A1.

Shedd once said, “we can expect students to find them gutless and hopeless.”¹²³ Rhetoric has become reality. In May 1994 the *Inquirer* published a disheartening feature on sixteen-year-old high school freshman Nereida Mulero. Nereida—“smart, sassy, and troubled”—is representative of the majority of students in the Philadelphia public schools, according to the article:

Sometime around fourth or fifth grade, her reading, writing, and math skills stalled, and now at Edison High School, she is failing most of her courses.

It doesn't help that she misses as much school as she attends—58 of the first 124 days this year. When she does show up, it's to preen, to see her friends, to check out boys.

“Right now I don't got no goals,” Nereida said one afternoon, nibbling an ice cream bar in the cafeteria, scanning the big room for action. The class she was cutting was Career Prep.

Nereida is not indifferent to school. She hates it “with a passion.” . . . “Teachers don't care,” she said. “If you come, you come. If you don't, you don't. All my friends dropped out; the teachers didn't care.”

Today the Philadelphia school district classifies nearly eighty percent of its students as “poor,” and, like Nereida, about fifty-two percent come from families on welfare. The teachers union resists even the most modest reforms. The courses taught in most schools are devoid of any connection to students' lives outside the classroom. “The old structures are still eating the new,” said one school district consultant.¹²⁴ So it should come as no surprise that students like Nereida have, as Shedd forewarned, lost faith in the value of education. Given the intensely negative reaction of many white Americans to the introduction of Afrocentric curricula in urban schools, bridging the gap between “school subjects” and “the guts and hopes” of inner-city students may be more difficult today than it was twenty-five years ago.

The story of Shedd and Dilworth's rise and fall is heartbreaking. But for those looking for a silver lining, here it is: by playing such a decisive role in determining who should run Philadelphia's schools, Rizzo closed the door on the era when mayors could govern without paying attention to public education. The mayor is now responsible, at least to some extent, for the

¹²³ Mark Shedd, “Speech to the Assembled Staff.”

¹²⁴ Mezzacappa, “Challenge to Reformers,” A1.

state of the Philadelphia school system. And this is just what reformers had in mind in 1965 when they convinced voters to change the way the school board was appointed. The problem is that while there is now accountability, our expectations for urban school systems are at an all-time low. The difficulties faced by politicians and superintendents—the intransigence of teachers' unions, the continuing decline of the American city's economic base, and growing impassivity of suburbanites' to the plight of the inner-city—seem insurmountable. Perhaps that's why the great debate in urban education today isn't about improving the public schools but replacing them, with either state-sponsored charter schools or voucher programs for private schooling. The narrow window of opportunity once open to school reformers has been slammed shut.

New York City

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