BENIGN INTENTIONS:

THE MAGNET SCHOOL AT RAVENSWOOD HIGH*

by

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In 1971 Ravenswood High School was transformed into a prototypical magnet school that would receive national-level praise as a way of achieveing racial balance without resort to mandatory busing.[1] At first glance, accolades would appear warranted. Ravenswood High, one of six schools within the Sequoia Union High School District, had opened in 1958. Located within East Palo Alto, then an unincorporated and relatively poor community of affluent San Mateo County, California, the high school originally enrolled a student body that was 21% African American. Despite boundary changes in 1963 and 1965 designed to increase White enrollment at Ravenswood and despite the belated initiation of an open enrollment program in the late 1960s that allowed any Ravenswood student to attend predominantly White schools within the district, the percentage of African American students rose dramatically throughout the decade. The school had become 60% Black in 1965 and 94% by 1970. In fact, open enrollment contibuted to the segregation of Ravenswood since initially only one White student agreed to transfer there, while many of Ravenswood's remaining Whites chose other schools.

Against this background, the transfer of more than five hundred White students to Ravenswood in 1971 appears to have been a signal achievement. The conversion of Ravenswood into a magnet school not only equalized the number of Black and White students through voluntary busing that placed a transportation burden on Whites, but it also attacted many of the best teachers

in the district and generated a number of innovative programs. In addition, the district made efforts to conduct in-service training to meet the new challenges, to create multicultural programs to better speak to the ethnic diversity throughout the district, and to organize students and families into block groups to ease the transition for voluntary transfers. Finally, the desegregation of Ravenswood suggested a heightened commitment to racial justice on the part of many White district officials and transferring students.

Despite the benign intentions of many Whites in the district, serious questions may be raised about how the Ravenswood magnet, commonly referred to as the New School at Ravenswood, served African American students. This essay will contend that a transformed Ravenswood High School seriously eroded African Americans' efforts to impress their interests on the institution. By examining these efforts prior to desegregation and by looking at the experience of Black and White students at the New School, the essay will cast doubt on facilely equating racial balance with racial justice.

Ravenswood Rebellion

From the moment Ravenswood opened until the middle 1960s Black community activists focused on desegregation policies to bring about equality of educational opportunity. They first sought significant boundary changes, then an open enrollment policy, and finally supported a 1965 citizens advisory committee recommendation that Ravenswood be closed to create racial balance

throughout the district. With the exception of modest boundary changes that failed to stem the increasing segregation of the school, the board of trustees refused to honor these initiatives. Reflecting on the failure of the trustees to close Ravenswood, East Palo Alto community activist Barbara Mouton saw it as a turning point in the direction of activism around the schools. She traced the advocacy of community control to the unwillingness of the district to implement a policy of thorough desegregation.[2] If efforts toward achieving desegregation would not yield racial balance at Ravenswood, it was felt that greater control might enhance opportunities to achieve academic excellence. In part due to low enrollments, Ravenswood had far fewer course offerings than other schools in the district. In addition, the Ravenswood curriculum had a vocational emphasis.[3] In the fall of 1968, students, with broad community support, took a decisive step to remedy these inadequacies and make the school more congenial to Black students.

On the morning of Tuesday, September 10, a group known as Students for Higher Education seized the school and presented a list of demands to Principal Malcolm Taylor. Taylor was given until 2:00 p.m. to call an assembly that would hear his responses. Many of the demands spoke to engendering quality education without reference to Black issues per se. Among them were the establishment of a daily study hall after school hours and tutoring during the evening, a better reading laboratory, more drama teachers, the abolition of remedial classes and

worksheets, and more library holdings in both Black and White literature. At the same time, the group held that more Black instructors, counselors, and administrators were needed to better serve the overwhelmingly Black student body; that Black history should be required of all students; that comtemporary music should be taught by a Black instructor; and that Swahili should be offered.[4] While it was not argued that all staff should be Black (in ensuing discussion it was pointed out that supportive white instructors, like Ken Mayer who helped students pursue college admission, should be retained), the list of demands named specific White counselors and teachers they wanted removed as well as the nurse and Taylor himself.[5]

When no response was forthcoming from Taylor, Students for Higher Education held a rally at the athletic field that attracted nearly half of the 1100 students who attended Ravenswood. A sit-in at Taylor's office followed. Superintendent George Chaffey was called in, but the police were not. Apparently, Taylor followed the advice of community aide Katye McCall on the matter, thus avoiding a potentially violent escalation of the confrontation. Superintendent Chaffey, however, was unable to end the sit-in. Citing a policy that schools had to close after dark, he declared, "I am inviting you to leave this building, I assume it will be vacated in 10 minutes."[6] The students retorted, "We'll give you 10 minutes to get out of here."[7] The students stayed and remained overnight and through the next day. While the sit-in continued into

Wednesday, another rally was held at 2:00 p.m. Several community leaders joined the students. Later that afternoon Taylor resigned. He made it clear that he would be replaced by a Black principal whom the students would have a say in selecting. This ended the sit-in. The Ravenswood Post reported that "The students made their way out of the building, through assembled media equipment, in evident victory after the 26 hour sit-in. A drum was pounded in excited rhythm and shouts of 'Black Power,' and 'Free Huey Now!' were heard."[8]

The following week, Malcolm Taylor reflected on what had happened. Originally he had resolved not to resign, but two things contributed to his change of heart. First, virtually all the Black instructors and aides supported the demands of the students; and second, he felt that a failure to concede would turn what had been a perfectly peaceful protest into a violent confrontation. Perhaps with some imaginative license he reportedly told the Ravenswood Post about the presence of Molotov Cocktails in the building and weapon-laden cars circling outside. He was quoted as saying, "This place was ready to blow. There would have been fires, dead bodies."[9] Such hyperbole might have been an attempt to combat the label of cowardice some people were likely to bestow on him for quitting his position.

Regardless of the actual threat of violence it was clear to Taylor that his credibility as a principal was irretrievably damaged. Though hurt by this sudden termination after spending eight years as an administrator at Ravenswood, he understood that

his departure was inevitable. Indeed, he offered a perceptive and even sympathetic treatment of what had transpired. He linked the protest at Ravenswood to the Montgomery bus boycott and the Woolworth sit-ins. He pointed out the dramatic, daily-felt discrepancies between the level of material life in East Palo Alto and its surrounding neighborhoods. He underscored the callousness of affluent whites who voted to overturn a fair housing act and the failure of the district to implement changes requested in the past. "People should and could be free," he stated, "but they are not, so they simply take it, take charge, to at least try."[10] And Taylor praised the way students took charge. Though hostility was evident and invective was hurled, no violence took place. In addition, Taylor believed that the rebellion was organized by the students themselves, rather than East Palo Alto community leaders, as some had claimed.

Despite Taylor's ability to understand the situation, it was not merely the color of his skin that prompted his ouster. Not a resident of East Palo Alto, he admittedly had not been involved in the East Palo Alto community. Furthermore, his concern that increased student control over the direction of the Ravenswood curriculum would reduce enrollments in shop and homemaking betrayed a lack of sensitivity to minority students' aspirations.[11] Finally, students found fault with his remoteness as a leader, and Taylor allowed that his style indeed was non-directive."[12]

Although a number of public officials expressed

consternation with what had taken place, censure of the rebellion was far from universal. The Palo Alto Times, for instance, which historically had been unsympathetic to the concerns of Black people in East Palo Alto and nearly always had supported the actions of the school administration, took the side of the students. "Ravenswood has peculiar needs," stated an editorial, "and the Sequoia Union High School District board and administration have utterly failed to meet them, despite repeated pleas by teachers, students and parents."[13] The article then summed up the significance of the student uprising: "It just means that the black youth--with their community behind them--demand a relevant education, and no less."[14]

The revolt ended when the school board officially announced that a Black administrator would replace Taylor and that Ravenswood students, as well as community leaders, would participate in choosing his successor. It was also agreed that teachers named in the demands who desired to transfer would make this transition within two days.[15] Most of the other demands would be met as well.[16]

The Impact of Black Power on Ravenswood High

As a result of the revolt at Ravenswood High School, students and the community acquired considerable influence in determining who would direct, who would teach, and what would be taught. The committee to interview candidates for principal included Gertrude Wilks, Robert Hoover, and Syrtiller Kabat, all leaders in the community control movement. The selected

candidate, Earl Menneweather, became the first Black principal in the history of the district. In addition, some new teachers hired at Ravenswood in late 1968 and early 1969 had attended prestigious universities, including Stanford, Berkeley, Cornell, and Oxford.[17] Pressure from the East Palo Alto community and students of color also spurred an increase in Black faculty members in the district from 15 in October 1967 to 30 in February 1969 and an increase of administrators from none in June 1966 to six in February 1969.[18]

In the spring of 1969, the school newspaper Trojan Torch announced new course offerings at Ravenswood for 1969-70. These included Swahili, Independent Study, The Negro in America, East Asian Affairs, International Relations, and Social Psychology.[19] The Torch itself, founded in early 1968, not only played an important role in informing students about activities on campus, but also in airing student grievances and creating potential linkages with organized young people throughout the state. For example, the Torch reported on the left-leaning statewide group, Junior Statesmen of America, as well as on the strike at San Francisco State.[20]

Increasing leverage in the affairs of the district in general and Ravenswood High in particular seemed to have influenced the peformance and aspiration of many Ravenswood students. Of the graduating class of 1969, 47 were listed as going to college. Student leaders Charles Boulding, Maurice Bundy, and Odie Chiles were all accepted to Stanford, as were

several other students. Offers of admission were also made by Carlton, Wellesley, Pembroke, Yale, UCLA, and University of California-Santa Cruz.[21] This was an extraordinary achievement, given that in 1964 only 3% of graduates in a majority white Ravenswood were enrolled in four year colleges the following year. Now, with blacks making up 87% of the student body, the percentage of those bound for college had risen to approximately 26%.[22]

When Ravenswood High opened for the 1969-70 academic year, it had the lowest student-teacher and student-counselor ratios in the district; it also employed three times as many teacher aides as any other district school. Among the new faculty and staff were several Blacks, including the dean of students.[23] That year forty-four seniors (approximately one-third of the graduating class) planned to go to four year colleges and 42 to two-year institutions. Of those accepted into elite schools, four students were going to Stanford, four to UCLA, one to Pomona, and one to Barnard. Sixty-seven students received at least one scholarship, and the combined worth of these funds was $300,000.[24]

Throughout the late 1960s the district kept data on disciplinary action and attendance that provide a window on the climate at Ravenswood. These indicate a trend of declining problems. During 1967-68, 285 Ravenswood students were suspended for truancy, constituting 39% of the district total. That year Ravenswood students also had dramatically higher numbers of

students suspended for behavior problems (229) and fighting (66) than any other school.[25] By 1970-71 violations at Ravenswood were down to 70 for truancy, 82 for behavior, and 33 for fighting. Suspensions in all categories at Ravenswood accounted for 19% of the district total in 1971, down from 35% of the total during 1967-68.[26] In addition, daily attendance at Ravenswood increased significantly between 1965-66 and 1970-71, an indication that students had come to feel at home and secure at the school. In the former year, unexcused absences for the month of October averaged 46 per day. By the latter year it had plunged to 12. Based on these data, Ravenswood had the highest absence rate in the predominantly white, affluent district during 1965-66 and the lowest in 1970-71.[27] Ravenswood also had the lowest number of illnesses for October 1970 and the lowest average for all of 1970-71.[28]

Despite these positive developments at Ravenswood between 1968 and 1971, it would be a mistake to romanticize what had taken place. Sometimes frivolous student disruptions and demands continued after the strike; improvements in the curriculum did not necessarily bring Ravenswood up to the standards of other Sequoia schools;[29] the new principal was widely perceived as being more committed to athletics than academics; and many teachers felt alienated if not threatened, an unlikely foundation for promoting an effective learning environment.[30] Nonetheless, students at Ravenswood arguably achieved the highest level of equality of educational opportunity

since the school opened in the late 1950s. A militant, nearly all-Black student body, urged by its newspaper and supported by the community, made a number of changes in the school that reflected an increased sense of enfranchisement as well as an increased recognition of the relationship between knowledge and power. A White principal partial to vocational education and lacking ties to the community was ousted and replaced with an African American. Teachers accused of racism were transferred and a number of Black instructors hired. Progress was made in establishing African-American studies and adding other academic courses. And the percentage of students going to college rose, while suspensions and absences declined. If occasional disruptions and continuing complaints about curricular weaknesses suggest an imperfect situation at Ravenswood, it was less imperfect than previously.

An Innovative School

Ironically, as Blacks made serious efforts to engender quality education in a nearly segregated school, school district officials finally moved forcefully to desegregate Ravenswood and the other five nearly all-White schools in the district. There is little evidence that this effort was designed to defuse growing Black power, but it certainly had that effect. Perhaps the foremost motive for school leaders' desire to promote segregation was to placate the Office for Civil Rights which was threatening to cutoff the district's federal funding unless racial balance was achieved. At the same time, a number of

educational leaders had become deeply committed to integration and were willing to make personal sacrifices to pursue that vision. For instance, Helen Kerwin, a trustee for thirteen years and formerly an adamant opponent of busing, ardently supported a desegregation plan that would include mandatory busing. She endured harrassment, slashed tires, and being voted out of office.[31] With Kerwin's defeat, mandatory busing was dropped, yet voluntary desegregation was pursued vigorously, with the Ravenswood magnet (the New School) as the centerpiece of the effort. There were promotional letters from the superintendent, articles in the district newsletter, a brochure on the New School at Ravenswood, and information centers at the high schools. In addition, an Integrated Education Steering Committee instituted a desegregation information hotline, organized faculty teams from Ravenswood to speak to prospective students and their parents, and arranged tours so that potential transfers could familiarize themselves with Ravenswood if they were White, or with one of the other schools if they were Black.[32]

Even before curriculum changes for Ravenswood were planned, the desegregation that many Black community leaders once steadfastly promoted now struck some as a threat. With a prescient sense of whom a desegregated Ravenswood would attract, Gertrude Wilks, head of the formerly integrationist Mothers For Equal Education, intoned, "And we don't want the liberals, radicals and hippies that will be coming in."[33] Indeed, the New School at Ravenswood was configured to attract countercultural

white students. A number of affluent White students, alienated by the competition, impersonality, and curricular irrelevance of their high school experience, had begun a study group with sympathetic faculty.[34] The subsequent development of the New School spoke to their concerns. An open campus, flexible scheduling, a house system based on students' zodiac sign, and a significant infusion of resources that permitted an array of courses broad enough to satisfy every interest were enormous incentives for many White students (and innovative teachers) to choose Ravenswood. A heart-felt desire to participate in the frontline of integration was often a motive as well. One former Ravenswood teacher stated that the new Ravenswood was an effort to incarnate a utopian vision of a multicultural society.[35] Unfortunately, it would fall short of this.

The week of the Attica uprising when the state displayed its most repressive side to a nation long embattled over the limits of human rights, an exercise of benign, almost flower-childlike activity commenced calmly in East Palo Alto. At Ravenswood no failing grades were given.[36] Courses were constructed out of 15 minute modules that could be as short as two modules long in a class like Shorthand Theory or as long as six in Art Workshop. The classroom year included 10 cycles, each lasting 17 days, and on the final day, students, assigned to houses based on their zodiac signs, participated in house activities.[37] Bill Shilstone of the Redwood City Tribune described a house day:

> Every 17th day at Ravenswood High School, students arrive early, scurry through corridors and courtyards in confusion

> and chaos shouting "play day!" at each other and finally pile into fleets of buses and cars with their picnics, packs, kites, roller skates and beachballs.
>
> The Libras go to Golden Gate Park, the Scorpios go to Pompanio Beach, the Virgos go to the museum, the Cancers go to Angel Island and the Leos go skating.[38]

Despite the clearly countercultural bent of house day activities, Shilstone saw interracial progress as the fundamental goal of the house arrangement:

> All the humanistic reasons for desegregation--breakdown of stereotype and prejudice and building understanding, acceptance and even friendship between people of different cultures--are reflected in the house system.
>
> It is designed to be a vehicle by which desegregation, the mixing of black and white bodies, becomes integration.[39]

Yet Shilstone's glowing but playful account of house activity was tempered by the recognition that Black and White students seemed to inhabit different worlds within the school. It was a sign of hope to him that on the second house day "the barriers seemed to slip a little...."[40]

In addition to the periodic adventures students participated in during house days, they were treated to an extraordinary variety of non-traditional courses which in 1971 included Black Writers in the 1970s; Alienation; Creative Communication; Manners and Morals in American History; Crisis in the Classroom; Harlem Renaissance and the History Game; Teenage Bill of Rights; African Tales and Folklore; How to Beat the Achievement Tests; Black English; Plays: Black, Brown, White; Community Action and Creative Thinking; Hebrew; Electronic Music; and Third World in the Twentieth Century. In addition, no class

size apparently was too small to cancel a particular offering. While in 1971 a whopping 1,053 students were enrolled in sections of a class called The Black Man, and Folk Rock drew 631, Swahili II, Russian II, and German IV each drew four students; three took French V; Introduction to Architecture and Latin IV enrolled one each.[41]

In addition to more conventional college preparation requirements, students could indulge in a promiscuous variety of topical courses. An article in the Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter, clearly pitched to encourage more students to transfer to Ravenswood, talked about the academic activities of three White students. One was quoted as saying, "The classes are so interesting that I find myself taking twice as many classes as I would have at my other school."[42] Her current load included Comparative Economic Systems, Journalism, Practical Politics, Independent Study in Spanish, Writing Laboratory, and History of the Vietnam War. Another was taking French IV, Latin I, Algebra II, Gymnastics, Your Civil Liberties, and Plays: Black, Brown, and White.[43]

Throughout the five year life of the New School at Ravenswood, traditional courses, like Advanced Standing English and Physics, coexisted with exotic ones like Mountaineering and Scuba Diving. Financial resources were disproportionately lavished on Ravenswood,[44] and the school garnered acclaim. Said a member of an accreditation team, "To turn a desperate educational system into a model high school takes guts and

genius. The school has gone from the last choice to the first choice for hundred of students in the district---that is a major accomplishment."[45] As far as race relations were concerned, the Redwood City Tribune evoked a picture of harmony when Coretta Scott King visited the school in 1972: "The wife of the slain civil rights leader sang 'We Shall Overcome' in a clear, sweet voice. A thousand students, black and white, jammed into the gymnasium, joined hands and joined in, swaying back and forth."[46]

A Desegregation Program for Whites

Despite high excitement about the Ravenswood experiment, the racial integration Bill Shilstone had seen as a goal of Ravenswood proved to be illusory. Black students and White students, evidence suggests, kept to themselves both socially and academically. A yearbook photograph pictured a scene many students saw as typical if ironic: the two courtyards where students socialized were perfectly segregated. Shilstone himself noted in his article that there were interracial tensions despite efforts through the house activities to overcome them. He cited an aide who traced the resentment of Black students to the efforts made in behalf of the school now that a significant number of White students not only attended, but also threatened to become dominant in school affairs. "It's tough to explain," he said, "why we couldn't get these improvements last year."[47] By early 1972 Principal Clarence Cryer, who replaced Earl Menneweather the previous year, expressed concern with the

underrepresentation of students of color in school life generally, while another staff member pointed out that house events were actually not working out well. Only half the students were participating, and for African American students the percentage was smaller.[48] By the spring of 1973 the house arrangement had been dropped due to lack of Black participation. According to Cryer, Blacks saw it as an artificial method of bringing the races together.[49]

Despite an extraordinary array of enticing courses offered at Ravenswood and the superior resources the school enjoyed, some school officials complained that not all students equally benefited. Trustee Jack Robertson, for instance, felt that a dual system existed at Ravenswood that separated the voluntary transfer students from those living within the attendance area; Principal Cryer felt likewise. In fact, Cryer ascribed intentionality to this situation. According to school board minutes, "Mr. Cryer pointed out that it was his understanding that the primary goal of Ravenswood has been the development and maintenance of a program which would attract volunteers, and that the additional funding and additional staffing were given to Ravenswood with that purpose in mind."[50] When Robertson moved that funds for Ravenswood be prioritized so that "disadvantaged" students would be favored over transfer students, he was denied a second.[51]

There is no written record of the racial breakdown of the classes offered at Ravenswood, but doubtless few transfer

students came to Ravenswood for occupational courses. Yet the first year of voluntary transfer, Ravenswood was the only school to offer food services, independent study in homemaking, electography, shorthand theory, and general office skills.[52] Photographs in the 1972 Ravenswood yearbook show that all students pictured in vocational courses, including Advanced Typing, Clothing II, and food service classes, are African American.[53] Not only is it unlikely that such vocational courses would appeal to White students, but also some impressionistic evidence indicates the absence of Black students from academic courses. A photograph of the class taking Practical Politics, for instance, reveals one Black student and 22 Whites. [54] Of various English and mathematics classes all but one student pictured are white.[55] A community activist and former aide recalled that an Italian class that went to Italy was entirely white.[56]

Observers recollect that formal tracking did not exist, but academic separation was common.[57] According to district documents, however, there was formal tracking for ninth and tenth graders.[58] This may in part account for district data, using the categories "minority" and "majority," that reveal racial isolation within a number of classes at Ravenswood. For instance, during the fall of 1973 when 56% of Ravenswood students were minority, there were 12 classes that enrolled no minority students.[59] In addition that fall 13% of freshman classes contained less than 20% minority students, and 18% included 80%

or more minority students. The following fall, with 65% minority students at Ravenswood, 8% of the freshman classes were less than 20% minority and 37% were 80% or more minority.[60]

Although many Whites considered Ravenswood a superb experience, the influx of White students and the looseness of the Ravenswood environment did not necessarily benefit Blacks. In fact, Black students were sometimes transferred because of perceived laxness. One parent, requesting the transfer of her daughter to Woodside High School, wrote the following to Superintendent Chaffey:

> The academic and social atmosphere at Ravenswood High is not conducive to preparation for post high school education for my daughter due to the informal approach to education exemplified at Ravenswood. My family culture does not condone this approach to education and we feel Renee needs a structured academic environment which seemingly is available at Woodside.[61]

If there were Blacks who felt that Ravenswood had been transformed with only the interests of transferring guests in mind, there were White parents who agreed and wanted guarantees that the school would remain that way. Curriculum and educational style rather than racial integration were foremost in attracting many transfers, and over time the increasing percentage of Black students in the school threatened this. One parent who complained about the changing racial composition at Ravenswood explained, "Decreasing volunteer enrollment has meant, and must necessarily mean, less of the type of courses that attracted the volunteers to Ravenswood. The increasing minority percentage enrollment creates an added series of problems with

which I am sure you are familiar."[62]

Nonetheless there were students drawn to Ravenswood out of a sense that the pursuit of racial justice meant that White students should bear some of the burden of desegregation. In an exchange of letters the year Ravenswood closed, a White student, John Gomperts, stated that he came to Ravenswood to help create integration, and he opined the failure to achieve this. His respondent, teacher Jack Fasman, maintained that integration was the motivation of few teachers and students who transferred to Ravenswood: "Most teachers I know didn't come for that purpose. They came for an innovative program, new philosophies of teaching, turned-on students. Many--perhaps most--white students came for the same reason. I believe you represent the exception."[63]

Whatever the extent to which Whites desired integration, broad sentiment existed that Ravenswood operated as a dual system whose experimental courses, flexible scheduling, and profusion of options were created by and for Whites. Black students could fit in if they were inclined or--as what often happened--could take advantage of the school's casualness to absent themselves from classes. Yet the school had some advantages for Blacks. It was geographically at least a home base, and it had a majority black student body. Both made Ravenswood less alien than other district schools. In addition, there were black administrators and some black-centered courses. And as long as the school remained in East Palo Alto, the

community potentially could exercise some leverage over what took place.[64] Thus, it is not surprising that racial disturbances at Ravenswood were few compared to other schools in the district and and the suspension rate for Blacks was the lowest. During 1972-73, for example, 6% of Black students at Ravenswood were suspended, as opposed to 13% at Seqouia, 32% at Menlo-Atherton, 25% at Carlmont, 35% at Woodside and 38% at San Carlos.[65] In addition, a number of Black students were involved in student activities. Whites dominated the prestigious California Scholarship Federation, the important editorships of the student newspaper, and certain sports like gymnastics, soccer, and tennis, but Blacks dominated the class officers, the football, basketball, and wrestling teams, and in most years nearly swept the senior polls. For instance, of those photographed winners of the 1972 poll, the only White victor took the category of boy with the biggest feet.[66]

Closure and Its Consequences

Over time the Black percentage of the Ravenswood population increased to over 60% as fewer Whites elected to transfer. At the same time the district faced sustained pressure from both the Office of Civil Rights and a suit filed in the California courts to create a form of racial balance that distributed Black students among the six district high schools in proportion to their population. The district also faced increasing financial difficulties in the 1970s. Officials decided to meet these challenges by closing a high school.

Although efforts in 1965 to close Ravenswood came to nothing because of significant White opposition to Black students transferring into their schools, now Whites preferred closing Ravenswood to one of their own neighborhood schools, and a high percentage of Blacks opposed closing Ravenswood.[67] It was not lost on Blacks that closure would put the full burden of busing on them and deprive them of a neighborhood school whose location at least suggested the possibility of community oversight. In addition, the performance of Black students who already were voluntarily attending the predominantly White schools was far from encouraging.[68]

While the deliberations were lengthy, it was a foregone conclusion that Ravenswood would be closed. On October 15, 1975 the board, with one dissent, voted to close Ravenswood at the end of the 1975-1976 year and to disperse African American students to the remaining five schools in a way that they would compose 10% to 15% of each. The Black community initiated a federal suit to keep Ravenswood open, but it came to nothing since the courts equated district-wide racial balance with racial justice.

What resulted was far from just, however. Bused as far as ten miles from home, constituting a minority at each school, disproportionately tracked into vocational programs, and often facing indifference from teachers, Black participation in school life declined precipitously and dropouts rose.[69] During 1978-79 14% of Black students dropped out. In 1979-80, 18% of Blacks dropped out. In 1980-81, 21% of Black students dropped out as

opposed to 5% of Whites.[70] By 1983 as many as nine out of ten Black students in the district were not completing high school.[71]

Conclusion

Since the late 1960s the experience of Black students in the Sequoia Union High School District defied the court-sanctioned equation of racial balance with educational equity. Arguably as the African-American percentage of the student body declined, so too did Black power and educational equality. The New School at Ravenswood represented the midpoint of this decline. Black students had the advantage of attending school in their community, of constituting the majority, of interacting with a Black principal and a number of Black teachers, of taking courses with an Afican-American emphasis. The school was multicultural in the sense that different cultures had opportunities to represent themselves and racial antagonism was limited. As one Black student observed during Ravenswood's final year, "Although we have had our share of racial problems, we have not been a scandal, and with that in mind we, the students and teachers, will accept the closing with dignity."[72] Yet integration remained illusory. Another student made this clear: "Ravenswood the integrated school. Sounds nice, huh? It's plain crap! The whites on their courtyard and the blacks on theirs. There's a little blending, but nothing real."[73]

None of this is to say that White students and teachers came to Ravenswood purely to exercise their privileges. Ravenswood teacher Phil Arnot maintained:

> Those of us who founded this new school in 1971 came here as risk-takers undertaking a bold experiment in human relations and education....Some staff and students came primarily to take a personal role in desegregation. Some came primarly to take part in the educational experiment. But in either emphasis there was risk--the risk that one would wake up one morning wishing she or he hadn't left the security and safety of Woodside, Sequoia, Carlmont, Menlo-Atherton, or San Carlos. So while our visions varied we were still united in courage.[74]

Yet as Arnot's statement makes clear, the New School was founded by Whites. This does not mean that no Whites sought solidarity with Blacks or that no Black students benefited from the Ravenswood experience.[75] Nonetheless, Ravenswood privileged the interests of the already privileged without requiring White students to question the justice of this. Thus one White student could remark, "Did I care about what was happening to the majority of blacks at Ravenswood? Yes and no. We had a lot more security about our futures than they did."[76] She blithely went on to talk about how Ravenswood was a second home to her. Inequality was seen as a simple fact that did not require interrogation or implicate Whites.

The acceptance by Whites of unequal power relations at Ravenswood diminished the possibility of What Henry Louis Gates refers to as "a conversation among different voices."[77] More fundamentally, it denied equal educational opportunity for Black students. The New School experience and, even more blatantly, the post-Ravenswood experience underscore a fundamental problem with many desegregation efforts. While desegregation can afford opportunities to attend schools with superior resources, limited power to control those resources is likely to perpetuate, if not

augment, educational inequity for African American students. That the most idealistic White students in the Sequoia District entered Ravenswood only under circumstances that favored them is suggestive about the possibility for authentic power sharing in desegregated schools.

1. See John McAdam, "Can Open Enrollment Work?" The Public Interest 37(Fall 1974):69-88.

2. Barbara Mouton interview, January 28, 1983, in East Palo Alto.

3. Palo Alto Times (hereafter PAT), December 1, 1962; Willow Residents Association to Board of Trustees, November 26, 1962 in Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.), vol. 12, September 18, 1968, p. 30.

4. Ravenswood Post, September 18, 1968, p. 2.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 1.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 3.

10. Ibid., p. 2.

11. Ibid., p. 3.

12. Ibid., p. 2. Also, for a general discussion of the protest, see PAT, September 10, 11, 12, 1968 and Trojan Torch (hereafter TT), September 20, 1968.

13. PAT, September 12, 1968.

14. Ibid.

15. SUHSD min., vol. 12, September 18, 1968, p. 30.

16. PAT, September 12, 1968.

17. TT, December 20, 1968 and February 10, 1969.

18. SUHSD min, vol. 12, February 19, 1969, p. 112.

19. TT, March 28, 1969, p. 1.

20. See, for instance, TT, October 28, 1968 p. 4 and February 10, 1969, p. 3.

21. TT, June 10, 1969, p. 7.

22. For the 3% figure, see Sequoia Union High School District, "Brief Summary of College Entrance Data," March 7, 1972 in Shelton File. The program of the "Tenth Annual Commencement, Ravenswood High School," June 12, 1969, lists 184 graduating students.

23. With regard to counseling, for example, ratios of 275:1 at Ravenswood and 375:1 at all other schools became 225:1 at Ravenswood and 325:1 at all other schools--"Administrative Plan to Complete the Desegregation of the Sequoia Union High School District," n.d., Shelton File, SUHSD p. 2.1. See also, Sequoia Union High School District, "Fact Sheet Relating to Ravenswood High School, 1969-70, in Segregation Phase-Out File; TT, October 6, 1969, pp. 1,2 and October 31, 1969, pp. 4,1.

24. PAT, November 13, 1970; TT, June 11, 1970, p. 1; Sequoia Newsletter 15(December 1970):4.

25. "Report of Expulsions, Recommended for Expulsions and Suspensions for Sequoia Union High School District," Attachment to memorandum of Vern Sterling to George Chaffey, March 20, 1972, n.p., in Shelton File. Percentages in the text that relate to suspensions are my calculations based on data herein.

26. Ibid. While part of the numerical decline is related to diminishing enrollment at Ravenswood--from 1173 in 1966-67 to 781 in 1970-71 or from 9.6% of district students to 6.0%--the number of Black students dropped only 55 over this period--See George P. Chaffey to Board of Trustees, "Report on Studies Related to Desegregation," Appendix C, October 18, 1972, Voluntary Transfer Files, SUHSD.

27. Sequoia Union High School District, "Average # Daily Absences During 2nd Month of Each Year," December 13, 1971, in Shelton File. For full year attendance, however, the contrast between 1965-66 and 1970-71 is less dramatic. The former year 42 unexcused absences were the average--the highest in the district by one. The latter year, the average was 30, the same as San Carlos, lower than Menlo-Atherton at 40 and much lower than Sequoia at 158. However, Carlmont and Woodside had 23 and 22, respectively. See SUHSD, "Daily Average Absence During Full Year," December 13, 1971, in Shelton File.

28. In October, it had 22 average daily absences for illness of the 561 in the district. For the year it averaged 39 per day of a district-wide average of 596--"Average Absences During 2nd Month;" "Average Absences During Year."

29. According to a 1970 Office for Civil Rights review of the district, Ravenswood did not offer 40% of the district's electives in 1968. The student rebellion had no impact on the curricular offerings until 1969, but it is very unlikely parity

was reached. See Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "Sequoia Union High School District Compliance Review," June 20, 1970, pp. 12-13, in District Attorney File, SUHSD.

30. See California Association of School Administrators, California School Boards Association, and California Teachers Association, Personnel Standards and Ethics Commission Report: Sequoia Union High School District, Ravenswood High School, May 1969.

31. Interview with Helen Kerwin, November 30, 1990, in Atherton.

32. See SUHSD Newsletter 15(January 1971):1 and SUHSD min., vol. 13, February 3, 1971, p. 321.

33. Redwood City Tribune, December 21, 1970.

34. Interview with Donald Harris, March 11, 1991, in Palo Alto.

35. Interview with Harvey Cole, May 2, 1991, in Woodside.

36. Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High Schol District (hereafter SUHSD min.), vol. 14, February 2, 1972, p. 111.

37. "Master Schedule: Ravenswood High School Third Cycle, 1971-72," n.d., in Shelton File, SUHSD.

38. Redwood City Tribune, November 9, 1971, p. 6.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. "Master Schedule, Ravenswood;" "Enrollment Statistics and Average Class Size Studies," October 1971, in Shelton File.

42. Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 16(February 1972):4.

43. Ibid.

44. See, for instance, SUHSD min., vol. 15, December 6, 1972, p. 320.

45. Palo Alto Times, August 21, 1974; SUHSD min., vol. 16, November 7, 1973, p. 63.

46. RWC Tribune, February 25, 1972.

47. RWC Tribune, November 9, 1971.

48. SUHSD min., vol. 14, February 2, 1972, p. 111.

49. PAT, February 3, 1973.

50. SUHSD min., vol. 16, February 6, 1974, p. 110.

51. Ibid., p. 110.

52. "Enrollment Statistics, 1971."

53. Trojan, 1972.

54. Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 16(February 1972):8.

55. Trojan, 1975, pp. 69, 72.

56. Mouton interview.

57. Mouton interview and interview with Terry Friedlund, November 2, 1982, in Palo Alto.

58. See Sequoia Union High School District,"Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey: School System Summary Report," Fall 1973, in Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Hereafter CRA '64) File, SUHSD.

59. SUHSD, "Application for Assistance, Emergency School Assistance Act," December 6, 1973, p. 33.

60. Calculations based on "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey," Fall 1973 and Fall 1974, in CRA '64 File.

61. Parent to Superintendent Chaffey, September 6, 1974, in VT File.

62. Parent to R.W. Dorst, President of Board of Trustees, February 24, 1975, in VT File.

63. Greg Gavin, Rosan Gomperts, and Carole Hall, eds. Ravenswood (Woodside, Cal.: Pressed for Time Press, 1976), pp. 70-71.

64. Organized protests were few during this period, but one succeeded in getting William Walti removed as acting principal following the resignation of Clarence Cryer in 1974. See SUHSD min., vol. 17, September 4, 1974, p. 55.

65. Calculations based on Sequoia Union High School District, "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey School Sytem Summary Report," Fall 1973, in CRA '64 File, and SUHSD, Department of Research and Data Processing, "Racial and Ethnic

Distribution of Total High School Enrollments, 1966-1972," in Appendix C of Chaffey report, October 18, 1972.

66. In 1975 Blacks and Whites won approximately equal numbers of categories. Several categories, like "most likely to succeed," included one African American and one White. See 1972-75 yearbooks, passim.

67. "Sequoia Union High School District on School Closure: Summary of School Closure Questionnaire," n.d. (survey conducted May 1975), pp. 3B, 3, in School Closure-HEW file, SUHSD.

68. Robert Lowe, "Ravenswood High School and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Sequoia Union High School District," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1989, pp. 290-304, passim.

69. Human Relations Evaluation Commission, "Commission Comments on Specific Reports or Policies of District," pp. 19, 20, n.d., in Master Plan HREC Board Report File, SUHSD; "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey: 1976-77," February 1, 1977, in Civil Rights Act of 1964 File, SUHSD. See also Mary M. Bacon, "Follow-up Study: High Potential Students from Ravenswood Elementary District," Report to SUHSD, July 2, 1981, in files of Elbert Mitchell.

70. "Human Relations Evaluation Committee Report, 1980-81," November 1981, p. 42, in HREC File.

71. Peninsula Times Tribune, April 18, 1983, cited in Kofi Lomotey and Craig C. Bookins, "Independent Black Institutions: A Cultural Perspective," in Diana T. Slaughter and Deborah J. Johnson, eds., Visible Now: Blacks in Private Schools (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 162 (check)

72. Gavin et al., Ravenswood, p. 62.

73. Ibid., p. 51.

74. Ibid., p. 40.

75. These are matters that future research, especially oral histories of students, will explore.

76. Ibid., p. 47

77. Henry Louis Gates, "Multiculturalism: A Conversation Among Different Voices," Rethinking Schools 6(October/November 1991): 1