

**Reputation and Reality in America's Model Town: Remembering Racial  
Integration in Teaneck, New Jersey, 1949 – 1968**

Rachel Mark  
Senior Thesis  
Department of History, Columbia University  
April 4, 2011

## Acknowledgements

In '65 tension was running high at my high school/ There was a lot of fights between the black and white/There was nothing you could do.../ Troubled times had come to my hometown/ My hometown/ My hometown/ My hometown

- Bruce Springsteen, "My Hometown"

This thesis investigates how integration is remembered in Teaneck, NJ, the first town in the nation to vote for integrated schools. While I observe in this thesis that the reality of integration ultimately fell short of the goals set by the activists themselves, I do not wish to take away from these individuals and their honorable actions. In a time when the country faced fierce segregation and racism, a majority in Teaneck stepped up and voted for what they believed in their hearts was right: equal education.

As a third generation Teaneck resident, I feel a close connection to this story. My grandparents still vividly remember casting their votes for integration, and my mother went to the central sixth grade school created as part of the original integration plan. And at the outset, I would like to thank my parents – Joseph and Meryl Mark – and grandparents – Abraham and Sheila Schlüssel, and Norman and Frances Mark – for not just providing me with a topic for my thesis but also for instilling a love of education and learning that inspired me to undertake the project in the first place.

I would also like to thank everyone else who made this thesis possible: My friends who knew when to bring snacks and when to stay away, as well as the characters (or children of characters) in the story to follow who were so receptive to my contact. Theodora Lacey and Barbara Ley Toffler both took time to share their stories with me. Thank you also to thank my thesis advisor, Hilary Hallett, and second reader, Rebecca Kobrin, who both provided invaluable guidance and edits. And I would like to give a special thank you to Reginald and Edna Damerell; without Mr. Damerell's incredible undertaking of writing *Triumph in a White Suburb* from the personal accounts of over 170 people immediately after the event, and having the dedication to quit his job in order to, as he told me, "eat, sleep, and cry Teaneck" for three years, the record might have been lost forever.

Community purpose is the leading character in our story

-- A Thornton Bishop, Teaneck Town Planner, 1946

\*\*\*

Let people not say that Teaneck waited to be directed. Let them say, 'Teaneck led the way.'

-- Harvey Scribner, Superintendent of Teaneck  
Public Schools, 1961-1968

## Contents

Acknowledgements	1
List of Abbreviations	4
Introduction	5
Chapter One: 1949 – 1953	13
Chapter Two: 1954 – 1959	21
Chapter Three: 1959 – 1964	31
Chapter Four: 1964 – 1968	44
Conclusion	60
Appendix	
Map of Teaneck	64
Timeline	65
Bibliography	66

## Abbreviations

<b>BFHC</b>	Bergen Fair Housing Committee; created in the aftermath of the dissolution of the TCC, used more aggressive tactics like walk-ins and test cases to call out realtors on their bias with blockbusting, created in 1959
<b>NECO</b>	North East Community Organization; started by blacks in the Northeast section of town, but was an interracial group focused on maintaining the character and quality of township services in the Northeast section, formed in 1964
<b>NSA</b>	Neighborhood School Association; created as pro-neighborhood school group around 1964
<b>TCC</b>	Teaneck Civic Conference; formed by an interracial group of neighbors in Teaneck's Northeast section with the hopes of promoting integrated living and preventing blockbusting, lasted from 1955-1959
<b>TCPS</b>	Teaneck Citizens for Public Schools; created as liberal pro-school integration group around 1964
<b>TLBS</b>	Teaneck League for Better Schools; formed in 1953 by Jews, the newcomers, to fight for the increased school budget in opposition to the conservative TTL
<b>TTL</b>	Teaneck Taxpayer's League; the conservative strong arm of Teaneck until 1958

## Introduction

In 1968, Reginald Damerell published *Triumph in a White Suburb*, his chronicle of Teaneck, New Jersey's school integration. In this account based on almost two hundred interviews, Teaneck resident Damerell told of the town's neighborhood integration efforts dating back to the early 1950s, culminating in the triumph of 1965, when Teaneck residents became the first in the nation to vote to integrate their school system. Teaneck, at that point a town of about forty thousand, became known nationally as a champion of integration. However, a second and contrasting Teaneck narrative exists as old as this first one. In the second narrative, Teaneck was like any other town. It rejected Jews and African Americans who first moved in. Some liberal residents banded together in an attempt to advocate for open housing, but ultimately failed. The school system was integrated, but it was first instated by the Board of Education, against the will of the majority. The town eventually voted for it, but it was only due to a strong, concerted effort by the integrationists. Ultimately, the promise of a truly integrated society fell short: the same year that *Triumph in a White Suburb* was published, a task force was appointed to investigate racial disturbances at the central high school. Yet the narrative of triumph has persisted and become dominant. This thesis will investigate how Teaneck came to symbolize racial progress even though it was apparent from the very moment of triumph that it was just that – a moment.

The existence of two narratives was apparent as early as 1968, and can be seen most clearly from the juxtaposition of two responses to the publication of *Triumph in a White Suburb*. The first and dominant narrative is exemplified by a *New York Times* book review written by Whitney M. Young, the executive director of the Urban League. Young wrote, "Today, [Teaneck] is a model American town which created heroes in the American tradition. They are the heroes who are not led but lead." Young continued, "Mr. Damerell has written a guidebook

for workable revolution – revolution that can work within this country. And it is a guidebook for those who believe in the precepts of our system, our Bill of Rights, our moral rights.” He also noted that after the successful school integration, the town’s African American “ghetto is broken up by whites buying back into it.” In other words, school integration spurred neighborhood integration. Young viewed Teaneck as the paragon of American democracy; it set an example of success that during the turbulent sixties, the rest of the nation could only hope to follow.<sup>1</sup>

However, a response from a Teaneck resident painted a starkly different picture. In a letter to the editor in response to Young’s review, K. Dornfeld<sup>2</sup> wrote: “The truth is that in the three years since Teaneck turned the Bryant school...into a ‘central sixth grade school,’ the percentage of Negro pupils in the area formerly served by the Bryant school has risen from 54 per cent to 78 per cent.” Moreover, it was only getting worse: “Our soon-to-leave superintendent of schools Harvey B. Scribner recently told a meeting of residents that the percentage of Negro pupils in this area will probably approach close to 100 per cent within a few years.” In contrast to Young’s assertion that school integration encouraged neighborhood integration, Dornfeld claimed that the ghetto was becoming more entrenched. As he put it, Young “mistakenly grasped upon a few isolated instances of whites buying into the predominantly Negro northeast section in his zeal to prove the exact opposite of what almost everyone in Teaneck knows to be true.” Dornfeld attributed “this error” to “Mr. Young’s admitted bias in favor of forced racial integration.”<sup>3</sup> Dornfeld’s letter contradicted Young’s laudatory review on two counts: firstly, it provided statistics to fight the assertion that the “ghetto is broken up by whites buying back into

---

<sup>1</sup> Whitney M. Young, Jr., “Guidebook for a Workable Revolution,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1968. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Unless otherwise noted, all newspaper articles hereafter accessed via ProQuest.

<sup>2</sup> Likely Kivie Dornfeld, a Jewish Harvard Law School graduate who lost his spot on the Board of Education in 1963, the year the first African American was elected to the board.

<sup>3</sup> Kivie Dornfeld, “Letters,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1968.

it.” More importantly, in calling out “Mr. Young’s admitted bias in favor of forced racial integration,” Dornfeld revealed his own biases: he, and presumably other Teaneck residents, were *not* in favor of “forced racial integration,” but felt coerced into it – hardly the embodiment of “heroes in the American tradition.” Dornfeld’s letter indicated that as early as 1968, there were those who felt that Teaneck was not the model of Civil Rights success that so many others wanted it to be, and alleged that “everyone” knew this to be true. Furthermore, a report from the “Teaneck Task Force,” a committee organized to investigate racial disturbances at the high school in September 1968, found that, “though the community prides itself on having made strides along lines of integration, the fact remains that clear cut divisions exist.”<sup>4</sup> Yet while Dornfeld and the Task Force acknowledged a failure, others – and even some members of the task force – continued to perpetuate a history of triumph.

Though the dominant narrative was not entirely accurate, it was rooted in both a local and national perception of the town as ideal. In 1946,<sup>5</sup> the town celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. In commemoration of the historic event, the chairman of the town planning board, A. Thornton Bishop, wrote a series of articles for the local newspaper, the *Sunday Sun*, entitled “After Fifty Years – Teaneck Looks Forward.” The first installment gave a brief history of Teaneck and established the patriotic heritage of the town, dating back to 1770 when George Washington rode through the area with his troops. Bishop noted though, that “after fifty years,” the town had to “look forward.” And in doing so, the town should remember that, “in any story of Teaneck, the dominant feature must be the community purpose, which is exemplified by a constant stream of citizens who have... stirred the purpose into action. This community purpose is the leading

---

<sup>4</sup> Charles V. Sgro, *Report - Teaneck Task Force*, (Teaneck, NJ: Teaneck Public Library, 1969), 3.

<sup>5</sup> The anniversary was actually in 1945, but the town waited one year to celebrate because they did not find it appropriate to celebrate their accomplishments while the US army was still in Japan.



character of our story.”<sup>6</sup> Bishop further urged citizens to have “deep regard for the shape [post-war] growth will take,” because, “the responsibility will rest with them.” He urged the town’s citizens to be civically engaged. In 1949, the strength of Teaneck’s community purpose was nationally recognized: the town was chosen from among 10,000 communities around the country as the “model town,” to be shown in occupied Germany and Japan as the paragon of American democracy. The contest was, according to the *New York Herald Tribune*, a “municipal beauty contest.” Teaneck was chosen, then, because it was deemed “the most photogenic and civil-minded town in the country.”<sup>7</sup>

To both the residents and the nation, though, the title denoted more than just municipal beauty. In an interview about the town’s honor, town manager Paul Volcker<sup>8</sup> attributed the recognition to the citizens: “I have always found Teaneck people highly intelligent and proud of their town. They are ready to fight at the drop of a hat over any live issue.”<sup>9</sup> And the *New York Herald Tribune* noted: “Graft doesn’t get a chance to take root with public spirit keeping watch over the community.”<sup>10</sup> Town residents, too, recognized the scale of civic awareness in Teaneck. Frank McGlynn, a white man who moved to Teaneck in 1936, remembered that Teaneck was not like other towns in Bergen County: “...there was a basic difference, which I sensed particularly

---

<sup>6</sup> A. Thornton Bishop, “After Fifty Years – Teaneck Looks Forward,” *Sunday Sun*, February 17, 1946, (Teaneck Public Library: Teaneck, NJ) accessed online at <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/After50years/Teaneck50years.html>

<sup>7</sup> Mel Grayson, “Teaneck Town of Prosperous Jersey Commuters Has One Privileged Class – Children,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 18, 1952, <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/ModelCommunity/modeltown1952.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Father of economist Paul Volcker

<sup>9</sup> Kalman Siegel, “Teaneck on Film as a Model Town,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1949, <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/ModelCommunity/modeltown1949.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Howard Young, “Democracy for Export,” *This Week*, November 6, 1949, <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/ModelCommunity/modelcommunity.htm>

in my conversation[s] both with neighbors and with fellow commuters on the train. There was definitely a consciousness in Teaneck.”<sup>11</sup>

As time went on, the “model” designation took on new meanings. In articles throughout the 1950s and 60s, whenever the national press mentioned Teaneck, it referred to its “model” designation. For example, in 1961, the *New York Herald Tribune* published an article entitled, “Teaneck, NJ, Called Model of Democracy.” The title became intertwined with both the character and culture of the community. To some, it meant that the town was perfect as it was in 1949, when it first received the recognition. To others, it meant that the town should continually aspire to be representative of the best America had to offer. And in the 1950s and 1960s, that meant Teaneck should be at the forefront of civil rights. As one resident put it, in 1965, “...all the people who were really involved and cared about Teaneck, about it being a model community which was the reputation it had, kind of rallied round [integration].”<sup>12</sup> The reputation drove citizens to action, but an impetus to preserve the reputation meant that dissenting opinions from both ends of the spectrum were often silenced. Individuals whose integration tactics were deemed too militant were quieted, and those who dared oppose busing were publicly called out as bigots in a local newspaper.

In 1968, both the town and the nation needed to see Teaneck as a model. The battle to desegregate Teaneck’s schools had been brutal. Though there was no physical violence, the town was split apart as friends and neighbors divided on the subject of integration. Moreover, in the turbulent sixties, the nation looked to the town as a model of peaceful integration. And so,

---

<sup>11</sup> Frank McGlynn, interview by Helen Klein, February 13, 1984, Teaneck Oral History Teaneck Public Library, Teaneck, NJ. All TOH accessed via <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/OralHistory2/index.html>. Hereafter TOH.

<sup>12</sup> Fay Geier, interview by June Kapell, May 11, 1984, TOH.

memories of the event have created and sustained the legacy of the dominant narrative, despite the acknowledged existence of evidence to the contrary.

In that vein, this thesis will focus on the relationship between memories of integration efforts and the facts of the events themselves. To do so, it draws off a close examination of a significant amount of oral history, taken at two different times: the first, which comes from *Triumph in a White Suburb*, was taken from 1965 to 1968, while the second, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, was recorded between 1984 and 1985. In writing his book, Damerell interviewed almost two hundred residents immediately after the vote for integration. Naturally, these memories emphasize the successes of the integrationists, vilify the tactics of their opponents, and deemphasize the near-constant stream of setbacks that the integrationists faced on the path to their goal. As oral historian Alessandro Portelli has noted, "...the unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure is the source's subjectivity." Moreover, "oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."<sup>13</sup> Individual memories of an event are colored by both their preconceptions and their motives; since Teaneck residents believed they lived in a model town that strove for democracy they remember a narrative of success. This is perhaps most true of the second batch of oral histories, taken in the 1980s. By this point, residents had seen the potential of integration falter. Though the schools were still integrated, the neighborhoods were emphatically not, and residents had a vested interest in perpetuating a history of triumph. And so, activists remember a time when Teaneck symbolized racial progress at both the local and national level.

---

<sup>13</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 50.

As a study of race relations in a Civil Rights-era Northern suburb, this thesis represents both a significant and undocumented history. As historian Thomas J. Sugrue argues, “to understand the history of Civil Rights – indeed, to understand modern America – it is essential to bring the North back in. As a battleground in the struggle for racial equality, the North mattered tremendously.” Sugrue further notes that because so many historians have focused on the atrocities of the South, the North has often been falsely granted a “badge of honor.” And as a result of the fact that Northern racial strife has been disregarded, civil rights activists outside the South have often been forgotten.<sup>14</sup> Racial conflict was often magnified in homogenous suburbs. As historian Andrew Wiese observes, “even as it reflected a shifting class structure within black America, suburbanization reinforced the significance of race in American life.”<sup>15</sup> As all other variables remained the same – whites and African Americans had similar jobs, incomes, and education levels – the significance of differences in race grew more pronounced, making their study all the more relevant for historians and social researchers alike. But, as political scientist Michael Jones-Correa has observed, most studies of minority migration have continued to focus on urban centers. Suburbia deserves close study because its “political fragmentation...the design of its institutions, and its use of physical space will ensure that the dynamics of suburban politics will remain, to some extent, distinctive.”<sup>16</sup> The study of Teaneck, then, presents a unique combination of these factors. And on the larger scale, the existence of divergent narratives in the Teaneck story raises questions about the possibilities for Civil Rights success *anywhere*.

---

<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Jones-Correa, “Reshaping the American Dream,” in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 185.

This thesis examines a town caught between its reputation and its reality. To do so, it closely investigates race relations and integration in Teaneck. The earliest racial battle was between Christians and Jews, and with the Christian victory, Teaneck proved to be a stalwart conservative. Once African Americans started moving to Teaneck in significant numbers, some residents encouraged neighborhood integration through a grassroots organization, but were ultimately defeated. But some residents persisted as they felt the eyes of the nation upon them, and continued to fight, this time shifting to school integration. In 1965, school integration succeeded. But it could not triumph without constant positive reaffirmation. In a time of great national upheaval, the country's highest ideals were foisted upon Teaneck, and it struggled to live up to the challenge. Many progressive individuals, believing in their hearts in the precepts of the Civil Rights movement, worked fervently to promote the integration of Teaneck's neighborhoods and school system. Yet many more were apathetic or worse, segregationists; certainly not the patriots of a "workable revolution." But the Teaneck story reveals the power of a reputation, and how the need for an example of peaceful integration led to the construction of one in America's model town.

## Chapter One: 1949 - 1953

The sequence in Teaneck was straightforward and predictable. It can be traced in very simple statements which could be made by those involved in the civic world of any community faced with the problem of integration.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1950s, Teaneck exhibited the patterns of residential segregation, discrimination, and xenophobia characteristic of suburbs throughout the country.<sup>18</sup> Suburbs experienced massive growth during the post-War era of the late 1940s and early 1950s and, like the rest of the country, were generally sharply divided by race. Neighborhoods and even whole towns were extremely homogenous. Minorities who looked for their piece of the American dream were often shut out. Those who managed to overcome national and local hurdles and succeeded in buying homes faced racism and hostility from their white neighbors who had no interest in bringing the “race problem” to their own backyards. Whites – fearing their new neighbors, and the decrease in home values and diminishing of public services that inevitably came with them – often fled, so that few neighborhoods remained integrated for long. The same pattern can be seen in an early study of Teaneck. Both Jews and African Americans who moved to Teaneck in the 1950s experienced discrimination as the model town struggled to adapt to the transition. Perhaps no event is more demonstrative of this than the tension surrounding the 1953 school budget referendum, which would have expanded the schools to make room for the minority newcomers. The sides taken in this battle were indicative of the larger splits in the community, and the subsequent defeat of the budget proposal is suggestive of the town’s strong conservative base. Moreover, Teaneck’s story in the 1950s places the model town squarely

---

<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Clausen, “Review,” *The Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 61, No. 10 (July-Aug 1968), p. 446.

<sup>18</sup> Jones-Correa, 184

within the confines of the traditional suburban story. In this sense, Teaneck was certainly a model – it was nothing more than a representation of the typical suburban experience.

\*\*\*

“The most characteristic feature of the postwar northern housing market” wrote historian Thomas J. Sugrue, “was its nearly complete segregation by race.”<sup>19</sup> During the 1950s, most neighborhoods had distinct color lines, with white Christians on one side, and African Americans and Jews on the other. Segregation was perpetuated officially through restrictive covenants, federal housing policies, and real estate agents. Both Jews and African Americans suffered from these discriminatory practices, though anti-Semitism was easing up. “Although discrimination against Jews in the manner of housing in suburbia is less marked than it was a decade ago,” noted sociologist Albert Gordon in 1959, “anti-Jewish discrimination is still a source of grave concern.” Moreover, Gordon found in his sociological study that “there is sufficient...evidence to indicate that...restrictive covenants and other devices used to prevent Jewish settlement in suburban communities are part of a discriminatory pattern...”<sup>20</sup> This practice of prejudice in housing was compounded when it came to African Americans: as historian Andrew Wiese argues, “racism stalked black suburbanites after the war.”<sup>21</sup> Though African Americans usually moved to areas near established African American communities, the simple act of moving to a neighborhood was often seen as an overt act of racial protest, and whites reacted as such, often fleeing when their neighborhood seemed poised to turn. Whites feared color even when class was homogenous: minority residents in suburbia at this time were usually middle class, white-collar workers. By the close of the 1950s, two thirds of American Jews lived in the suburbs of

---

<sup>19</sup> Sugrue, 201

<sup>20</sup> Albert Gordon, *Jews in Suburbia*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 168-169.

<sup>21</sup> Wiese, 113

major Metropolitan areas<sup>22</sup> while approximately thirteen percent of African Americans could call themselves suburbanites<sup>23</sup>.

This pattern of minority suburbanization was echoed in Teaneck. Because the middle class community of around 34,000 was located just five miles from Manhattan and bordered on Englewood's established African American community, it was a desirable location for minority migration. Jews, African Americans, and other newcomers were attracted to the town's affordable detached homes, excellent school system, parks, and quaint municipal green. Though the town's population was one percent Jewish in 1940, it was fifteen percent Jewish in 1954, and twenty two percent Jewish by 1960. Consistent with patterns seen around the country, African American growth was slower. The African American population remained at less than one percent from 1940 to 1950, but grew to four percent by 1960. Both Jews and African Americans who moved to Teaneck during this period recall experiencing prejudice upon their arrival.

"In its attitude towards Negroes, Teaneck was the United States in microcosm," claimed Reginald Damerell, of Teaneck in the early 1950s.<sup>24</sup> The town even followed the discriminatory tactic outlined by Wiese of "let[ting] adjacent property lie fallow as a buffer between white and black neighborhoods,"<sup>25</sup> by creating a park over the dirt roads that connected the outskirts of Teaneck with the poor African American community in neighboring Englewood; Power lines lay under the area that became known as Argonne Park. African Americans who did manage to move into town remember the white flight incited by their arrival, though there were definitely whites that considered their options and chose to stay. As Frank Hall, one of these residents, told it, "...I remember speaking to my wife...and saying...well now is the time to make up your

---

<sup>22</sup> Gordon, 6

<sup>23</sup> Wiese, 5

<sup>24</sup> Reginald Damerell, *Triumph in a White Suburb: The Dramatic Story of Teaneck, NJ, the First Town in the Nation to Vote for Integrated Schools* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1968), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Wiese, 117



mind. If this bothers you, living in a town...that would go primarily black...we should move now...and we both decided no, that wasn't for us."<sup>26</sup> There was, however, real movement as many of the old timers felt anxious about their changing town. As one Northeast resident explained, "We did have quite an exodus of white Protestants from our town...the white Protestants, I would say, [felt] uncomfortable...as though their children ha[d] no one to play with."<sup>27</sup>

The old Protestant guard was uneasy around their new Jewish neighbors. Eleanor Kieliszek, a Catholic who would become Teaneck's first female mayor, recalled that soon after she moved in, "...there were people who, when they became conscious of the growth of the Jewish community, felt that it wasn't the community for them any longer." In fact, "I met someone who had just put her house up for sale and she told me...she was leaving Teaneck because there were too many unusual types of people moving here." "Unusual," Kieliszek noted, was her neighbor's code words for Jews.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the mass departure in Teaneck represented something of a changing of the guard: conservative white Protestants who had dominated the town and its politics since its incorporation in 1895 felt themselves being edged out, and many left as the newcomers arrived, unwilling to share their town. One Jewish resident remembered that it "was kind of the feeling all over Teaneck, young people moving in. It was frightening to some...older people."<sup>29</sup>

White flight was more pronounced in the suburbs because of the unique relationship between individuals and their town governments – most services such as schools and police departments were paid for by local property taxes. Residents were acutely aware of where their

---

<sup>26</sup> Frank Hall, interview by Helen Klein, November 15, 1984, TOH.

<sup>27</sup> Charlotte Scarbrough, interview by Ethele Brown, March 27, 1984, TOH.

<sup>28</sup> Eleanor Kieliszek, interview by Helen Klein, July 9, 1984, TOH.

<sup>29</sup> Morton and June Handler, interview by Helen Klein, March 11, 1985, TOH.

tax dollars were going – and some chose to flee when they did not agree with the destination. As Sugrue notes, “local struggles to open up suburbs were both challenges to assumptions about race and battles over the meaning of citizenship in a period of American history when public goods were largely meted out by local political institutions.”<sup>30</sup> This held true in Teaneck; in 1953 the growing town population – which increased by sixty six percent from 1940 to 1960 - necessitated the construction of new school facilities, leading to a conflict between the established residents and the new arrivals. June Handler, a Jewish newcomer, remembered the town divisions: “...they were very much against...the newcomers because we were the ones who wanted more schools and we needed more schools. We had more children coming in.”<sup>31</sup> Throughout the interview, both Handler and her interviewer associated “newcomers” with “Jews.” White Protestants left Teaneck and were ready to fight the new school budget proposal because they did not want to share their town – their taxes, their facilities – with their new minority neighbors.

The 1953 school budget battle exacerbated the tensions between the old timers and the newcomers and reaffirmed Teaneck’s place as a conservative pocket of suburbia. Residents often divided along racial<sup>32</sup> lines, as well as based on their status as either an old timer or a newcomer. The old timers used the Teaneck Taxpayer’s League (TTL), an organization that had controlled the Town Council for over twenty years, as their pulpit, while the newcomers organized the Teaneck League for Better Schools (TLBS). The fight was over the Board of Education’s three-part plan, which called for an increased budget to provide more and improved facilities to help reduce the overflow in the school system; at the start of the 1953 school year, students had to be

---

<sup>30</sup> Sugrue, 207

<sup>31</sup> Morton and June Handler, interview.

<sup>32</sup> In the 1950s, Jews were considered a non-white minority, and therefore a Jewish-Christian divide from this time period can be characterized as a racial conflict. See Julian Levinson, “Derac(e)inated Jews,” *Postmodern Culture* 10 (1999-200), [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/v010/index.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v010/index.html) (accessed March 1, 2011).

bused from Bryant, the school in the Northeast section that would become the recipient of most of the town's African Americans, and another elementary school, and the high school and junior high had to have double sessions. To remedy this, the Board proposed (1) the building of a second Junior High School, (2) an addition to Bryant School, as well as (3) the building of a new elementary school. The tension that resulted in the town over this proposal is indicative of the strength of the conservative forces that existed in Teaneck.<sup>33</sup>

The conservative political presence in town was a strong and established one. The Town Council was dominated by the TTL, which was founded in 1929 when, according to one of their founding documents, a group of concerned citizens got fed up after “nine years of increasingly inefficient and costly administration” finally brought the town to a point of fiscal “crisis.” In response, “...the people of Teaneck awoke to the principle set forth in the Declaration of Independence that whenever any form of government becomes destructive, it is the right of the people to...institute a new government.” Among the TTL's principles was one of “non-partisan government.” In other words, no political parties – and seeing as both the Republicans and Democrats had denounced the group, that meant only TTL-based slates.<sup>34</sup> The TTL also promoted conservative social policies; among the important issues on its agenda were two distinctively nativist policies: “the adoption of regulations controlling the sale of alcoholic beverages,” as well as “an ordinance forbidding operation of pinball games.” Finally, the pamphlet declared it an individual's patriotic “duty...to help keep Teaneck's government the splendid example of democratic processes that it has been....” In other words, tradition and

---

<sup>33</sup> Damerell, 71 -74

<sup>34</sup> “Slate” refers to a slate of candidates. Teaneck used a town-manager style of government which meant that the five council candidates who received the most votes became councilmen, and elected a mayor from amongst themselves. In order to ascertain control, different groups often ran slates of five candidates at a time. See Howard M, Young, “Democracy for Export,” *This Week*, November 6, 1949. <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/ModelCommunity/modelcommunity.htm> (accessed October 1, 2010).

controlled spending were good; change and added costs were not.<sup>35</sup> The TTL took the position of being anti-budget, and forced the Town Council to appoint a special task force, in addition to the one that had already been appointed by the Board, even though the Board was supposed to be an autonomous body.<sup>36</sup> According to Damerell, the TTL stance “went beyond simply not wanting to pay higher taxes...” It was a matter of worldview: “many were the sort of Republicans who had not gotten over ‘that man in the White House,’ Franklin D. Roosevelt.” Older residents were outraged that “some of the new residents had dared register as Democrats,” and schools were thought of as “hotbeds of Communism.”<sup>37</sup>

The battle of conservative against liberal quickly became a battle of the races. In opposition, the newcomers formed the TLBS with the intention of, according to their charter, taking “all necessary and desirable steps and actions to promote the benefit and welfare of the residents of the Township of Teaneck in regard to their public school system,” so that “a maximum of education facilities and opportunities for school children of Teaneck may be provided in both the immediate and indefinite future.”<sup>38</sup> Members of the TLBS saw Teaneck’s older and better-established residents as their opponents: “some of the older people in Teaneck didn’t want to go to the expense,” one early member recalled.<sup>39</sup> TLBS quickly became known as “a Jewish group,” and only two non-Jewish couples joined the organization. But they didn’t stand a chance against Teaneck’s old guard. On Election Day, there was a record turnout. Damerell claimed, “...all the long-time residents turned out to vote. People in wheel chairs were pushed to the polls. Elderly men and women came leaning on canes and younger arms.” The

---

<sup>35</sup> Teaneck Taxpayer’s League, *Teaneck’s Most Progressive Twelve Years*, (Teaneck, NJ: Teaneck Public Library, 1941) <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/teaneck12years/index.htm> (accessed October 1, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Damerell, 70-71

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 72

<sup>38</sup> “Certificate of Incorporation of Teaneck League for Better Schools,” May 27, 1953. In possession of Barbara Ley Toffler, Teaneck, NJ.

<sup>39</sup> William and Maria Thurnmauer, interview by June Kappell, February 23, 1984, TOH.

referenda “...were defeated by three to two margins.”<sup>40</sup> It is clear from this turnout that Teaneck was a town that took its politics seriously. Moreover, it is apparent that the conservatives were not going to sit idly by and allow the newcomers to push their liberal Jewish agenda. An editorial in the *Bergen Evening Record*, a county newspaper, reported that after the election, “the line goes like this: the only people who really wanted the school program in that form were – well, look at their names – were the newcomers.”<sup>41</sup>

\*\*\*

This first school battle affirmed that Teaneck was still a conservative stronghold. A year later, in 1954, TLBS joined with liberal Christian groups to create the United Committee for the Referendums, and two of the three parts of the school plan passed – everything but the new elementary school. Nevertheless, the TTL’s conservative forces were strong, and they clearly had a powerful grip on the town’s politics. The fact that the town reacted so strongly to the proposed school budget increase indicates the extent to which it did not want to share its resources with the newcomers. Teaneck had been white, conservative, and Protestant, and there was a concerted effort to keep it that way.

---

<sup>40</sup> Damerell, 72

<sup>41</sup> William Caldwell, *Bergen Evening Record*, 1953, quoted in Damerell, 73.

## Chapter Two: 1954 - 1959

The Teaneck Civic Conference is now history...A small group of ordinary people took a stand. We determined to throw an iron spike into the grinding and crushing machinery of race prejudice on one simple issue, the absolute, unchangeable right of all Americans to live their lives anywhere they choose. But...you can't create a tiny island of decency in the middle of an ocean of bigotry.<sup>42</sup>

In June of 1951, James Payne, an African American from Englewood, was looking to buy property to build his own home. He was a mason-foreman in housing construction, and on his drive along the buffer zone leading from Englewood to Teaneck, he saw a 'For Sale' sign tacked on a tree in the woods. He approached the weather-beaten sign, and copied down the contact information. The realtor told him that the owner lived in California, and was looking to sell the property for \$2200. After bargaining the price down to \$1700, Payne bought the property, but did not have the money to begin building until 1953. Payne worked on his home only when he had free time on the weekends, and each time he came back he would find some of his hard work vandalized. Boys from the neighborhood kicked rocks into the careful excavations he made for the foundation, and stole or chopped up his lumber. They turned on his water to ruin his efforts, and cut off his sewer connection to the street. Payne tried to placate the boys with sports equipment, but it was to no avail; they simply accepted the gifts and continued to foil his work. Perhaps because he was building his home himself, members of the neighborhood soon became acutely aware that an African American was planning to move in at the edge of their town. Even before Payne moved in, panic selling began, and by the time he moved in, in January 1954, twenty-four of the forty whites living closest to him had sold their homes to African Americans. But what happened next is what set Teaneck apart. Instead of the whole neighborhood fleeing in

---

<sup>42</sup> Teaneck Civic Conference, *The Good Neighbor*, September 21, 1959, quoted in Damerell, 111-112.

fear, a group of neighbors - spearheaded by Jews, the other newcomers - formed an organization to save their community, called the Teaneck Civic Conference (TCC).<sup>43</sup>

In the story of the TCC, one can see Teaneck's greatest aspirations and its starkest shortcomings. The organization was formed in the Northeast neighborhood in an effort to stem white flight and promote neighborhood integration. Integration, as it was practiced by the TCC, was a fundamentally different concept from desegregation. While desegregation is negative because it utilizes legislation to remove barriers to equality, integration works towards the positive equal acceptance of all races into all aspects of the social fabric.<sup>44</sup> And so the organization sought to encourage interracial and interfaith interaction and friendships through social events such as dances and picnics. The group operated from around 1954 to 1959, when it admitted defeat, unable to "create a tiny island of decency in the middle of an ocean of bigotry." In trying to promote friendships across color lines, the TCC was surely the most progressive example of Teaneck's integration efforts. Its mere existence, albeit temporary, was testament to the fact that Teaneck residents aspired to *be* model. But its dissolution was an indication of an unfortunate reality: Teaneck was no better than anywhere else. In the late 1950s, even the model town could not sustain such a progressive organization.

\*\*\*

"Are you out of your minds? Don't you know you've bought deep in the heart of Dixie?" realtors asked whites as they bought homes in the Northeast section of Teaneck during the mid-1950s.<sup>45</sup> African Americans had been slowly buying into the Northeastern most edge, which lay closest to Englewood's established African American community, since 1954, and realtors had

---

<sup>43</sup> Damerell, 25-31

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Vally Forge: Judson Press, 1974), 120.

<sup>45</sup> Damerell, 37

been inciting panic selling for almost as long. The process, which occurred around the country, was known as blockbusting, and it was the subject of an article in the *Pittsburgh Daily Courier*: It “has been a favorite strategy all over the country which has netted unscrupulous realtors fat profits.” The article explained, “these smart boys induce white homeowners to sell cheaply to escape the Negro ‘invasion’ and then turn around and re-sell the homes to Negroes at great increased prices.”<sup>46</sup> Actually, discriminatory practices such as these were built into the ethical guidelines of the National Associations of Real Estate Boards through the 1960s. Realtors were cautioned not to sell property to anyone “whose presence will be clearly detrimental to property values in a neighborhood.” Listed among the individuals who might fit this description were: “a madam who had a number of call girls on her string, a gangster who wants a screen for his activities,” or “...a colored man of means who was giving his children a college education and thought they were entitled to live among whites.”<sup>47</sup> And, as a result of scheming realtors and racist neighbors, integrated neighborhoods usually did not stay integrated for long.

Some Teaneck residents, however, did not want to see their neighborhood succumb to white flight and panic selling, and in the winter of 1955 a group of neighbors in the Northeast section of town formed the TCC in response. The group met and discussed the reasons why they wanted to remain in their homes: Teaneck was an old, established community, it had an excellent school system, and a short commute into Manhattan. Though some residents were nervous about the changing neighborhood, they did not want to leave simply because African Americans were moving in. The only logical conclusion, then, was to “find a fair and peaceful solution that would be to everyone’s advantage.”<sup>48</sup> This was the TCC.

---

<sup>46</sup> “ ‘Panic’ Selling” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Jul 23, 1955.

<sup>47</sup> Sugrue, 203

<sup>48</sup> Damerell, 40



The idea of a Civic Conference was not unique to Teaneck; it was consciously modeled off of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, a grassroots organization that was formed in the Southeast neighborhood of Chicago to stem white flight around the University of Chicago area. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the neighborhoods quickly deteriorated as African Americans moved in huge numbers from the South into Northern cities. Blocks that were once white and middle class quickly became slums as landlords subdivided larger apartments and rented or sold tiny apartments to African Americans. White residents fled the city before their homes lost all value. But this was the area where the social scientists and historians of the University of Chicago resided, and they wanted to stay. In the words of Sol Tax, a University of Chicago anthropologist who was involved in the Community Conference, the Conference aimed to break “the pattern of racial residential segregation which characterized cities in the North.”<sup>49</sup> They did so by planning community meetings to discuss solutions to crime and urban renewal. Yet the neighborhood continued to lose whites and gain African Americans. Finally, they realized that they had to engage in urban planning, and work to purposefully replace whites when they moved out of apartments, rather than allow African Americans to move in. Otherwise, the neighborhood would never stay integrated.<sup>50</sup> Following in the footsteps of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Conference, the TCC had two goals. First, like the Conference, it aimed to prevent panic selling that could lead to the creation of a ghetto. But more significantly, the TCC sought to promote “integration between white and Negro families.”<sup>51</sup>

To accomplish the first goal of stemming panic selling, the TCC requested aid from the Urban League of Englewood, an organization founded in 1918 for the purpose of assisting the

---

<sup>49</sup> Sol Tax, “Residential Integration: The Case of Hyde Park in Chicago,” *Human Organization* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 22, <http://sfaa.metapress.com/openurl.asp?genre=article&eissn=1938-3525&volume=18&issue=1&page=22> (accessed February 10, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Tax, 22-27

<sup>51</sup> “Negroes Greeted in Teaneck Area,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1955.

“diverse community of Bergen Country” with, among other things, “home ownership and mortgage counseling.”<sup>52</sup> The Urban League helped the TCC by contacting the realtors to stem blockbusting from that end. It also tried to enlist friendly realtors – both African American and white – who might be on the TCC’s side, but it was difficult to get realtors to cooperate during this time of instability. The white agents reported that they were unwilling to go “out of their way to sell a house to a white family until they knew what was going to happen” to the neighborhood. And the African American agents resented the input of the Urban League, accusing it of getting involved in issues that were none of its business. If they could “sell good houses to Negroes,” why should the Urban League care?<sup>53</sup> And so it was up to the residents themselves to maintain their integrated neighborhood, even as outside forces continued to work against them. Included amongst these grassroots integration tactics were block meetings, contacting ministers and churches, “discuss[ing] changing neighborhoods at PTA meetings,” exposing realtors, and reporting acts of discrimination.<sup>54</sup> Members of the TCC also posted signs on their front lawns that read “Not For Sale...Because We Like Our Neighborhood” and asked neighbors to sign pledges not to move, which ninety of three hundred white members agreed to sign.<sup>55</sup> Their group was catching on; by July 1955, the organization consisted of over three hundred white families and fifty-seven African American families. The TCC’s innovative actions garnered national attention, and Teaneck was held up as a model of race relations. Articles about the group were published in African American newspapers like the *Atlanta Daily World* and *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *New York Times* ran a headline entitled “Negroes Greeted in

---

<sup>52</sup> Urban League for Bergen County, “About Us,” Urban League for Bergen County, [http://www.urbanleaguebc.org/about\\_us/aboutus.html](http://www.urbanleaguebc.org/about_us/aboutus.html) (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Nida E. Thomas, “Preventing Growth of Racial Ghettos,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 29, no. 6 (February 1956) 253-254, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2264030> (accessed February 28, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, 254-255

<sup>55</sup> “Panic Selling,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 23, 1955.

Teaneck Area.” The TCC’s efforts were also covered on the Today Show and in *Look* magazine. Nida Thomas, an Urban League executive who helped Teaneck in its efforts, published an article entitled “Preventing Growth of Racial Ghettos,” which depicted the Teaneck story as an imminent success: “Although the problem isn’t entirely solved,” she noted, “a very definite pattern has been set up for other communities to use.” Moreover, the experience in Teaneck sent the message that “the people with proper guidance can work out a solution to any neighborhood problem.”<sup>56</sup>

The group’s subsequent actions were its most idealistic and revolutionary: it actively promoted social integration amongst its interracial members. Though organizations like the TCC existed elsewhere in the country, individuals rarely attempted to relate to one another as anything other than neighbors at best. As historian Mary Patillo-McCoy notes, during the 1950s and 1960s, “being middle class did not annul the fact of being black.”<sup>57</sup> That is, even though individuals might have been neighbors in the same community and therefore have had similar income and education levels, they still did not socialize across color lines. But in Teaneck, one resident remembered, “...we found that when people are from, how shall I say, the same education level, they have an awful lot in common.”<sup>58</sup> And the African Americans who were moving into Teaneck were the same middle-class, white collar workers as their white neighbors; The TCC fostered social integration by organizing regular activities such as “community betterment projects and interracial ceramic, sewing, dancing, and bowling groups.”<sup>59</sup> They also held special events, such as picnics in Central Park and dances at the Reform Temple. In 1956,

---

<sup>56</sup> Nida Thomas, “Preventing Growth of Racial Ghettos,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 29 No. 6, (Feb 1956): 257, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2264030> (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Mary Patillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1999, 19.

<sup>58</sup> R. Caroline Witherspoon, interview by Myrna Gillespie, no date provided, TOH.

<sup>59</sup> Damerell, 82

the TCC took on its biggest social project yet: the production of a play, written by and for Teaneck residents, entitled “It’s a Small World.” The performance had an interracial cast, production crew, and lead couple, and followed the female lead, played by an African American, as she travelled around the world. The play was sold out for both of its performances, and fifteen hundred people ultimately saw the production, which was a huge success. From the ticket revenue, the TCC gained 600 dollars for its treasury, and the organization gained new members from different sections of town. It seemed that the TCC was accomplishing the impossible and actually creating a model integrated society.<sup>60</sup>

Though its creation and beginning had been met with much fanfare and excitement, the TCC found it difficult to make serious strides after its initial membership joined and instead encountered a series of setbacks; even the model town could not sustain such a dynamic, progressive movement. As the town and organization were praised, the words in a *Redbook Magazine* profile of the TCC hinted at the trouble to come. “This turn of events...was a heartening example of community action against race prejudice, a model for hundreds of other traditionally all-white communities confronted with Negro home ownership. But,” the article continued, “stories rarely have completely happy endings in real life.”<sup>61</sup> While the TCC did hold events to encourage integration, they were inadequate to bring new membership, and the Conference members grew agitated at the lack of success.<sup>62</sup> When the TCC invited religious leaders to partake in its meetings, only two out of twenty came. And only one member of the Town Council, a Jew named Adolph Robison, accepted the TCC’s invitation to attend a meeting. Fred Link, the African American chairman of the TCC, sold his home and moved out of Teaneck

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 82-91

<sup>61</sup> Selwyn James, “We’re Learning to Live Together,” *Redbook Magazine* 109 (June 1957), in *The Suburb Reader*, ed. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 337.

<sup>62</sup> Damerell, 58

in late 1956, having grown tired of the fight. The TCC pushed on, even as they were fighting a losing battle; by 1956, 66% of the homes near James Payne's were African American-owned.<sup>63</sup>

Even at its height, the TCC was not capable of creating a race-blind utopia. Lamar Jones, the first African American on the Board of Education and “the first black elected to anything here in Teaneck,” recalled that when he moved to Teaneck in 1955, whites became uncomfortable and moved out: “well when I first came here, you’d walk on Beveridge Street<sup>64</sup> and you’d notice that white people would look at you funny and they also would look at one another very funny, like who was going to jump first.” But, “when one moved, then Beveridge Street went out like a house on fire except for two families who remained there...it went very fast.”<sup>65</sup> African Americans who moved to Teaneck as the TCC was faltering remember it being even worse. Evelyn Parker recalled that when she and her husband, a physician, looked for homes in Teaneck in 1958, “there were just one or two blocks we were shown houses on,” all on the same Northeast street. When asked about the effectiveness of blockbusting tactics in her neighborhood, Parker responded, “...it is easier to count the whites that remained. I don’t even know how many houses are on the block but it is a long block and I think by the time we left, there were three whites left. And when we moved in, there were three black families.”<sup>66</sup>

Though white liberals in Teaneck claimed that they wanted to live in an integrated neighborhood, when it came to actually living next door to African Americans, they shrank from the challenge. When asked if he was welcomed into the community, Jones responded, “that’s kind of hard to say.”<sup>67</sup> Sugrue notes “efforts to change white attitudes had little impact on the reality of northern segregation. Even if a sizeable majority of whites in the North professed their

---

<sup>63</sup> Damerell, 82

<sup>64</sup> In the Northeast section, it quickly became the African American neighborhood

<sup>65</sup> Lamar Jones, interview by Gloria Howard, April 9, 1984, TOH.

<sup>66</sup> Evelyn Parker, interview by Orra Davage, March 7, 1984, TOH.

<sup>67</sup> Lamar Jones, interview.

support for racial integration, they moved in overwhelming numbers to all-white communities.”<sup>68</sup> They wanted African Americans to be able to live in white neighborhoods, so long as they weren’t *their* neighbors. Damerell cites a letter to the editor of the *Bergen Evening Record* written by Kay Schick, one of the founders of the TCC, in which she points to a *Catholic Digest* study which found that “seven out of ten whites evidently believe they like, rather than dislike Negroes... Yet only four out of ten whites would be willing to live next door to Negroes.” Schick pointed out the hypocrisies inherent in most whites’ attitudes towards integration: “...most of us keep swapping around, depending on whether the question is abstract or concrete. Do you like colored people? Yes. Would you live or work next to a Negro? Who me? Good heavens, no!”<sup>69</sup>

\*\*\*

The TCC was no abstract ideal; it worked towards a concrete goal of integrated living. But that goal proved to be more than even model Teaneck was ready to undertake, and in 1959, the TCC voted to disband and allocated their small treasury to the Bergen Fair Housing Council (BFHC). The farewell issue of the TCC’s publication, *The Good Neighbor*, contained an editorial explaining their demise: “a small group of ordinary people took a stand. We determined to throw an iron spike into the grinding and crushing machinery of race prejudice on one simple issue,” that is, “the absolute, unchangeable right of all Americans to live their lives *anywhere they choose*.” They learned, however, that they couldn’t “create a tiny island of decency in the middle of an ocean of bigotry.”<sup>70</sup> The dissolution of the TCC made residents aware of their shortcomings, and the creation instead of the BFHC can be seen as a retreat. While the TCC aimed to create a community at the apex of race relations by encouraging both neighborhood and

---

<sup>68</sup> Sugrue, 248

<sup>69</sup> Damerell, 59-60

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 111-112

social integration, the BFHC focused instead on creating equal housing opportunity through the reformation of legal codes. The idealistic model had been defeated.

### Chapter Three: 1959 – 1964

...The Fair Housing Council organized...walk-ins, test cases...they'd test a property with a black couple and then a white couple...everybody kept saying, we don't do this, so we were trying to document our cases. We decided that it was time to go public...and the next thing you know, the Advisory Board on Community Relations...is calling us to say, no, no, no you can't do that. That's bad publicity...I mean that was a pretty touchy period. Everybody seemed to be thinking that Teaneck was the ideal town and we kept saying no, no, no, it isn't.<sup>71</sup>

From 1959 to 1964, Teaneck was caught between its reputation and its reality, which, after the TCC's demise, was similar to other Northern suburbs. In the early 1960s, racial battles were increasingly fought in the North. In 1962, a *New York Times* article addressed the issue as it played out in the suburbs of New York City: "Racial attitudes are being reexamined. Some harden. Some adjust as patterns of daily life." The article noted forced integration and brewing racial tensions throughout the metropolitan area. Englewood was sued by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as a "sit-in and fifteen arrests" followed its first failed attempts at integration and the town feared "the possible extension of 'unrest, struggle, and violence.'" In 1961, New Rochelle, a Westchester County suburb, was ordered to recalibrate its school districts to remedy the unlawful gerrymandering that resulted in segregated neighborhood schools. According to the article, the New Rochelle case indicated that suburbs "could not, simply by enlarging or improving the school, escape the positive responsibility to desegregate." The *New York Times* also noted that, like Teaneck, other towns were trying to entice African Americans to their neighborhood with welcoming signs. When asked if he had a racial integration plan for a particular Westchester suburb, an NAACP attorney replied: "I would say that something is in the works for the entire North." It was a time when the

---

<sup>71</sup> Orra Davage, interview by June Kapell, April 18, 1984, TOH.



country was looking to the North as the next integration frontier, and Teaneck did not want to disappoint.<sup>72</sup>

Though the TCC had fallen apart, Teaneck continued to be known as a “model town.” But the title meant different things to different people. Some felt that Teaneck already was a model of race relations – after all, no riots ensued when African Americans bought into the Northeast community, and two of the eight elementary schools could boast an integrated student body. Others still clung to the conservative, 1949 model. But though they disagreed on the definition, liberals and conservatives alike knew one thing: the model town was perfect. It had no problems, racial or otherwise. Even the national press continued to view Teaneck as a model: in 1961, the *New York Herald Tribune* ran an article entitled “Teaneck, New Jersey, Called Model of Democracy.”<sup>73</sup> As Teaneck increasingly became known as the paradigm of democracy, efforts were made by both the town and the press to silence dissenters on both ends of the political spectrum. Moreover, true to the concept of preserving a *reputation*, many residents seemed content with creating the illusion of a liberal consensus without actually working towards one. For example, residents pressured the Town Council to create an Advisory Board on Community Relations to deal with Civil Rights issues, but the group was completely powerless to affect any change. Groups that acknowledged the town’s shortcomings were silenced; when the BFHC charged realtors with bias, the Advisory Board cautioned the activists against “bad publicity.” And when conservative residents opposed the earliest forms of school integration, a local newspaper branded them bigots. All the while, residents pressured their Town Council to

---

<sup>72</sup> Milton Bracker, “Integration Forces in Suburbs Mount Drive on a Broad Front,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1962.

<sup>73</sup> “Teaneck, N.J., Called Model of Democracy,” *New York Herald Tribune*, (exact date unknown) 1961, <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/ModelCommunity/modeltown1961.htm> (accessed February 1, 2011).

maintain the model town. In the last period before school integration, the town worked hard to construct and protect its model reputation.

\*\*\*

In 1959, it seemed that liberals and newcomers were finally making great strides in Teaneck's politics. In 1958, the conservative reign of the TTL had finally been broken as the town voted in its first independent slate of councilmen in thirty years. Matty Feldman, a Jewish liberal, became mayor, though the process was a circuitous one: he was elected deputy, and moved up to the position when the mayor unexpectedly passed away. Though other Jews had been on the Council before, they were usually run as part of the TTL's five-man slate as "token Jews" in order to capture a certain percentage of the vote. Feldman was definitely more liberal: while campaigning at a TCC meeting, he promised the town that he would create an Advisory Board on Community Relations to deal with Civil Rights in the town. Moreover, he ran as an independent, and attracted his own slate of co-politicians. His victory represented a shift in Teaneck politics.<sup>74</sup>

In December 1959, the Town Council finally agreed to form an Advisory Board on Community Relations, but the group had little influence due to conservative opposition and conflicting liberal aims. Though Mayor Feldman had outlined his plan for the board in 1958, the Board was established only after Feldman agreed to officially title it "The Mayor's Advisory Board on Community Relations," as the other members of the Town Council were not interested in associating with the organization. Many citizens, too, were opposed to the Advisory Board: Damerell claimed, "the idea of the board was unpopular. Many people considered it a welcoming committee for Negroes." The Board was a somewhat strange institution; it was filled with appointed positions, and it had no real power of its own. Among its initial members were two

---

<sup>74</sup> Damerell, 92-107

realtors, one of whom had no interest in the Board after attending his first meeting, three clergymen: Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, and three laypeople who had been involved in town integration politics.<sup>75</sup> Disagreement about the role of the Board grew so strong that it was disbanded for a brief point in October 1961, when it was up for renewal. Councilman Menkes voted against reinstating the Board on October 17, but the board was revived in mid-November when Menkes changed his mind. Sam Bartoletta<sup>76</sup>, the lone councilman who remained opposed to the board, had the letters “KKK” painted on the door of his home. In Feldman’s mind, incidents like these “could be the reason we need an advisory board on community relations. Other homes and religious places have had similar incidents. Every clergyman in town feels the necessity of the board.”<sup>77</sup> But liberals still wanted a board that could act for integration, and conservatives still opposed the idea altogether.

The conflict between the Advisory Board and the more activist liberals, represented by the BFHC, was most pronounced in their differing approaches to housing integration. As the 1950s turned into the 1960s, blockbusting, steering, and white flight continued to impede neighborhood integration efforts in Teaneck. The BFHC wanted to address the problems head-on by filing bias suits against specific realtors. But the Advisory Board favored a more moderate approach of simple communication and anti-bias workshops for the town. What the argument boiled down to, however, was image: Mayor Feldman and the Advisory Board opposed the tactics of the BFHC because public actions would sully Teaneck’s reputation.

White flight continued after the dissolution of the TCC. Orra Davage, an African American member of the BFHC, remembered that when she moved to Teaneck in 1959: “the realtors I soon discovered were steering blacks into the northeast part of town only. With great

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 129

<sup>76</sup> Bartoletta became the fifth man on the Town Council after Haniball died.

<sup>77</sup> John W. Slocum, “Teaneck Revives Anti-Bias Board,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1961.

reluctance, they admitted there was another part of Teaneck, but you know, you don't want to live there..." She also "noticed that people would ring my doorbell, realtors...wanting to know if I was going to sell...they were just destroying up the neighborhood, going to see, is your house for sale."<sup>78</sup> And white flight persisted; in 1961, the *New York Times* quoted a white Northeast Teaneck resident: "colored people moved in there last month," he said, pointing three doors down from his home. "I don't know them from Adam, and I have nothing against them. But I'm not going to be the last white man on the street. I'll sell as quick as I can and I don't care if it's white or colored."<sup>79</sup>

The BFHC's approach to the neighborhood integration problem was more tactical than ever before; it focused on calling out realtors on their acts of bias like blockbusting or steering African Americans to one particular neighborhood. Davage remembers that to do so, the group members "...organized...walk-ins, test cases. In other words...they'd test a property with a black couple and then a white couple...we were trying to document our cases."<sup>80</sup> The *New York Times* reported that the BFHC also attempted to pressure the Town Council to act by circulating an anti-bias petition. The signers of the petition hoped to force the Council to "issue a public statement that discrimination in housing is a denial of the American way," as well as to proclaim that Teaneck was "an open-occupancy township and that all good neighbors are welcome to purchase homes in any section."<sup>81</sup>

Mayor Feldman and the Advisory Board wanted no part in such aggressive measures; they felt that "by establishing lines of communications and understanding between neighbors," they could "drive unscrupulous real estate dealers out of Teaneck." It was not necessary to call

---

<sup>78</sup> Orra Davage, interview.

<sup>79</sup> Clarence Dean, "Negroes Facing Test in Suburbs," *New York Times*, May 21, 1961.

<sup>80</sup> Orra Davage, interview.

<sup>81</sup> "Teaneck Group Seeks to Avert Creation of Negro Ghetto There," *New York Times*, August 5, 1961.

out the realtors publicly in the manner of the BFHC. To Feldman, it was enough to just promote neighborly relationships and allow integration to naturally grow. The Board also supported a six-week workshop sponsored by New York University “designed to counter bias and suspicion, and stimulate respect.”<sup>82</sup> These tactics were specifically intended to counter what Feldman told the *New York Times* were the “militant means” of the BFHC. The mayor also sent a message to members of the BFHC through the newspaper article: “I say to those who do not like the way Teaneck is laid out and operated and managed, and do not like to live under present conditions, there is no Chinese wall around Teaneck.” Residents who were unhappy with the status quo could “do something about it at the ballot boxes in May.”<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, these mild tactics would promote Teaneck’s reputation by portraying it as a town that was capable of combating its “realtor problem” with rational discourse rather than lawsuits. Davage recalled that after the BFHC decided to go public with their findings, they soon had “...the Advisory Board on Community Relations...calling...to say, no, no, no you can’t do that. That’s bad publicity...” In Davage’s mind, “...that was a pretty touchy period. Everybody seemed to be thinking that Teaneck was the ideal town and we kept saying no, no, no, it isn’t.”<sup>84</sup> Though Feldman and the Advisory Board had professed distaste for “militant tactics,” when it boiled down to it, they were actually opposed to “bad publicity.” And those who insisted on bringing Teaneck bad publicity were free to leave.

Teaneck’s residents, too, were conscious of constructing and maintaining the town’s reputation in the face of the country’s broader narrative of the Civil Rights movement. Town Council meeting minutes from November 1963 record that a Mr. Stern of 859 Greenwood Road attended a Teaneck town council meeting and “congratulated the Township, saying that while he

---

<sup>82</sup> Damerell, 129

<sup>83</sup> John W. Slocum, “Mayor Revives Anti-Bias Board,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1961.

<sup>84</sup> Orra Davage, interview.

was out on the West Coast last month the newspapers were full of the troubles in the Southern cities and in Englewood, N.J. whereas Teaneck has taken the first steps [toward integration] smoothly and in good will.”<sup>85</sup> Stern was referring to the fact that the year before, Teaneck’s Board of Education had made an effort toward school integration. Some residents and town leaders alike became alarmed when the Bryant School, in the Northeast section of town, approached a fifty percent African American enrollment. In response, the Board of Education created the voluntary transfer plan, which allowed students to transfer out of their neighborhood school to any of Teaneck’s other elementary schools. Participation in the plan was strictly limited to African Americans looking to transfer out of the Northeast and whites looking to transfer into it. In Stern’s mind, Teaneck was most clearly contrasted with Englewood, which was at that moment embroiled in a tense, court-ordered school integration battle. Still, Teaneck residents continued to attend Town Council meetings and remind their councilmen of the need to uphold Teaneck’s reputation. Minutes from the Town Council meeting on December 3, 1963, where the issue of school integration was brought up and two members of the Board of Education were in the audience, record that “Mr. Roy Henderson of 239 Voorhees Street mentioned that Teaneck had been proclaimed the Model Town in the past and he hoped it would be kept that way.”<sup>86</sup> Teaneck’s reputation as the model town was conditional on Teaneck’s status as the paragon of integration. Moreover, it was the Council’s job to ensure that that the reputation “would be kept that way.”

In 1963, *Brown v. Board of Education*’s 1954 promise of equal education<sup>87</sup> appeared to

---

<sup>85</sup> Teaneck Town Council, *Meeting Minutes*, (Teaneck, NJ: Teaneck Municipal Records), November 1963.

<sup>86</sup> Teaneck Town Council, Dec. 3, 1963

<sup>87</sup> In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States handed down its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The Court declared that separate but equal education was inherently unequal. In doing so, it overruled the precedent set by the 1896 decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which had declared that separate but equal facilities for whites and African Americans were constitutional. Though the court had ruled for equal education before, notably in *Sweatt v. Painter* in 1950, which declared that separate but equal law schools were

be crumbling all around Teaneck, especially in Englewood. The neighboring town had a longstanding, mostly lower class African American community, having been established by servants of the extremely wealthy white mansions on “the hill.” The African American community was concentrated in Englewood’s Fourth Ward and consequently, Lincoln School, the local school in that district, was almost completely African American. A nearby school was partially integrated – sixty two percent African American. In 1961, an Englewood resident, representing the interests of the Fourth Ward, the Lincoln School Parent Teacher Association, and the NAACP, read a statement to the Board of Education, requesting the integration of the Lincoln School in accordance with the *Brown* decision. When the Board refused to make any immediate or public moves, residents organized a boycott. This was followed by a very public debate over the school budget that involved the NAACP and the Bergen County chapter of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE). Eventually, Englewood was forced to desegregate when, after a series of court cases, the New Jersey Commissioner of Education ruled that the de facto segregation was unconstitutional. The national media, especially the *New York Times*, criticized the “embarrassing situation” in Englewood. It was against this backdrop that Teaneck made the first steps towards its own school integration; it wanted to demonstrate that it was a civically engaged town, with progressive activists eager to prove themselves to their neighbors and nation.<sup>88</sup>

But Teaneck’s first school desegregation plan was a disappointment to liberals and conservatives alike: In 1962, the first year of the voluntary transfer program, only four students participated, and by September 1963, still only nineteen children had taken advantage of the

---

unconstitutional, *Brown* declared that separate education is inherently unequal, no matter the facilities. See *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>88</sup> David Spengler, “The Englewood-Teaneck Experience,” in *School Integration in the North*, ed. T. Bentley Edwards and Frederick M. Wirt (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967), 207-219.

plan.<sup>89</sup> Individuals across the political spectrum were frustrated that so few residents were willing to partake in the plan: liberals actually wanted racial integration, while conservatives had hoped that the town would be able to integrate without a mandatory plan. The Board of Education itself was divided. Lamar Jones, a Harlem teacher who was the only African American on the Board of Education, voted against the plan “on the ground that the board was being stampeded.”<sup>90</sup> Andrew Gainer, an African American from the Northeast, opposed the plan because he felt it placed the responsibility of integration solely on African American children. To him, it seemed that “they were going to *allow* Negro children to transfer to white schools to get the benefit of sitting next to white children.” But, he argued, “I do not think my children are inferior. I think that to transfer Negro children puts a heavy burden on young shoulders.”<sup>91</sup> The onus of integration applied equally to both African Americans and whites, and some African Americans realized early on that integration could not occur without active white participation. As 1963 drew to a close, it became obvious that the vast majority of Teaneck’s citizens were no different from those of any other New York suburb; they would not act to integrate without a mandatory plan. As one white suburbanite told the *New York Times*, “Everybody’s in favor of [school integration] in principle. But the minute it hits one particular neighborhood, that’s different...”<sup>92</sup> Whites were not going to act voluntarily; a mandatory school integration plan was inevitable.

Even as Teaneck encountered setback after setback – the Northeast became increasingly African American, the Advisory Board and BFHC could not present a united front, and the voluntary integration plan faltered – an organization to foster interracial relationships sprang up

---

<sup>89</sup> “Teaneck Schools Shift Racial Plan,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1963.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Damerell, 190

<sup>92</sup> Milton Bracker, “Integration Forces in Suburbs Mount Drive on a Broad Front,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1962.



in the Northeast section. The organization, known as the North East Community Organization (NECO), was founded in 1964 in the home of Dr. Archie and Mrs. Theodora Lacey. The couple certainly fit the archetype of Teaneck's well educated, civically engaged African Americans: he was a professor at Hunter College, and Mrs. Lacey, who would become a Teaneck public school teacher, had been active in the Civil Rights movement in Montgomery, Alabama, where she grew up. Her father was responsible for bringing Martin Luther King, Jr. to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and she was friends with Rosa Parks and active in the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott.<sup>93</sup> The group naturally formed from the cottage parties and nightcaps that young couples had at homes throughout the neighborhood following various town meetings. As Dr. Lacey explained, NECO was formed "to make certain that [services] remained as good as they were anyplace in town."<sup>94</sup> But the organization quickly meant more than that. "...In addition to a community organization, we had social functions and we had people, we began to invite people from all over the town," explained Mrs. Lacey. "We had people in other parts of town joining. Because we had some wonderful, it was a wonderful family organization, home oriented and we had some beautiful affairs all over North Jersey." These events were held "at the Bergen Mall, Garden State Plaza, dances and parties and really NECO really got to be very, very fine for more than its function in the community."<sup>95</sup> NECO's efforts seemed to hark back to the principles of the original northeast organization, the TCC. Like the TCC, it was an organization committed to maintaining the neighborhood and providing opportunities for interracial socialization.

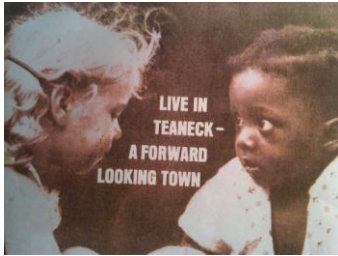
---

<sup>93</sup> Theodora Lacey, interview by author, Teaneck, NJ, December 29, 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Archie and Theodora Lacey, interview by June Kappell, June 5, 1984, TOH.

<sup>95</sup> Archie and Theodora Lacey, interview.

NECO sought to promote and preserve the interracial character of its neighborhood



through a pamphlet it released in conjunction with the BFHC in October 1964. The pamphlet, entitled “Teaneck – A Forward Looking Town” had on its cover a picture of an African American toddler and white toddler playing. Inside, the pamphlet touted the

many positive aspects of life in Teaneck’s Northeast community, which included schools, parks, and the town council-manager style of government, among others. The neighborhood was depicted as idyllic. If a prospective homebuyer walked through Teaneck, the pamphlet claimed, he would “see the neighbors chatting over forsythia-lined fences; see the children playing on the streets and sidewalks, in the backyards.” But these children were different from those around the country: “Tall and short, stocky and slim, black and white, the children are all playing together, running together, laughing together. For this is an integrated neighborhood, where Negro and white lived side by side, in friendship and understanding.” Teaneck residents, the pamphlet claimed, “regardless of their backgrounds or philosophies, on one point are agreed: this may possibly be the best town in the world.” But this wasn’t just because of the schools or outdoor summer concerts offered in the town’s “very own Central Park.” Rather, Teaneck residents loved their town because “they know the value and values of an integrated society.” Teaneck residents, in their approach to race relations, were at the cutting edge of a world social revolution: “We know that sympathetic human relations are key to the secret of sympathetic world relations...And so, we all live here together, people of varied racial and religious backgrounds, in this pleasant, quiet community. And we like it.” Even in the face of Teaneck’s housing and

school integration disappointments, NECO continued to promote the town's reputation for democratic equality.<sup>96</sup>

NECO's promotion of the town as a democratic haven gains even more significance when juxtaposed with the fact that CBS, a national media source, recognized Teaneck as having a ghetto. In December 1964, just two months after the "Live in Teaneck" pamphlet was released, a special aired on CBS, entitled "Segregation – Northern Style." The purpose of the special was "to try to answer the largest unanswered questions about Negro housing: what actually happens when a Negro family looks for a house in Northern white suburbia? In some ways, the answer is the key to the much larger problem of Negro housing in general." In order to achieve this goal, CBS looked for a family who lived in a "ghetto," defined as "a quarter in which members of a minority group live because of social, legal, or economic pressure," and hoped to move to a white or integrated community. The couple that answered this description was "Corbett and Sally Rachal, an attractive, well-educated Negro couple with an 11-year old daughter" who "live in a nearly all-Negro neighborhood of Teaneck, NJ."<sup>97</sup> While NECO was touting Teaneck as the best America had to offer for integrated living, CBS determined that the town had a "ghetto." In light of this, the packet demonstrates how some Teaneck residents refused to give up on the promise of their model community. They clung to the model town reputation even as outsiders saw a ghetto. As the chairman of the Advisory Board on Community Relations told the *New York Times*, "the booklet was a testament of faith in a town."<sup>98</sup>

\*\*\*

---

<sup>96</sup> *Live in Teaneck – A Forward Looking Town*, (Teaneck, NJ: The Teaneck Fair Housing Committee and the Northeast Community Organization, 1964), pamphlet in possession of author.

<sup>97</sup> William Peters, "Not for Sale: The Black and White Crisis in Suburbia," *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1964.

<sup>98</sup> "Teaneck is Great, its Residents Say," *New York Times*, Oct. 11, 1964.

But it was rapidly becoming obvious that Teaneck would have to take a firmer stand if it really wanted integration to take root. Voluntary school integration and rational talks with biased realtors could not effectively desegregate or destroy prejudice. The BFHC continued to bring charges of bias against realtors, and segregation in the school system was growing. As the 1963 - 1964 school year wore on, the growing racial imbalance in the town's elementary schools was becoming impossible to ignore. Bryant and Washington Irving, both in the Northeast section, had fifty percent and thirty eight percent African American enrollment, respectively, while the town's six other elementary schools were almost completely white. Tension was mounting. Regular residential attendance at Board of Education meetings increased to the point that the Board moved its meetings from its Board Room, which could accommodate forty people, to the High School's auditorium, where the members of the Board could conduct the meeting from the stage and up to one thousand concerned citizens could fill the audience. With internal and external pressures rising and the town's reputation on the line, the Board of Education was going to have to act.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Damerell, 197

## Chapter Four: 1964 – 1968

Let people not say that Teaneck waited to be directed. Let them say, ‘Teaneck led the way.’<sup>100</sup>

The battle over Teaneck’s mandatory school integration threatened to split the town apart. Though the plan was implemented by the Board of Education, the town made their feelings about integration known in two Board elections. Elections for the nine-man Board occurred every year, when three members at a time were elected to three-year terms. In 1964, mandatory integration was an unofficial election issue. Residents on both ends of the political spectrum realized that it was coming, and cast their votes in line with their feelings on the subject. As such, it became clear once again that Teaneck was no different from any other town: two of the three elected candidates were openly anti-integration. Nevertheless, the Board of Education mandated a busing plan to integrate the school system by making Bryant a central sixth grade school, freezing enrollment at Washington Irving, and busing Bryant children to schools in other neighborhoods.<sup>101</sup> In 1965, then, it was up to the town to voice their approval or disapproval about the plan at the ballot box. Liberal fellow travelers banded together in organizations like the Teaneck Citizens for Public Schools (TCPS) to combat anti-integrationists who rallied under the guise of being “pro-Neighborhood school” in the Neighborhood School Association (NSA). Though there was no violence, the depths of bigotry that liberals saw in their neighbors during this integration battle shook them to the core. Real or imagined, the model town felt all eyes on them to make the right decision and peacefully accept voluntary integration.

---

<sup>100</sup> Damerell, 257

<sup>101</sup> Hereafter, the “Central Six Plan”

As Superintendent Harvey Scribner declared in the midst of the struggle: “Let people not say that Teaneck waited to be directed. Let them say, ‘Teaneck led the way.’”<sup>102</sup>

Integrationists briefly emerged triumphant, when in 1965 the Teaneck Board of Education mandated a plan to integrate the town’s public schools. Although the town was able to look past ideological disputes, this harmony was fleeting. In the years that followed the establishment of a central sixth grade, the town experienced continued turmoil, as actual implementation proved more difficult than the ideal. Yet those who fought so hard for Teaneck’s promise proudly remember an unspoiled moment, in which community purpose prevailed.

\*\*\*

In 1964, the Board of Education election had only one issue: integration. Citizens were concerned solely with whether a candidate was for integration or favored maintaining neighborhood schools. Two slates of candidates ran for election, and both consisted of accomplished, highly educated individuals who felt strongly that the question of integration merited their devotion. The anti-integrationists backed by the NSA were: (1) Dr. Harry Warner, a Jewish physician from the South whose wife was executive treasurer of the NSA, (2) Paul Margolis, also Jewish, and (3) Helen Zahray, a Catholic, who, though she was anti-integration, had fought for increasing the budget in the school battle ten years prior. The slate of integrationist candidates were: (1) Bernie Confer, an incumbent Board member who was a Protestant and executive director of Lutheran World Relief, (2) Fay Geier, a Jewish past president of the Bryant school PTA, and (3) Reverend Arthur Stevenson, director of Administrative Services at the Board of National Missions at the United Presbyterian church in

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

Manhattan.<sup>103</sup> Both slates rallied support by attending cottage meetings around town and trying to gain votes, one citizen at a time.

The integration battle consumed the town. Confer remembered that although he had other issues he wanted to address, the constant subject for discussion was racial imbalance, which he said was “discussed... at every cottage meeting.”<sup>104</sup> Fears and prejudices were mounting, and the TCPS candidates tried to learn how to handle the panic. Ruth Glick, an active member of TCPS recalled campaigning for her group’s candidates: “...when we saw the tenor of the town...that kind of hysterical attitude at the meetings...we gave ourselves a leadership training course...we got Henry Lipman from Columbia University...and he met with us for a number of sessions...” After learning how to handle the crowds, “we set up a series of cottage parties which we called crackerbarrel sessions in people's houses all over town, all over, we went into actually strange houses, we didn't know anybody.” They went to “all neighborhoods. We went into the black community because they had to know that we were white people who wanted to be integrated you know with them. We went everywhere. And some places we had hostile reception and some places were interested. They gave us an argument.” But they just wanted to “open people's minds and let them talk about the whole issue and let them express all the hostility and all the fears they felt [about African American children going to school with their white children]. We had to do that first before they could begin to listen and try to understand...”<sup>105</sup> The efforts of the TCPS were certainly noble, but the fact that they had to go “into the black community” to introduce themselves as “white people who wanted to be integrated” is indicative of the fact that the liberals who banded together for this cause were not completely united. They

---

<sup>103</sup> Damerell, 210

<sup>104</sup> Bernard Confer, interview by June Kappell, May 12, 1984, TOH.

<sup>105</sup> Ruth and Harold Glick, interview by June Kappell, June 1, 1984, TOH.

banded together with a common goal, but the groups did not necessarily have open lines of communication. Although the coalition was strong enough to last through the fraught elections of 1964 and 1965, when the end game was clear and tangible, it fell apart once the goal was achieved.

Tensions peaked in weeks preceding the election. At a public forum where the two slates of candidates debated each other in January 1964, Bill Watkins, an African American from the Northeast who had participated in voluntary integration, got up and asked Dr. Warner if “he would wait for a Supreme Court decision” before implementing a mandatory integration plan at Bryant. Warner responded that “de facto segregation was not a moral issue because Negroes had moved there out of their own free will,” clearly choosing to ignore the blockbusting, steering, and white flight that had brought on the situation in the first place. With Warner’s response, every African American in the audience, except for Board of Education member Lamar Jones, got up and walked out simultaneously.<sup>106</sup> Superintendent Scribner tried to remind citizens that Teaneck High School, which had always been integrated because the town had just one high school building, in 1963 had the highest number of National Merit Scholarship semifinalists of any school in New Jersey; clearly education did not suffer from an integrated classroom environment.<sup>107</sup>

But Teaneck’s conservative forces won out once again. The Board of Education election in February 1964 had the highest turnout the town had seen in ten years, since the school budget had been defeated in 1954. The winners of the 1964 election were (1) Warner, (2) Margolis, and (3) Confer, the lone incumbent, with Zahray, the third integrationist, as a close fourth. Two anti-integrationists and one incumbent had won. The integrationists took this loss to heart. One TCPS

---

<sup>106</sup> Damerell, 215

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 218



member recalled, “when the results came in which showed that the anti-integration forces were going to win, the kids linked arms and they sang ‘We Shall Overcome’.”<sup>108</sup> It was a bit melodramatic, to be sure, yet it highlights the importance that these residents attached to their town and their efforts, and the extent to which they took their fight seriously. By singing what was arguably the anthem of the Civil Rights movement, members of the TCPS aligned themselves with this larger movement, and connected Teaneck’s efforts with those of the rest of the country. Dr. Lacey of NECO issued a statement saying, “The election result was no different than the referenda that have been held in the South to determine whether schools shall be segregated or integrated.”<sup>109</sup> This outcome in the model town was representative of national trends.

Tensions escalated, as even without the town’s endorsement, the Board of Education took cautious but determined steps toward mandatory integration. Racial imbalance at Bryant had grown too pronounced; if the Board did not act soon, they might be faced with unwelcome outside intervention. In fact, in late March 1964, the president of the Bergen County branch of the NAACP contacted Mayor Feldman and the Town Council “to seek solutions to the problems of racial imbalance in the Teaneck school system,” but he received no reply.<sup>110</sup> The Board of Education felt pressure to act to implement a plan for the upcoming 1964 - 1965 school year, fearing that if they waited too long, more NSA candidates like Warner and Margolis would be elected to the Board. Citizens bombarded the board with integration plans and petition, but when Scribner presented the Central Six plan to the Board of Education, Warner and Margolis stood by their neighborhood school stance and refused to discuss the possibility. Meanwhile, the NSA heightened its efforts to rally town support. Warner turned to rousing members of the NSA

---

<sup>108</sup> Morton and June Handler, interview by Helen Klein, March 11, 1985, TOH.

<sup>109</sup> Spengler, 244

<sup>110</sup> “Ask School Talk,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 4, 1964.

against the Board of Education by telling conspiracy theories at secret house meetings. One pro-integration couple somehow snuck into one of these meetings, and in a letter to the *Sunday Sun*, a Teaneck newspaper, the couple disclosed the details of Warner's speech. He claimed that a plan for a sixth grade school had already been extensively discussed in a private session, and that it called for eventually creating central schools for each grade. Warner told the crowd that these plans were unnecessary wastes of money, as there was no race problem in Teaneck, and he urged the importance of electing NSA candidates for the 1965 election. And if all else failed, Warner told his constituents to look into the possibilities of private schools or tutors. Warner also invited Mayor Feldman to private meetings at his home with the African American members of the NSA, who claimed that *they*, not Dr. Lacey and NECO, represented the interests of the African American community. But the Board had already made up its mind. The public meeting to announce the integration plan was scheduled for the following night.<sup>111</sup>

The meeting had an unprecedented turnout. Both sides led phone campaigns, urging residents to attend, and fourteen hundred people showed up. When Confer called on the Board's secretary to read the correspondence and petitions of the week, most letters were against the adoption of any forced integration plan. One petition was signed by "fourteen longtime residents who could be considered prominent." Among them were: a "former Superior Court Judge, four ex-Councilmen, three of whom had been mayors...seven former Board of Education members, three of them presidents." The petition urged that "any plan involving compulsory busing of children would not only be harmful to the children involved but would be disastrous to the community and its future."<sup>112</sup> The meeting proceeded, and Superintendent Scribner finally announced the integration plan. They had decided to make Bryant a central sixth grade school, to

---

<sup>111</sup> Damerell, 222 - 235

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 251

where students from all over the town would be bused. Students in the Bryant elementary school district would be bused to different schools, and enrollment at Washington Irving elementary school, which was at that point almost 30 percent African American, would be frozen. When the plan was announced, the crowd turned into an angry mob. Members of the NSA screamed that their children needed to have hot lunches and argued that busing would disturb the children psychologically. Scribner proceeded with the vote, and all but Warner and Margolis voted in favor of integration. Scribner knew that many citizens wanted the town to wait for the state to give them direction, but he was not content to wait.<sup>113</sup>

True to form, the NSA refused to stand idly by as the integrationists pushed their liberal agenda. The *New York Times* reported that at the end of the four-hour meeting, NSA members paraded in front of the stage, and threatened legal action.<sup>114</sup> A week later, the *New York Amsterdam News*, an African American newspaper, covered the story as well: “advocates of the neighborhood schools, irate whites, and others angrily denounced the plan and since that time an avalanche of anti-integrationist literature has flooded the area.” The NSA hoped to recall the vote by collecting signatures for a petition. Though 3,872 signatures were necessary, the NSA was confident that they would be able to get 5,000.<sup>115</sup> They refused to partake in conversation with the Advisory Board on Community Relations, choosing instead to file suit against the Board of Education in June. According to journalist David Spengler, legal counsel for the NSA argued that the Board’s plan was unconstitutional because “it was based on racial considerations and because it deprived children of a right to attend nearby schools.” The case was thrown out,

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> John W. Slocum, “Teaneck to Merge Sixth Grade Classes to Avert Imbalance,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1964.

<sup>115</sup> Cathy White, “Anti-Integrationists Hit Teaneck Bd. Of Ed.,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 23, 1964

however, due to a “failure to exhaust administrative remedies.”<sup>116</sup> The NSA had good reason to take action: according to the *New York Times* the integration plan “went into effect despite what both sides in the controversy say was the opposition of the majority of the townspeople.”<sup>117</sup>

The summer of 1964 was a trying time for race relations, especially throughout the urban North. The racial discord present in the model town was spreading throughout the nation. This was the first of the “long hot summers,” months in which African American urban violence and rioting for civil rights peaked. One of the worst riots occurred just five miles from Teaneck when African Americans in Harlem marched defiantly against an off duty white police officer who had shot and killed a young African American man.<sup>118</sup> Riots also rocked nearby Newark, NJ, and even shook Montclair, an affluent New York City suburb located just fifteen miles from Teaneck.<sup>119</sup>

Meanwhile, in Teaneck, the NSA had grown frustrated with trying to make its objections heard within the town. If Teaneck leadership would not listen to them, even as the *New York Times* and a town councilman recognized that they represented the majority views, they were going to take their case to the country, which they did by picketing at the Democratic National Convention, which took place that August in Atlantic City. The *Chicago Daily Defender* reported: “a busload of 50 picketers from Teaneck, NJ paraded up to the convention hall with signs calling for the ‘preservation of neighborhood schools’ in that city.”<sup>120</sup> They also had signs blaring, “Democracy is Dying in Teaneck” and “Teaneck – No Liberty For All.”<sup>121</sup> The article noted that “the new arrivals, mostly housewives, were new at picketing, but they quickly learned

---

<sup>116</sup> Spengler, 245

<sup>117</sup> Walter Carlson, “School Shuffle Divides Teaneck,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1964.

<sup>118</sup> “Nation: All the Long, Hot Summers,” *Time*, June 2, 1980, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,924145,00.html> (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Sugrue, 327

<sup>120</sup> Norman C. Cornish, “Even Santa Pickets At Convention,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 27, 1964.

<sup>121</sup> Damerell, 266

how to march in a circle like the civil rights demonstrators.” One of the picketers told the *Defender* that “her group was opposed to a compulsory bussing [sic] plan approved by the local board of education to avoid an ‘imbalance’ of Negro and white pupils in the public schools.” They picketed to pressure the Democratic Party to make a “plank against such actions,” as the Republican Party had already done.<sup>122</sup> A resident who attended the Town Council meeting immediately following the picketing defended the actions of the NSA women, claiming that “the people went down to Atlantic City to get attention which...they could not get in Teaneck.” The Council was humiliated. Teaneck still proudly retained its model town image, and members of the Council felt this reputation had been tarnished. Even in a September 1964 article about the town divisions caused by the integration plan, the *New York Times* opened by noting that “fifteen years ago this northern New Jersey township was selected by the United States Army from 10,000 communities as a model town – ‘a model of democracy’ for the world.”<sup>123</sup>

Though they had been rebuffed persistently, the NSA still refused to comply with the integration plan, and they intended to send their sixth grade children to their neighborhood schools come September. When the Advisory Board on Community Relations saw this plan outlined in a petition, they sent letters to the parents on the list, requesting their cooperation. Parents were irate that the Advisory Board, supposedly an arm of the neutral Town Council, seemed to be openly siding with integration. They found sympathetic ears when they brought their complaints to the Council; two of the Council’s members were still openly in favor of neighborhood schools. One councilman noted that the outraged residents could take their complaints to the Board of Education, because it “chose to overlook two public votes” in mandating the integration plan in the first place. Another Councilman “read a statement

---

<sup>122</sup> Norman C. Cornish, “Even Santa Pickets At Convention,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 27, 1964.

<sup>123</sup> Walter Carlson, “School Shuffle Divides Teaneck,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1964.

reaffirming his support of the Neighborhood School Policy,” but asked disgruntled parents to take their frustrations out at the ballot box, rather than through civil disobedience.<sup>124</sup> But a week before school started, the Town Council asked the petitioners to follow the law, and send their children to the appropriate schools.<sup>125</sup> The model town finally behaved itself: the school year began with none of the threatened boycotts.<sup>126</sup>

Though the 1964 - 1965 school year passed uneventfully, the 1965 school board election – the first time that integration was an official issue on the table – exacerbated tensions like never before. As Charles Grady, an African American who moved to the Northeast in the 1960s, remembered the election: “the issue centered around the approval of the board approval of this plan,” and “...the integrationists if you will were of course...opposed by those...segregationists.” The town’s stamp of approval for the integration really depended on “voting for school board members who took certain positions to implement this plan.”<sup>127</sup> As such, two slates of three ran in the 1965 election: one integrationist, and one segregationist. Like the candidates of the 1964 election, 1965’s slate featured six candidates whose prestigious positions demonstrated the extent to which Teaneck residents were committed to their town. The integrationists were dubbed “The Good Guys” by their supporters, and they consisted of (1) Joe Coffee, an assistant to the president of Columbia University, (2) Orville Sather, an engineer and CEO who had already served nine years on the Board, and (3) Jay Greenstone, a young lawyer who grew up in Teaneck, attending the integrated Washington Irving School. Supporters of the Good Guys knew that since they did not have the majority of the town on their side, they would have to make a serious effort to get their candidates elected. In opposition to the Good Guys

---

<sup>124</sup> Teaneck Town Council, *Meeting Minutes*, August 11, 1964

<sup>125</sup> Spengler, 246

<sup>126</sup> “No Boycott in Teaneck,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1964.

<sup>127</sup> Charles Grady, interview by Orra Davage, March 22, 1984, TOH.

were (1) George Kaplan, a Jew, a trustee of the conservative temple and a graduate of Harvard Law School (2) Mario Foah, an Italian Jew, and executive vice president of an international food company (3) M. Richard Sampson, a Protestant and representative of worldwide shipping companies.<sup>128</sup>

The shortcomings of integration were foreshadowed by the fact that the individuals involved came from disparate groups, each of whom had differing motives for supporting integration. Integrationists formed a loose coalition of liberals: Ruth Rosenblum remembered that liberal groups got “married.” They were “the 'middle of the road liberals' you know, civil right people, etc. with interest that way, good government, etc. and I suppose they were basically people who never voted down a budget. That group plus, of course, a group of blacks. Some blacks.”<sup>129</sup> The liberal groups managed to band together to integrate the school system, but they were by no means a cohesive group. Relatedly, her memory also points to the racial divide that still existed in at least some residents’ minds: whites were identified by the way they voted, and African Americans by their skin color.

Teaneck residents were unprecedentedly invested in the election. “Beginning January 4, 1965,” claimed Damerell, “no town or city in United States history was ever more engaged in a local election campaign.”<sup>130</sup> The integrationists took out ads in the local newspapers with signatures of fifty-one college and university professors who lived in Teaneck and supported integration, circulated pamphlets and wrote editorials. Meanwhile, the NSA took town surveys to prove that the majority was against integration, and spread rumors that a central fifth grade was

---

<sup>128</sup> Damerell, 291-298

<sup>129</sup> Ruth and Sam Rosenblum, interview by June Kapell, June 22, 1984, TOH.

<sup>130</sup> Damerell, 300

in the works should their slate lose. Candidates on both sides held cottage meetings on what seemed like every night of the week, and they engaged in several town-wide debates.<sup>131</sup>

But the integrationists took it one step further. They realized that they could only win if they made personal appeals. Leo Gamow, a resident with experience in political organizing, orchestrated a campaign of three hundred volunteers to canvas the town, which had 23,321 registered voters. Gamow appointed election district chairmen and created a forty-seven-page manual for the canvassers. It contained election laws, district statistics, and canvassing techniques, along with other information. The canvassers made index cards with names of each of the town's voters, and marked a "+" or "-" next to their name depending on whether they were for or against integration. The spirit of "community purpose" was back.<sup>132</sup>

These canvassers vividly recalled their efforts and what they meant to them. Ruth Glick remembered, that volunteers "began to organize a district by district organization to recognize who are positive voters and to spend our energy and so we had literally hundreds and hundreds of volunteers who went out and knocked on every door in Teaneck and asked people, How did you feel about this and on the basis of that experience, we now had lists of so called positive voters."<sup>133</sup> Rose Levitt, another volunteer, related a similar sense of purpose and devotion:

"We went door to door. I'll never forget. In January, my friend Ruth Kessler and I...it was bitter cold, it was horrible, and our husbands thought we were insane." But they canvassed regardless:

we were given an area to cover and we went door to door and we explained that we had children in the schools and we loved our children and we want our children to have a good education and we couldn't understand how exposing them to other children, just because their skins were different, was going to harm them. It was probably going to be better for them. And some people were very nice to us, some people slammed the door in our face and called us names and Jew is a nigger turned inside out and oh awful things. When I think about it, I can't believe it. But Ruth and I, we went...we had this list of

---

<sup>131</sup> Damerell, 300

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 304

<sup>133</sup> Ruth and Harold Glick, interview by June Kapell, June 1, 1984, TOH.



homes and we just knocked on doors and we went to board meetings and talked to people. We wrote letters to the editor. It was exciting but it was a horrible time and it was an exhausting time and it really opened my eyes. I don't know how I could have been all that naïve.<sup>134</sup>

Numerous other residents remember how their political experiences began with that campaign, with “doorbell ringing.”<sup>135</sup> Fay Geier, a Jew who lived in the Northeast section, remembered her support for the Good Guys: “Well after that, I think all the people who really were involved and cared about Teaneck, about it being a model community which was the reputation it had, and a good school system, kind of rallied round...” In her recollection, everyone who was “really involved and cared about Teaneck” cared about Teaneck’s reputation. They had to push integration to maintain the model community. In fact, this fight to make the community model was “the wildest election we had. Brought out the largest vote in town. It really became crucial to our point of view for the integration in the community to have these three men win...”<sup>136</sup> The testimony of each of these women demonstrates not only the extent to which volunteers believed in the power of their actions, but also the potency of memories.

The fight only escalated as the canvassers worked. The *New York Times* noted: “the contest has at times been so savage...that long friendships have been shaken, social engagements have been canceled and members of the same church or temple have questioned each other’s motives.”<sup>137</sup> Residents also remember the turbulent period: “The schism at that time between integration people and anti-integration people was so strong that neighbors who were friends just weren't talking to each other anymore. It was that bitter.” Paul Margolis, the anti-integrationist who was on the Board of Education, told the *New York Times*: “Has this broken up friendships?

---

<sup>134</sup> Rose Levitt, interview by Helen Klein, March 13, 1985, TOH.

<sup>135</sup> Bernard Brooks, interview by June Kapell, April 14, 1985, TOH.

<sup>136</sup> Fay and Martin Geier, interview.

<sup>137</sup> Walter Waggoner, “School Election Divides Teaneck,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1965.

And how! It has broken up the town. The town will never be the same.”<sup>138</sup> Jay Greenstone, one of the Good Guys, admitted, “I never dreamed it would be this kind of campaign. I knew it was going to be tough but I didn’t know how tough.”<sup>139</sup>

Election day came on February 9, 1965. The integrationists stayed vigilant. Gamow went from district to district to collect the most recent data.<sup>140</sup> The integrationists had determined that they needed around 7,000 votes to win, and they did all they could to ensure that 7,000 people would show up. On election day, Glick remembered, “the technique was to get the plus voter out on election day which included not only calling them at six o'clock, driving them to the polls and getting babysitters for them if necessary and calling again if necessary at eight o'clock.”<sup>141</sup> Rosenblum recalled, “You babysat. You watched the polls. You counted each person. Checked off their names and if they didn't show, called to find out what was happening and got out the vote.”<sup>142</sup> They were effective; the *New York Times* reported, “the 12,820 votes cast were the highest in the history of Teaneck school board elections.”<sup>143</sup> And the integrationists prevailed.

In the years that followed, Teaneck continued to face racial struggles. As immediately as 1966, the town was again embroiled in controversy over busing. This time, the conflict centered on the school budget vote, and the poll watchers who had been appointed to oversee it. Supporters of the neighborhood schools filled all available sixty-four spots with individuals who opposed the budget, in order keep track of the vote the same way the integrationists had done a year before. As the *New York Times* noted, “the recurring dispute over school policy that periodically rocks this well-to-do suburban community...reach[ed] another climax...”<sup>144</sup> A year

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Morton and June Handler, interview.

<sup>140</sup> Damerell, 332

<sup>141</sup> Ruth and Harold Glick, interview.

<sup>142</sup> Ruth and Sam Rosenblum, interview.

<sup>143</sup> Walter Waggoner, “Integration Plan Wins in Teaneck,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1965.

<sup>144</sup> Walter H. Waggoner, “Teaneck Stirred Again On Schools,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1966.

after integration was passed, it remained an unresolved issue. And tensions only worsened. In September 1968, hostility reached an apex; After a Saturday night high school dance, white and African American students clashed and even resorted to physical violence. Discord continued and reached such a height that the high school had to be closed the Wednesday after the fight. While reporting the story, the *New York Times* juxtaposed Teaneck's reputation with its reality: "the high school was closed at noon here today after youthful racial unrest...erupted in this predominantly white community that is proud of its 'triumph' in suburban school integration."<sup>145</sup>

Armed with the reality of these events, activists speaking in the 1980s look back upon a single, untarnished moment. African American activist Charles Grady wistfully conveyed: "in the same way that our children look back on this pride, I think we do, and I think something else," he said. "I think it drew a cohesiveness amongst all of us... to this day, when any of us see each other, we just put our arms around each other and have to kiss and talk about it. It is always a good feeling. It is almost like a password that we were part of a moment, and what we did was meaningful."<sup>146</sup> And Jewish integrationist Alice Hecht vividly remembered election night:

It is one of the pictures I shall have in my mind for the rest of my life, I couldn't wait to find out what the election results were so I went over to Eugene Field School and as I was coming up that funny, crooked walk, I was quite a distance from the door and there were two ladies and one jumped up and said, We Won, threw her arms around the other one, and I went into that room and there was electricity in that room. Everybody was running around kissing one another. And they were screaming, and yelling. It was New Years Eve and the Fourth of July wrapped up all together.

But activists also connect this moment with setbacks. Right after relaying the "electricity" of the victory of 1965, Mrs. Hecht observed that the achievement of integration also marked "the beginning of [her] disillusionment [with] the card carrying liberal mentality," noting that, "to a

---

<sup>145</sup> Walter H. Waggoner, "Teaneck Combats Racial Tension," *New York Times*, September 19, 1968.

<sup>146</sup> Charles Grady, interview.

degree, perhaps, we failed from that high point.”<sup>147</sup> Moreover, the cohesiveness fell apart almost immediately: Rose Levitt, who canvassed in such good faith, remembered that even people who had fought for integration left once they realized what it would bring to their town: “well Teaneck has always been a wonderful town and I think it is close enough to...New York City, that people, most people had always known all kinds of people” so they initially welcomed diversity. But, they had “a stake in their home and they were told that property values would go down and nobody would ever come to Teaneck again. It would turn to an all black community. And it was preying on people’s fears...and a lot of people bought it. They may have had these latent feelings...I mean it wasn’t all smooth, there were a lot of problems.” That is, “people had chips on their shoulder, people didn’t trust each other. A lot of blacks wondered why the whites were fighting for them.”<sup>148</sup> For one moment, community purpose brought triumph to the model town. But it was just that: a moment.

---

<sup>147</sup> Alice Offord Hecht, interview by Betty Schectman, March 24, 1984, TOH.

<sup>148</sup> Rose Levitt, interview.

## Conclusion

As the model community, Teaneck represents the most controlled version of the integration experiment. Teaneck activists took all the right steps: with the best intentions, they tried to integrate their neighborhood, fight discriminating realtors, and desegregate their schools. Unlike in many towns around the country, integrationists in Teaneck acted of their own volition and goodwill: no court or legislature directed their progress. Class, education, and income levels were fairly homogenous across the board. The African American community was small – just seven percent of the town’s population in 1965. At several points, Teaneck seemed poised for integration. Organizations like the TCC and NECO attempted to foster interracial relationships, but they could not succeed as town-wide ventures; they were confined to a neighborhood. In Teaneck, the only variable was race, and color still clouded even liberals’ visions.

Despite the efforts of many activists, integration did not come to fruition in Teaneck. Residents speaking in the 1980s claimed that, “everybody in Teaneck knows the story of the black door at the high school.”<sup>149</sup> They were referring to the entrance to the high school that was used only by African American students, which still exists today: if a white student tries to use that door, he is asking for trouble. True, the schools remain desegregated – African American and white students share an academic building. But they are not integrated. According to theologians Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, Martin Luther King, Jr. believed integration to be a fundamentally different concept from desegregation: “desegregation is essentially negative in the sense that it eliminates discrimination against Blacks in public accommodations, education, housing and employment.” In contrast, “integration means ‘the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human

---

<sup>149</sup> Fay and Martin Geier, interview.

activities.”<sup>150</sup> Because integration, according to King, is a fundamentally positive action, it requires constant reassertion. As historian Barbara Fields argues, “an ideology must be constantly created and verified in social life; if it is not, it dies, even though it may seem to be safely embodied in a form that can be handed down.”<sup>151</sup> The loose coalition of liberals who banded together for the 1965 fight was insufficient to constantly verify an ideology of integration, and so it died.

Like any research project, this thesis is constrained by the evidence available to the researcher. In this case, the evidence presented itself largely in the form of oral history and memories. Even parts of the narrative itself were informed by the existing oral sources. As such, it forces a commentary on the relationship between the memories and events. The existence of two narratives in the Teaneck experience points to the fundamental differences between desegregation and integration. Some see Teaneck as a champion of Civil Rights because it managed to desegregate voluntarily; others see a town that did not manage to integrate. It is difficult to make pointed arguments because oral evidence does not lend itself to intense scrutiny. But from a historian’s standpoint, the message is obvious. The success of integration is dependent upon more than just the wishes of the simple majority. It requires the active and voluntary participation of the entire community.

The Teaneck story also has lasting and national ramifications. As Sugrue claims, “The history of the struggle for racial equality in the North – its triumphs and its failures, its ironies and its unexpected outcomes – opens up new ways of exploring the most important, and still

---

<sup>150</sup> Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Vally Forge: Judson Press, 1974), 120.

<sup>151</sup> Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 110, (My-June 1990): 112.

unfinished, history of race, rights, and politics in modern America.”<sup>152</sup> The vicissitudes of race relations in the model community of Teaneck question the general feasibility of school integration. The fact that *Brown* could not succeed in Teaneck begs the question: can it succeed anywhere?

In 1954, the *Brown* decision that separate but equal education is inherently unequal gave official sanction, and therefore hope, to the possibility of integrated education. Even before *Brown*, there were those who realized that policy alone could not create integration: as lawyer and constitutional scholar John P. Frank argued in 1952, “...practical experience overwhelmingly demonstrates that if litigation victories are to be solid and meaningful, they must be won not only in the court room, but in the hearts of men.”<sup>153</sup> This is not to say that policy is not significant, but it does say that it is not sufficient to bring integration on its own.

Teaneck offered one of the best combinations of policy and personal convictions: rather than just by institution from above, integration in Teaneck was affirmed by a majority vote that resulted from a series of individual decisions. But it can be undone just as easily. The size of Teaneck’s population has not changed in the last forty-five years; it still hovers at roughly forty thousand. Though Teaneck was just seven percent African American in 1965, today that population is thirty percent. In 1965, that statistic meant that the population was ninety three percent white. But today, the town is only fifty two percent white; the other approximately twenty percent is Asian or Hispanic.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, the high school is fifty percent African

---

<sup>152</sup> Sugrue, xxviii

<sup>153</sup> John P. Frank, “Can the Courts Erase the Color Line?” *The Journal of Negro Education* 21, No. 3, The Courts and Racial Integration (Summer 1952): 316.

<sup>154</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Fact Sheet on Teaneck Township, Bergen County, New Jersey*, [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?\\_event=ChangeGeoContext&geo\\_id=06000US3400372360&\\_geoContext=&\\_street=&\\_county=Teaneck&\\_cityTown=Teaneck&\\_state=04000US34&\\_zip=&\\_lang=en&\\_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&\\_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&\\_submenuId=factsheet\\_1&ds\\_name=ACS\\_2009\\_5YR\\_SAFF&\\_ci\\_nbr=null&q\\_r\\_name=null&reg=null%3Anull&\\_keyword=&\\_industry=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFacts?_event=ChangeGeoContext&geo_id=06000US3400372360&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=Teaneck&_cityTown=Teaneck&_state=04000US34&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=ACS_2009_5YR_SAFF&_ci_nbr=null&q_r_name=null&reg=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry=) (accessed April 1, 2011).

American.<sup>155</sup> Policy cannot force people to stay still, and it cannot compel parents to send their children to public schools. As Fields argues, integration needs to be constantly verified. Hearts need to be won not just once, but again and again, over and over, until ideology becomes tradition. What Teaneck tells us is that unless every person does his or her part, integration cannot succeed.

This is not to say that Teaneck can be written off a total failure. As sociologists and historians Amy Stuart Wells, Anita Tijerina Revilla, Jennifer Jellison Holme, and Awo Korantemaa Atanda, conclude in their study of struggling, integrated schools: “Rather than portray the struggle...as evidence that we have fallen short of the ideal of a racially more equal and just society, we want to point to these stories as evidence of both how far we have come and how much further we need to go.”<sup>156</sup> The Teaneck experience certainly counts as one of these stories. Though it has faltered, Teaneck is a town with an unusual level of self-awareness that has always struggled to do what is right. The moment and subsequent defeat of triumph offers its own promise and possibility. With each setback, new lessons are learned. The fact that integration did not work in 1965 does not mean that it can never work. It does, however, indicate that a community must act continuously to perpetuate a positive ideology. As Justice Felix Frankfurter said of the Supreme Court’s ability to legislate social tolerance: “Only a persistent, positive translation of the liberal faith into the thoughts and acts of the community is the real reliance against the unabated temptation to straitjacket the human mind.”<sup>157</sup> There is no time to rest on the long road of racial and social justice.

---

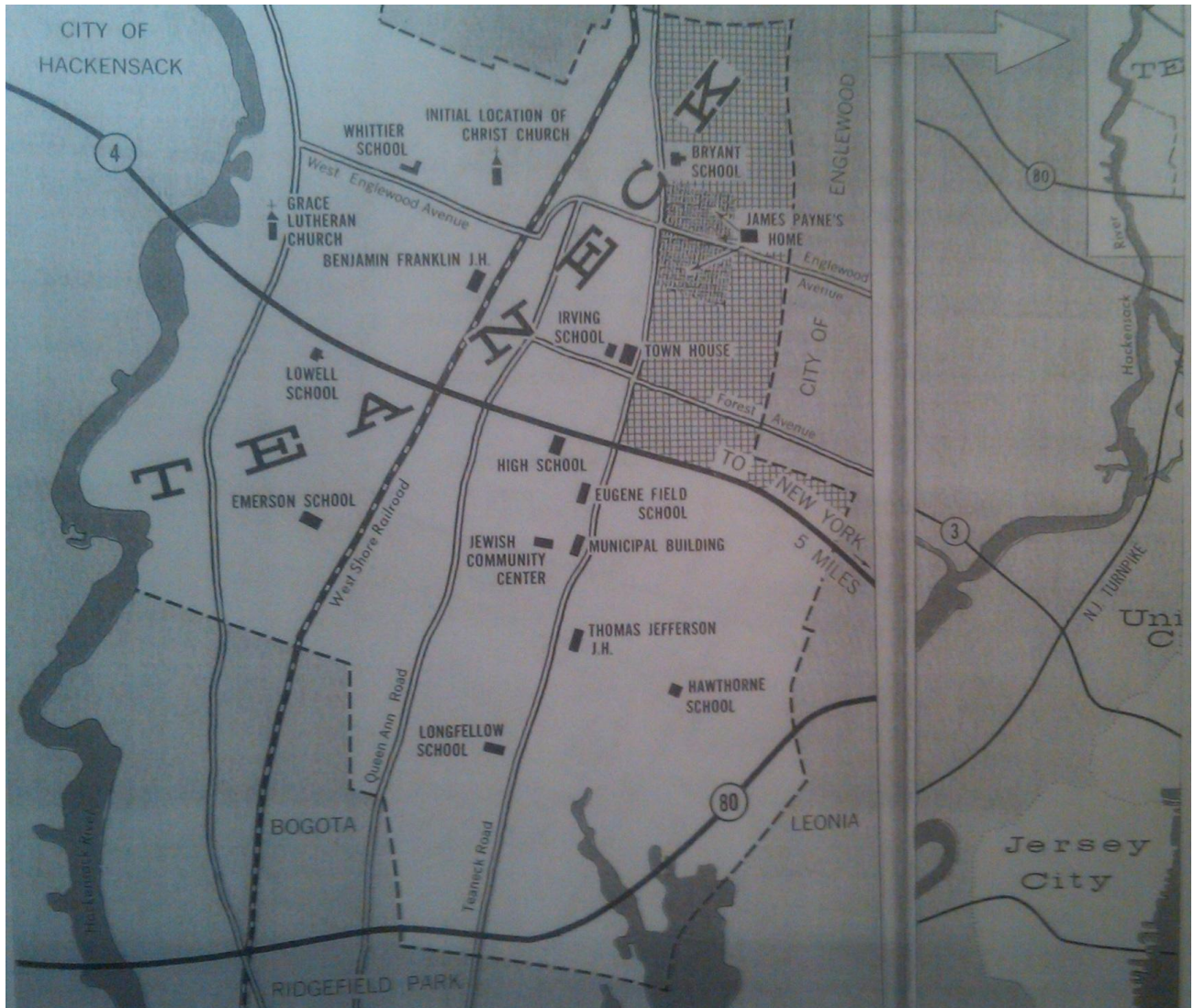
<sup>155</sup> Local School Directory, “Teaneck Senior High School,” Public and Private Schools – Local School Directory, <http://www.localschooldirectory.com/public-school/55701/NJ> (accessed April 1, 2011).

<sup>156</sup> Amy Stuart Wells, et al., “The Space Between School Desegregation Court Orders and Outcomes: The Struggle to Challenge White Privilege.” *Virginia Law Review* 90, no. 6 (October 2004): 1750, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3202412>.

<sup>157</sup> Felix Frankfurter, “Can the Supreme Court Guarantee Toleration?” *The New Republic* (June 17, 1925): 87



## Appendix



“Map of Teaneck, New Jersey,” *Damerell*, inside cover

## Timeline

- 1949: The Army Corps of Engineers declares Teaneck the “Model Town”
- 1953: Old timers and newcomers come head to head in the major school expansion budget fight
- 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education*: The Supreme Court declares “separate but equal” education unconstitutional
- 1953: Formation of the liberal, pro-spending school group Teaneck League for Better Schools (TLBS)
- 1954: Formation of the Teaneck Civic Conference (TCC)
- 1958: Matty Feldman, Jew, becomes first non-Teaneck Taxpayer’s League mayor in thirty years
- 1959: Creation of the Mayor’s Advisory Board on Community Relations
- 1959: Dissolution of the Teaneck Civic Conference (TCC)
- 1961: Brief dissolution of the Mayor’s Advisory Board on Community Relations
- 1963: Teaneck’s northeast neighbor, Englewood, forced to desegregate its school system by court order
- 1964: Northeast Community Organization (NECO) is formed
- 1964: (February) In an election when integration is essentially the only issue, two out of three winners of Board of Education election are openly anti-integration
- 1964: (May) Board of Education announces implementation mandatory integration plan to be achieved through bussing
- 1965: (February) “The Good Guys,” pro-integration slate, is elected to the Board of Education, thereby solidifying the bussing integration program
- 1966: Continued tension over school budget
- 1968: (February) Publication of *Triumph in a White Suburb*
- 1968: (September) Physical violence erupts between white and African American students after a school dance, school is forced to close for a day

## Bibliography

### Interviews

- Brooks, Bernard. Interview by June Kapell, April 14, 1985 Collections of the Teaneck Public Library, Teaneck, NJ. Accessed online via <http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/OralHistory2/index.html>. Hereafter TOH
- Confer, Bernard. Interview by June Kappell, May 12, 1984, TOH.
- Davage, Orra. Interview by June Kapell, April 18, 1984, TOH.
- Geier, Fay. Interview by June Kapell, May 11, 1984, TOH.
- Glick, Harold and Ruth, Interview by June Kappell, June 1, 1984, TOH.
- Grady Charles. Interview by Orra Davage, March 22, 1984, TOH.
- Hall, Frank. Interview by Helen Klein, November 15, 1984, TOH.
- Handler, June and Morton. Interview by Helen Klein, March 11, 1985, TOH.
- Hecht, Alice Offord. Interview by Betty Schectman, March 24, 1984, TOH.
- Jones, Lamar. Interview by Gloria Howard, April 9, 1984, TOH.
- Kieliszek, Eleanor. Interview by Helen Klein, July 9, 1984, TOH.
- Lacey, Archie and Theodora. Interview by June Kappell, June 5, 1984, TOH.
- Lacey, Theodora. Interview by Rachel Mark, December 29, 2010, Teaneck. Transcript in possession of the author.
- Levitt, Rose. Interview by Helen Klein, March 13, 1985, TOH.
- McGlynn, Frank. Interview by Helen Klein, February 13, 1984, TOH.
- Parker, Evelyn. Interview by Orra Davage, March 7, 1984, TOH.
- Rosenblum, Ruth and Sam. Interview by June Kapell, June 22, 1984, TOH.
- Scarborough, Charlotte. Interview by Ethele Brown, March 27, 1984, TOH.
- Thurnmauer, Maria and William. Interview by June Kappell, February 23, 1984, TOH.
- Witherspoon, R. Carolyn. Interview by Myrna Gillespie, no date provided, TOH.

### Primary Sources

- Clausen, Robert E. "Review," *The Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 61, No. 10 (July-Aug 1968).
- Damerell, Reginald G.. *Triumph in a White Suburb; the Dramatic Story of Teaneck, N.J., the First Town in the Nation to Vote for Integrated Schools*. New York: W. Morrow, 1968.
- Frank, John P. "Can the Courts Erase the Color Line?" *The Journal of Negro Education* 21, No. 3 (Summer 1952): 304 – 316.
- Frankfurter, Felix. "Can the Supreme Court Guarantee Toleration?" *The New Republic* (June 17, 1925): 85-87.
- Gordon, Albert Isaac. *Jews in Suburbia*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.
- James, Selwyn. "We're Learning to Live Together," *Redbook Magazine* 109 (June 1957). In *The Suburb Reader*, edited by Becky M. Nicolaidis and Andrew Wiese. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006.

James, Selwyn. "We're Learning to Live Together," *Redbook Magazine* 109 (June 1957). In *The Suburb Reader*, edited by Becky M. Nicolaidis and Andrew Wiese. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006.

*Live in Teaneck – A Forward Looking Town*. Teaneck, NJ: The Teaneck Fair Housing Committee and the Northeast Community Organization, 1964. Pamphlet in possession of author.

Sgro, Charles V. *Report – Teaneck Task Force*, Teaneck, NJ: Teaneck Public Library, 1969.

Spengler, David. "The Englewood-Teaneck Experience." In *School Integration in the North*, edited by T. Bentley Edwards and Frederick M. Wirt. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967.

Tax, Sol. "Residential Integration: The Case of Hyde Park in Chicago," *Human Organization* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 22 -27. <http://sfaa.metapress.com/openurl.asp?genre=article&eissn=1938-3525&volume=18&issue=1&spage=22> (accessed February 10, 2011).  
Teaneck Taxpayer's League, *Teaneck's Most Progressive Twelve Years*, Teaneck, NJ: Teaneck Public Library, 1941.  
<http://www.teaneck.org/virtualvillage/teaneck12years/index.htm> (accessed October 1, 2010).

Teaneck Town Council. *Meeting Minutes*, Teaneck, NJ: Teaneck Municipal Records, November 1963.

Thomas, Nida E. "Preventing Growth of Racial Ghettos," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 29, no. 6 (February 1956): 252-258, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2264030> (accessed February 28, 2011).

U.S. Census Bureau, *Fact Sheet on Teaneck Township, Bergen County, New Jersey*  
[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFFacts?\\_event=ChangeGeoContext&geo\\_id=06000US3400372360&\\_geoContext=&\\_street=&\\_county=Teaneck&\\_cityTown=Teaneck&\\_state=04000US34&\\_zip=&\\_lang=en&\\_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&\\_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&\\_submenuId=factsheet\\_1&ds\\_name=ACS\\_2009\\_5YR\\_SAFF&\\_ci\\_nbr=null&q\\_r\\_name=null&reg=null%3Anull&\\_keyword=&\\_industry=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFFFacts?_event=ChangeGeoContext&geo_id=06000US3400372360&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=Teaneck&_cityTown=Teaneck&_state=04000US34&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&ActiveGeoDiv=&_useEV=&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&_submenuId=factsheet_1&ds_name=ACS_2009_5YR_SAFF&_ci_nbr=null&q_r_name=null&reg=null%3Anull&_keyword=&_industry=) (accessed April 1, 2011).

### Newspapers and Online Media

"Nation: All the Long, Hot Summers." *Time*, June 2, 1980.  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,924145,00.html> (accessed March 1, 2011).

*Chicago Daily Defender*: Full Text Daily Edition available via ProQuest Historical Newspapers 1960-1973.

*New York Amsterdam News*: Full Text available via ProQuest Historical Newspapers 1943- 1993

*New York Times*: Full Text available via ProQuest Historical Newspapers 1857 - present

*Pittsburgh Courier*: Full Text available via ProQuest Historical Newspapers 1955-1966

*Sunday Sun*: Full Text available in Teaneck Public Library, Teaneck, NJ 1940 - 1961

## Secondary Sources

### *Works Cited*

Fields, Barbara Jeanne. "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review* 110, (May – June 1990): 95 – 118.

Jones-Correa, Michael. "Reshaping the American Dream," in *The New Suburban History*. Edited by Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary E.. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999.

Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories* . Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Smith, Kenneth, and Zepp, Ira. *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974.

Sugrue, Thomas J.. *Sweet Land of Liberty: the Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*. New York: Random House, 2008.

Urban League for Bergen County. "About Us." Urban League for Bergen County, <http://www.urbanleaguebc.org/> (accessed March 1, 2011).

Wells, Amy Stuart, Anita Tijerina Revilla, Jennifer Jellison Holme, and Awo Korantemaa Atanda, "The Space Between School Desegregation Court Orders and Outcomes: The Struggle to Challenge White Privilege," *Virginia Law Review* 90, no. 6 (October 2004): 1721-1751 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3202412>

Wiese, Andrew. *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004.

### *Works Consulted*

Borstelmann, Thomas. *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Jackson, Kenneth T.. *Crabgrass Frontier: the Suburbanization of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Meyer, Stephen Grant. *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American neighborhoods*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Svonkin, Stuart. *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997.