

RAVENSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
IN THE SEQUOIA UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

VOLUME 1

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
AND THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Robert Lowe

September 1989

© Copyright by Robert Lowe
All Rights Reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter

1 SETTING THE STAGE FOR SEGREGATION:
THE FOUNDING OF RAVENSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL 22

2 CONFLICTS OVER DESEGREGATION, 1960-1966 77

3 BLACK POWER IN THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT, PART I:
THE RISE OF SELF-ACTIVITY 114

4 BLACK POWER IN THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT, PART II:
TOWARD SEPARATE AND EQUAL 152

5 THE DECISION TO DESEGREGATE THE SEQUOIA
DISTRICT 192

6 THE ATTAINMENT OF VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION 239

7 THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK STUDENTS UNDER
VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION, 1971-1975 285

8 THE AMBIGUOUS ACHIEVEMENT OF PERMANENT
DESEGREGATION: THE CLOSING OF RAVENSWOOD
HIGH SCHOOL 324

9 THE IRONY OF RECENT SCHOOL REFORM 364

LIST OF MAPS

1. Sequoia Union High School District	3
2. Boundaries of East Palo Alto Prior to 1949	30
3. Boundaries of East Palo Alto in 1951	31
4. Boundaries of East Palo Alto in 1963	32
5. Area of Early Black Settlement in East Palo Alto ..	40
6. Proposed Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area, 1957	54
7. 1958 Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area	59
8. 1963 Ravenswood H.S. Boundaries Including the Willows Area	81
9. 1965 Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area	107
10. Sequoia Union High School District Attendance Boundaries Showing Newly Assigned Attendance Areas, 1976	343

RAVENSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
IN THE SEQUOIA UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
AND THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Robert Lowe

September 1989

© Copyright by Robert Lowe
All Rights Reserved

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

David Tyack (Principal Advisor)

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Larry Cuban

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Clayborne Carson (History)

Approved for the University Committee
on Graduate Studies:

Dean of Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

Despite the abolition of discriminatory legislation and the enormous energy that has gone into equalizing education since the 1954 Brown decision, schooling has continued to have unequal results for blacks. One way of gathering insight into how such outcomes have persisted is to examine over time blacks' experience with education in a specific setting. In order to provide a nuanced understanding of the subtle ways inequality is reproduced this dissertation examines a milieu where a significant number of people believed in racial equality and where outspoken segregationists were rare. It traces the history of Ravenswood High School which opened as a majority white school in 1958 and rapidly segregated through the 1960s. As a magnet school in the early 1970s it drew hundreds of white students, and its closure in 1976 created racial balance throughout the Sequoia District.

In order to make sense of these transformations the dissertation analyzes not only those forces that acted to pinch and contort black educational equality, but also those forces, spear-headed by the black community, that strove to expand equality.

Looking over time at black efforts and the resistance they faced calls into question a conventional reading of Ravenswood's history, one that would equate the attainment

of racial balance with the achievement of equal education. In fact, it suggests that blacks came closest to realizing educational equity when a nearly all-black school was being shaped by the black community. Desegregation diminished black control and arguably served whites' interests.

The persistence of unequal education for blacks, however, was not the result of purposive oppression or the desire for social control. Rather, it reflected decisions that conformed to relations of unequal power. If many whites ultimately came to accept just schools as ones balanced racially, many blacks' view of just schools came to focus on the results achieved by black students. A results-based standard of justice, it is argued, is key to recognizing the need for affirmative measures once formal equality is achieved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of people have played significant roles in making this dissertation possible. First, I am indebted to members of my dissertation committee. David Tyack has allowed me to define my own research agenda and has been masterly in putting up just the right amount of resistance to nudge me into clarifying and refining my work without discouraging me from pursuing this project. Over the years I have learned much from him, and I deeply value his friendship. Larry Cuban has given me close readings of draft material that have attuned me to problems of evidence and style; I have found his bluntness invigorating and his generosity of spirit uplifting. Clayborne Carson has helped me develop a broader and deeper understanding of African American history that I hope in small measure is expressed in this dissertation.

Two unofficial members of my committee, Cynthia Ellwood and Harvey Kantor, are dear friends who have provided invaluable help and endlessly insightful observations. Their genuine interest in this topic miraculously has been sustained over many drafts and many years. Moreover, if it were not for Cynthia's logistical and spiritual support in the final days of this project, despite having to live with a curmudgeon, it might well not have been completed.

This dissertation draws heavily on resources within the Sequoia District and within the East Palo Alto community. Superintendent Merle Fruehling has generously allowed me access to all district documents relevant to Ravenswood High School. Over some eight months Executive Secretary Diana Chang frequently took time away from her tasks to help me find materials. Both also have extensive knowledge of the district's history, and I benefited greatly from their willingness to share it. I am indebted to many people in East Palo Alto, but especially to Mayor Barbara Mouton and to Dianne Otterby. From them I have learned much about the community and its schools. In addition, I have found in their activism a model of humane commitment.

Finally, I would like to thank both past and present students and staff of the Educational Opportunity Program at Marquette University. Over the many years I worked in the program, I received far more than I gave. I am moved that so many members of the EOP community have regarded the completion of this dissertation as if it were their own accomplishment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter

1 SETTING THE STAGE FOR SEGREGATION:
THE FOUNDING OF RAVENSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL 22

2 CONFLICTS OVER DESEGREGATION, 1960-1966 77

3 BLACK POWER IN THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT, PART I:
THE RISE OF SELF-ACTIVITY 114

4 BLACK POWER IN THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT, PART II:
TOWARD SEPARATE AND EQUAL 152

5 THE DECISION TO DESEGREGATE THE SEQUOIA
DISTRICT 192

6 THE ATTAINMENT OF VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION 239

7 THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK STUDENTS UNDER
VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION, 1971-1975 285

8 THE AMBIGUOUS ACHIEVEMENT OF PERMANENT
DESEGREGATION: THE CLOSING OF RAVENSWOOD
HIGH SCHOOL 324

9 THE IRONY OF RECENT SCHOOL REFORM 364

LIST OF MAPS

1. Sequoia Union High School District	3
2. Boundaries of East Palo Alto Prior to 1949	30
3. Boundaries of East Palo Alto in 1951	31
4. Boundaries of East Palo Alto in 1963	32
5. Area of Early Black Settlement in East Palo Alto ..	40
6. Proposed Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area, 1957	54
7. 1958 Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area	59
8. 1963 Ravenswood H.S. Boundaries Including the Willows Area	81
9. 1965 Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area	107
10. Sequoia Union High School District Attendance Boundaries Showing Newly Assigned Attendance Areas, 1976	343

INTRODUCTION

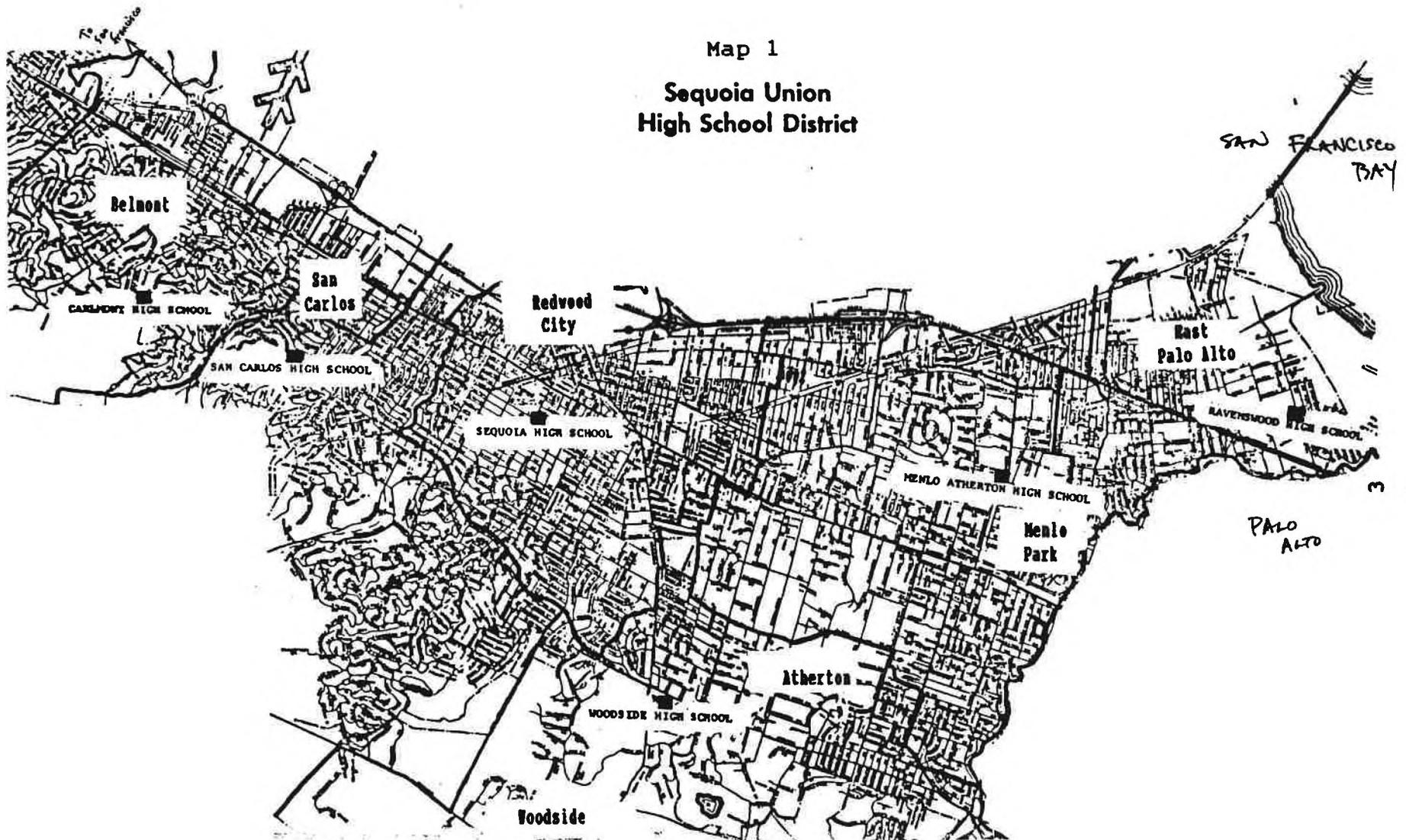
THE PROBLEM OF INEQUALITY AT RAVENSWOOD HIGH

The momentous Brown decision of 1954 ushered in nearly two decades of spiraling official commitment to equality of educational opportunity. On the national legal front, the Supreme Court urged that desegregation take place "with all deliberate speed" in 1955, ruled that still extant racial imbalance in southern schools was illegal in 1968, mandated busing in 1971, and moved on northern segregation in 1973.¹ In addition to fostering racial balance, the federal government provided educational programs for the historically underserved through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Higher Education Act. Significant effort at the state and local level often followed the federal mandate to expand educational opportunity. Yet despite the abolition of discriminatory legislation and the enormous energy that went into equalizing education, schooling continued to have unequal results for blacks in academic performance and rate of graduation.²

One way of gathering insight into how such outcomes persisted is to examine over time blacks' experience with education in a specific setting. To look within a Little Rock or a Prince Edward or a Selma, however, would be to examine a locale where the commitment to equality had not taken hold, where the obstacles to achieving racial justice were crude and obvious. But to conduct a study within a milieu where there thrived a commitment to equality can provide a nuanced understanding of the subtle ways inequality is reproduced.

Ravenswood High, one of six schools within the Sequoia Union High School District, opened in 1958 (see map 1). Located within East Palo Alto, then an unincorporated and relatively poor community of affluent San Mateo County, California, the high school enrolled a student body that was 21% black. Despite boundary changes in 1963 and 1965 designed to increase white enrollment at Ravenswood and despite the initiation of programs in the late 1960s that first allowed black students to transfer out of the district and subsequently permitted them to attend predominantly white schools within the district, the percentage of black students at Ravenswood rose dramatically throughout the decade. The school had become 60% black in 1965 and 94% by 1970. This swift racial transformation took place in an environment where a significant number of people believed in

Map 1
Sequoia Union
High School District



Source: Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter, 17 (February 1973).

racial equality and where even the most conservative could not be considered virulent segregationists.

A successful voluntary desegregation effort in 1971 attracted some of the best teachers in the district, generated a number of innovative programs, and initially equalized the number of black and white students at the high school. Not only did the Ravenswood experiment attract local acclaim, but a 1974 article in The Public Interest counted the school district as one of the foremost innovators nationally in the area of desegregation.³ In the fall of 1976, however, Ravenswood was closed, and its students disbanded to the remaining schools in the Sequoia District.

The closing of Ravenswood may appear to be a triumph. Such an outcome had been the most ardent desire of black East Palo Altans and liberal whites ten years before--a desire the school board could not easily have fulfilled at that time because it would have met resistance from those uncommitted to integration and those concerned with fiscal waste. The peaceful acceptance of racial balance by 1975, even in the more conservative northern sections of the district, did suggest a heightened commitment to racial justice on the part of many whites. In addition, closing the high school meant that minority students would compose a small but stable portion of the enrollments in the remaining high schools, satisfying both the Office for Civil Rights

and the plaintiffs who sought desegregation through the state courts.

On the other hand, a definition of racial justice in which African Americans were everywhere in the minority and schooled outside the community did not necessarily satisfy East Palo Alto's blacks in the 1970s. The relatively weak performances and high suspension rates of black students attending other schools within the district, the disappearance of an institution that permitted some accountability to the community, and the loss of a bridge between young people and the political life of East Palo Alto initially engendered protest and a lawsuit, and it inspired long-term, smoldering hostility to the Sequoia Union High School District. At the same time, blacks did not unanimously condemn the closing of Ravenswood in 1975. A shared perception of racial injustice in the black community did not produce an agreed upon remedy.

Given the presence of a racially tolerant environment, why did segregation develop? What forces ultimately reversed this trend? Why, five years after Ravenswood desegregated, did a highly praised experiment in integrated education terminate with the closing of East Palo Alto's only secondary school? More broadly, how do we understand the creation and maintenance of an unequal education for black students in a politically conscious, predominantly black community surrounded by relatively liberal neighbors?

This last query is the key question my dissertation will address.

The most obvious explanation for persistent inequality of black education in the district resides in the discriminatory behavior of the school board and superintendent. Court findings, however, do not confirm this. Though three suits were filed against the Sequoia Union High School District in the 1970s, none of the decisions found the board guilty of intent to discriminate. Moreover, for a number of years key administrators expressed in word and deed an unflagging commitment to racial justice (though their definition did not always accord with the dominant one in East Palo Alto's black community).

A more compelling account of inequality would document the unintended consequences of administrative decisions. Once such decision was the creation of the Sequoia District's boundaries. Outlined more than a half-century before blacks lived in the area, these boundaries were drawn in a way that excluded Palo Alto, which abuts East Palo Alto and historically has had the most liberal citizenry on the Peninsula. On the other hand, the district included the more conservative suburbs of Belmont and San Carlos, located a number of miles from East Palo Alto. Slightly different boundaries, therefore, ultimately might have resulted in stronger support for racial equality.

Similarly accidental, the district's considerable size meant it would encompass an overall population that would dwarf East Palo Alto, drastically curtailing the influence of voters there. Even the building of the Bayshore freeway in the mid-1950s had fortuitous racial consequences. Rather than cleaving to the bay as it did in passing most cities on the Peninsula, it bisected East Palo Alto. The highway then became an obvious choice for the main attendance boundary of Ravenswood High, a barrier which in time "naturally" separated the Sequoia District's students by race. Further, the very placement of the high school in the far southeastern corner of the district--a reasonable decision given the rapid population increase there in the 1950s--meant that once East Palo Alto became a predominantly minority community, there would be few options for boundary changes that might foster racial balance.

Certainly, neither the particular actions of the Sequoia District nor the totality of administrative decisions that affected East Palo Alto bespoke intentions to oppress black people; however, their consequences and to some extent their causes did indicate the operation of unequal power. For instance, prior to substantial black settlement the inability of East Palo Alto citizens to prevent the route of the Bayshore Highway from cutting the municipality in half, uprooting its business district in the process, can in part be understood as the result of the

relative powerlessness of a working class community. This same vulnerability might also explain why East Palo Alto, rather than other suburbs on the Peninsula, experienced massive block-busting.

In the Sequoia Union High School District, the relatively limited tax monies that derived from East Palo Alto and its citizens' concomitant lack of influence might partly explain the persistence of at-large school board elections that further diminished the ability of East Palo Altans to affect school board policy. Similarly, the continuous gap between blacks and whites in academic performance in part can be traced to the inadequate revenues commanded by East Palo Alto's elementary school district, an entity distinct from the high school district and by far the poorest system in the county. In addition, an absence of political clout can help answer such questions as why Ravenswood High was built in East Palo Alto rather than affluent Atherton where it was first proposed and successfully opposed and why the initial attendance boundaries of Ravenswood included virtually every black family in the district when black students previously attended Menlo-Atherton.

East Palo Alto's lack of power did not simply spring from class differences between it and surrounding communities in San Mateo County. The municipality was also weakened by interracial conflict. Since the Second World

War, East Palo Alto largely comprised blue collar workers of both races. Though interracial violence was rare, even during the most intense period of block-busting in the 1950s, blacks and white often worked at cross-purposes, diminishing the community's influence in political combat. Unimpeded by racial discrimination in housing and labor markets, whites' response to problems at Ravenswood High was to abandon the school by moving outside its attendance area. Such behavior relaxed pressure on the school district to provide quality education and made the achievement of racial balance all the more difficult.

There is more to the story of Ravenswood, however, than an institution inscribed with class and racial inequality. It bore the impress of a black community that became well-organized, tactically imaginative, and until the late 1960s unified in its goals. A desire for self-determination informed the highly publicized sneak-out program, the dramatic confrontations with the school board, and the midnight meetings convened to solicit white support. In addition, school leaders did not simply mediate between opposing forces. At times pushed by the state board of education, the Office for Civil Rights, and Supreme Court decisions, at other times propelled by their own convictions, administrators and key school board members strove to create an educational system that was integrated in both form and essence.

An understanding of the life of the high school, then, not only demands an analysis of forces that acted to pinch and contort black educational equality, but also those forces, spear-headed by the black community, that strove to expand equality. By exploring this relationship between determination and self-determination as it addresses education in the post-Brown period, this dissertation may contribute to the literature on black educational history. In brief, it seeks to join two formerly distinct approaches to the past--one that focused on social control and the other on self activity. Combining these frameworks will provide a more complex understanding of black educational eventuation.

Traditions of Black Educational History

Only over the last decade has black educational history been integrated into general studies of the educational past.⁴ Prior to that time it was, with the exception of the most perfunctory overviews, treated as part of southern history, or, more typically, Jim Crowed--separated from studies addressing the schooling of other groups in the United States. Even today black educational history typically is presented as a separate phenomenon, no longer so much because it is considered an unsuitable topic of discourse, but because it necessarily chronicles a set of experiences distinct from those faced by white Americans.⁵

Yet to a surprising extent studies of black education have comported with mainstream fashions. The vast majority of volumes are Cubberleyan in their celebration of educational progress leading to democratic apotheosis. While this tradition includes Henry Bullock's comprehensive A History of Negro Education in the South,⁶ most of these works focus on the development of a single institution viewed in isolation from social and economic forces. These tend to be house-histories, written by alumni or employees, which serve to congratulate all those associated with the school in question. In the words of one such author, they are designed to "establish a basis for building proper respect and genuine unity among an institution's constituency."⁷ Occasionally the subjects are public schools like Washington D. C.'s Dunbar High, but more typically they are black colleges, which until well into the twentieth century primarily served as pre-collegiate institutions due to the paucity of regular secondary school training available in the South.⁸

A second tradition of black education historiography is pessimistic, emphasizing a connection between black schooling and social control. The oldest strand of this tradition largely ignores the content of schooling, but focuses on the grave inequities between black and white institutions. Books like Horace Mann Bond's Education of the Negro in the American Social Order and Louis Harlan's

Separate But Unequal show how white schools in the South have expanded at the expense of black ones, fracturing equal opportunity in the process.⁹ While such a perspective tends to view education as a good that is purposefully denied, another strand of the social control tradition views the curriculum and practice of schooling as an elite-controlled evil bent on socializing black people for subservience in a stratified society. Some works of this nature, like James Anderson's "Education as a Vehicle for the Manipulation of Black Workers," and Donald Spivey's Schooling for the New Slavery fit within the orbit of revisionist scholarship charted out by Clarence Kariyer, Joel Spring, and Paul Violas. Covering the period between 1866 and 1915, these pieces score the racist character and exploitative intent of philanthropists, industrialists, and school leaders.¹⁰ On the other hand, two more recent studies of the Reconstruction period de-emphasize intent: Jacqueline Jones points to the negative impact of well-meaning, egalitarian-minded teachers who did not comprehend the cultural differences between themselves and blacks, and Ronald Butchart argues that colonization resulted from even the most emancipatory education because schooling substituted for land redistribution.¹¹

While the social control perspective views blacks as relatively passive victims of elites' actions, a third and largely recent trend emphasizes black self-activity.

Inspired, in part, by the work of E.P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman, these educational historians underscore the ways in which blacks have acted to create their own schools after their own vision. The theme of black autonomy in educational development has been sounded by Thomas Webber in a book on the ante-bellum South and, in contradistinction to his previous work, by James Anderson in an article on the Reconstruction period. In addition, Anderson's impressive new book, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865-1935, concentrates on blacks' efforts to create educational institutions consonant with their vision of citizenship, but it presents such efforts against a backdrop of enduring subordination that limits but does not alter the black agenda.¹²

Both the social control and self-activity frameworks imply antagonistic relationships between blacks and whites, but each framework largely excludes one of the combatant groups. Only by merging these frameworks is it possible to learn how class and racial conflict shaped educational change. Two brilliant books written in the 1930s, Horace Mann Bond's Negro Education in Alabama and W.E.B. DuBois' Black Reconstruction, suggest this approach, but few subsequent histories of black education have followed their lead. Although a concern with charting the relationship between agency and control is beginning to re-emerge in black education history, race alone has defined conflict in

such books as Vincent Franklin's Black Philadelphia and William Chafe's Civility and Civil Rights.¹³ The latter, though only partly devoted to education, is the first book treating schooling from the late 1950s to early 1970s that pays serious attention to the changing aspirations and tactics of black people and white people over matters of segregation, desegregation, and community control.¹⁴

Chafe's book, an examination of Greensboro, North Carolina that concentrates on the period between 1954 and 1971, is rooted in the history of the black community. Yet it avoids the romanticism that follows from the depiction of unrestrained self-activity.¹⁵ Rather, he strives to document the tension between black's struggle for freedom and the white power structure's efforts to contain this struggle. While the desire to uncover the forms and meanings of this dialogue between determination and self-determination will inform my work, the differences between the social environment of Greensboro and that of East Palo Alto mean the terms of such dialogue will alter considerably.

Greensboro was atypical for a southern city in its commitment to racial peace, if not equality between the races. While Jim Crow legislation essentially remained intact through the 1950's, concessions were made to blacks that at the very least contributed to giving the town a liberal image to Northerners. It had a black city

councilman by 1951, a black school board member by 1953, and it was the first southern city to voice compliance with the Brown decision. In actually implementing desegregation, however, Greensboro ultimately stood with much of the rest of the South--its plans a charade. Under the state Pupil Placement Act, Greensboro excluded blacks from white schools until 1957 when six were admitted--a number that would decline by one the following year.¹⁶ In spite of massive civil rights activity inaugurated by the 1960 Woolworth's sit-in, progress in school desegregation was glacial. Not until 1971, when a large segment of the black population favored community control, did thorough desegregation take place and then at behest of the courts.

East Palo Alto's high school, in contrast, had begun as an integrated, predominantly white institution that by 1970 became virtually all black. The municipality's black community had no deep roots; indeed, there was no black community there prior to 1950. Without the presence of other institutions that categorically discriminated against blacks, schools--especially the high school--became the focus of community protest. While Chafe sees white people bent on exercising social control, such an explanation has limited meaning in explaining racial injustice within the Sequoia Union High School District. Perhaps few of Sequoia's whites were willing to sacrifice their children's advantages in order to create a more equal society, but

sincere efforts to advance racial justice were widespread through much of the period under discussion. Differing conceptions of such justice in part might be traced to people's different positions in the social structure, and unequal racial outcomes were largely the result of differentials in power within that structure rather than the consequence of purposive oppression.

This dissertation will examine the complex, sometimes contradictory struggle for racial justice within Ravenswood High School. David Kirp has written that "Progress entails capturing the meaning of equality in a specific setting and translating that meaning into official action, not securing a coherent, timeless understanding."¹⁷ My study seeks to probe that meaning through uncovering the dialectic between official action and the black demand for just schools. In doing so, it will question whether desegregation necessarily advances the project of equal educational opportunity.

Chapters One and Two of the dissertation will trace the development of separate and unequal schooling in the Sequoia District to race and class based inequalities. Chapters Three and Four will discuss the contribution of the local black power movement to engendering quality education in a segregated setting. Chapters Five through Eight and the first part of chapter Nine will examine the legal, ideological, and economic factors that spurred official efforts to achieve desegregation, and they will

assess how desegregation affected the circumstances of black students. The remainder of Chapter Nine will examine changing conceptions of racial justice in the Sequoia District and will challenge received wisdom about the struggle for equal education during the 1960s and 1970s.

1. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U. S. 483 (1954) and 349 U.S. 294 (1955); Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, 391 U.S. 430 (1968); Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education, 402 U.S. 1 (1971); Keyes v. Denver School District No. I, 93 S.Ct. 2686 (1973).
2. On inequality in reading scores and differential high school graduation, see Center for Educational Statistics, The Condition of Education: A Statistical Report (Washington D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Dept. of Education, 1986), pp. 30-31, 42-43. For the increase in desegregated schools of disproportionate EMR placement and punishment, see Jennifer Hochschild, The New American Dilemma: School Democracy and School Desegregation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 166. For a summary of studies that find a disproportionate number of blacks suspended nationally, see Clarence H. Thornton and William T. Trent, "School Desegregation and Suspension in East Baton Rouge Parish: A Preliminary Report," Journal of Negro Education 57(Fall 1988):483-484.
3. John McAdams, "Can Open Enrollment Work?" The Public Interest 37 (Fall 1974): 69-88.
4. For a comprehensive historiographical essay on black education that differs somewhat from the following analysis, see Ronald E. Butchart, "'Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World': A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education," History of Education Quarterly 28(Fall 1988):332-366.
5. Two of the first books that made serious efforts to integrate black educational history into broad studies of the past are David Tyack, The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University press, 1974) and Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak, Education in the United States: An Interpretive History (New York: The Free Press, 1976). The most well-known history of Southern education treats black schools, though not without paternalism: Charles William Dabney, Universal Education in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936). Standard works that pay scant or no attention to black education include Ellwood P. Cubberley, Public Education in the United States: A study and Interpretation of American Education History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919 [1939 ed.]); Lawrence A. Cremin, The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957 (New York: Vintage Books, 1964); and Raymond E. Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

6. Henry Allen Bullock, A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).
7. George A. Sewell and Cornelius V. Troup, Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years, 1881-1981 (Atlanta: Morris Brown College, 1981), p. xii.
8. See also Mary Gibson Hundley, The Dunbar Story, 1870-1955 (New York: Vantage Books, 1965); Alferdteen B. Harrison, Piney Woods School: An Oral History (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1982); and Zella J. Black Patterson, Langston University: A History (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979). For a somewhat more critical study, see Joe M. Richardson, A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980).
9. Horace Mann Bond, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1934); Louis R. Harlan, Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915 (1958; reprint ed., New York: Athenaeum, 1969).
10. James D. Anderson, "Education as a Vehicle for the Manipulation of Black Workers," in Walter Feinberg and Henry Rosemont, Jr., eds., Work, Technology, and Education: Dissenting Essays in the Intellectual Foundations of American Education (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 15-40; Donald Spivey, Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978). In a similar vein, see James D. Anderson, "Northern Foundations in the Shaping of Southern Black Rural Education, 1902-1935," History of Education Quarterly 18 (Winter 1978): 371-396. For the work of Clarence J. Karier, Paul C. Violas, and Joel Spring, see especially their co-authored Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973).
11. Jacqueline Jones, Soldier of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Ronald E. Butchart, Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction, 1862-1875 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980).
12. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1963); Herbert G. Gutman, Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) and The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Thomas

L. Webber, Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865 (New York: W.W. Norton, Inc., 1978); James P. Anderson, "Ex-Slaves and the Rise of Universal Education in the New South, 1860-1880," in Ronald K. Goodenow and Arthur O. White eds., Education and the Rise of the New South (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1981), pp.1-25. Idem, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). For works stressing black autonomous goals, see Carleton Mabee, Black Education in New York State: From Colonial to Modern Times (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979); Linda Perkins, "Quaker Beneficence and Black Control: The Institute for Colored Youth, 1852-1903," in Vincent P. Franklin and James D. Anderson, eds., New Perspectives on Black Education History (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1978), pp. 19-44; Raymond Wolters, The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920's (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

13. Horace Mann Bond, Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel (1939; reprint ed., New York: Atheneum, 1969); W.E.B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880 (1935; reprint ed., New York: Atheneum 1969); Vincent P. Franklin, The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Education History of a Minority Community, 1900-1950 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979); William Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). Race and class are factors in J. Anthony Lucas's Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families (New York: Knopf, 1985), but power relationships are completely absent.

14. Generally speaking, studies that look at desegregation during the post-Brown period take on traditional perspectives of education historians. "Whiggish" volumes include Reginald G. Damerell, Triumph in a White Suburb: Integration in the Berkeley Schools (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969). Books written from a social control perspective include Lillian Rubin, Busing or Backlash (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) and Emmett H. Buell, Jr. with Richard A. Brisbin, Jr., School Desegregation and Defended Neighborhoods: The Boston Controversy (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1982). A short study cognizant of changing aspirations and tactics is David N. Planck and Marcia Turner, "Changing Patterns of Black School Politics: Atlanta, 1872-1973," American Journal of Education 95(August 1987): 584-608.

15. See, for example, Perry Anderson's response to Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class in Arguments Within English Marxism (London: Verso, 1980), chap. 2.

16. Chafe, Civilities, pp. 66, 74.

17. David L. Kirp, Just Schools: The Idea of Racial Equality in American Education (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 9.

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SEGREGATION: THE FOUNDING OF RAVENSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Some weeks before Ravenswood High School first opened its doors, the East Palo Alto community fair featured a barbershop quartet and square dancing. The young woman selected "dream girl" of 1958 was--as always--white. These festivities paid homage to the white aesthetics, values, and tastes of a rural world that was rapidly receding into the past. Despite this bit of nostalgia played out on a warm summer weekend, the East Palo Alto flower growers were being replaced by factory workers, the poultry colony lands had been largely transformed into housing subdivisions, and the body of farmers known as the Grange retained only symbolic functions. The racial makeup of East Palo Alto gradually had begun to change as well, but it remained a predominantly white community.¹

When the new high school began to operate in September 1958, its enrollment was 21% black. This percentage swiftly grew to 60 in 1965 and more than 90 by the end of the

decade. In retrospect, it seems improbable that a segregated institution would have emerged in this diminutive suburb that was surrounded by liberal neighbors, that stood in one of the ten wealthiest counties in the country, and that was located in a state now free of Jim Crow legislation. This chapter will reconstruct those conditions that would have made such an outcome probable as early as 1958.

As in most northern cities, segregation in East Palo Alto did not solely spring from the policies of a school board. A full understanding of the segregation process requires an inquiry into matters of class, race, and political power. This chapter, then, more a study of community development and underdevelopment than of educational policy, is most broadly a foray into understanding how racial inequality is forged in an environment generally free of overt racism. It will begin by briefly tracing the history of white settlement in East Palo Alto. It will then turn to the subsequent settlement of blacks who, in addition to suffering distinctly racial encumbrances, inherited the relative powerlessness of geographically isolated working class whites. A discussion of the relationship between the two groups, mediated by liberal outsiders on one side and conservative realtors on the other, will set a context for exploring the formation of Ravenswood High School.

Roots of Powerlessness:

Patterns of White Settlement in East Palo Alto

Blessed with a superb climate, physical beauty, and a bay front location, the East Palo Alto area attracted settlement as early as the 1850s. The Port of Ravenswood was meant to be a shipping center for goods destined for San Francisco. The building of a rival port in Redwood City, however, and the completion of a railroad from San Jose to San Francisco, soon left the Port at Ravenswood superfluous, and the promise of a bustling community died. By 1870 the townsite was vacant and much of the surrounding area had become part of William Cooley's ranch. So began a rhythm of settlement and abandonment that would continue for a century, hindering the development of common institutions and a civic identity, fostering a municipal powerlessness that would one day have serious consequences for East Palo Alto's citizenry.

In the 1870s a rebirth commenced when William Cooley leased five acres of his ranch to a brick factory. Worked primarily by Chinese labor, the factory made the bricks with which San Francisco's Palace Hotel was built. Apparently few additional contracts were forthcoming, and the brickyard shut down in 1883. Once again the town was stillborn, leaving two families of ranchers, the Cooleys and Kavanaughs, the only permanent residents of the area. In

1905, the San Francisco Chronicle commented on the unfulfilled promise of "California's Dream City": "Topographically, geographically, and in many other respects, the promoters of the enterprise had every reason for painting the roseate picture of the city that was to be." The "city" then had a population of one--a man employed by Pacific Gas and Electric to guard its pipeline.²

New settlement began in 1907 when the Woodland Place subdivision of Ravenswood went up for sale. The Palo Alto based Ravenswood Investment Company advertised lots there as the cheapest on the Peninsula, but a decade later the establishment of the Runnymede Little Farms Colony surpassed the Ravenswood development in population and influence.³ Devoted to poultry raising the colony immediately attracted residents. Sixty families had settled by 1917, and it comprised 1,200 people by 1922.⁴

Runnymede was one of many utopian schemes in California founded on the belief that rural life was superior and that small plots of land intensively farmed could produce the necessities of life, as well as the serenity that could only come from independent labor. Stated an advertisement, "The highest independence would be that happy state in which a man would neither hire nor be hired."⁵ This was hardly a call for revolution or an effort to entice the poor, however, since plots of land, ranging from one to five acres, had to be purchased in cash and in advance. The

advertisement's caption read, "ESPECIALLY ADAPTED TO PEOPLE OF MEANS WHO WISH A PRETTY GARDEN HOME."⁶

Tensions between the colonists and the residents of the Ravenswood section developed in the early 1920s and came to a head in 1925 when an election to determine the name of the entire community was held. In a 504 to 321 vote, the former group, which chose "East Palo Alto," won over supporters of "Ravenswood."⁷ The election, however, did nothing to unite the community. Separate chambers of commerce survived until the late 1930s, and throughout this period the Palo Alto City Directory recognized distinct municipalities (with only Ravenswood getting billed on the cover during the Depression decade).⁸ In addition, the presence of numerous service districts with irregular boundaries, some of which expanded beyond the East Palo Alto area, compounded the confusion. Certainly the East Palo Alto Progressive Club's Slogan, "Unity in the Community," sounded a bit farfetched.⁹

Due to an epidemic of liquor stores, the East Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce entertained the possibility of incorporating in 1935. Claimed chairperson A. Groves, "As our section is outside the prohibited Stanford intoxicating liquor zone, we are getting more than our share of business, and...if we have to endure the undesirable business in our midst, they should pay the expense of their proper control and regulation which can only be done by incorporating."¹⁰ But this goal was not realized. Ongoing sectional

antagonisms between Ravenswood and Runnymede, the incipient decline of the colony due to the Depression and increased competition from other poultry producers, and possibly the advancing age of many colonists, all diminished the felt need to formulate a city. Indeed, few had a future in the community. By the early 1940s, neither chamber of commerce existed and much of the poultry colony was being divided into housing subdivisions.¹¹

After the war, East Palo Alto underwent another incarnation. Its population skyrocketed from an estimated 1,500 residents in 1947 to 6,000 in 1952 and 12,000 the following year. It continued to grow at the rate of 1,000 annually through the remainder of the decade.¹² As of 1960, more than two-thirds of the area's housing had been built during the prior ten years.¹³ While virtually everyone had been independent poultry raisers during the peak years of the Runnymede Colony, East Palo Alto in the post-war period was increasingly inhabited by those who worked for others--especially machinists, mechanics, draftsmen, and sheet metal workers.¹⁴ Rapidly urbanizing, East Palo Alto lacked the community institutions necessary to conduct serious planning. Yet even had there been greater continuity in population and leadership, the historic organizations, devoted mostly to rural pedestrian concerns like gopher and ground squirrel extermination, and according to a Palo Alto Times article, to the "eradication of poison oak, thistles,

and other obnoxious weeds," had little of value to impart about the preservation and development of urban wealth.¹⁵

During the 1940s and 1950s community organizations functioned primarily at the neighborhood level. Improvement groups like the Palo Alto Park Property Owners Association, the Palo Alto Manor Residents Association, and the Palo Alto Gardens Improvement Association sought lighting, police protection, bus transportation, and swimming pools. In addition, some of these pushed for restrictive covenants or otherwise tried to exclude non-whites.¹⁶ That many residents considered themselves inhabitants of Palo Alto rather than East Palo Alto is evident from the names of the organizations listed above.¹⁷ The Citizens' Service League, the only organization whose jurisdiction encompassed all of East Palo Alto, did not have the influence or longevity to significantly foster civic consciousness. Not until 1956 did East Palo Alto again have a chamber of commerce. Its forerunner, the Boosters Club, was established in 1946 and initially acted as a dad's club concerned with such things as building playground backstops and bicycle racks for schools. Though it was never listed in the Palo Alto City Directory, it gradually took on the functions of a chamber, disbanding when the official organization was formed.¹⁸

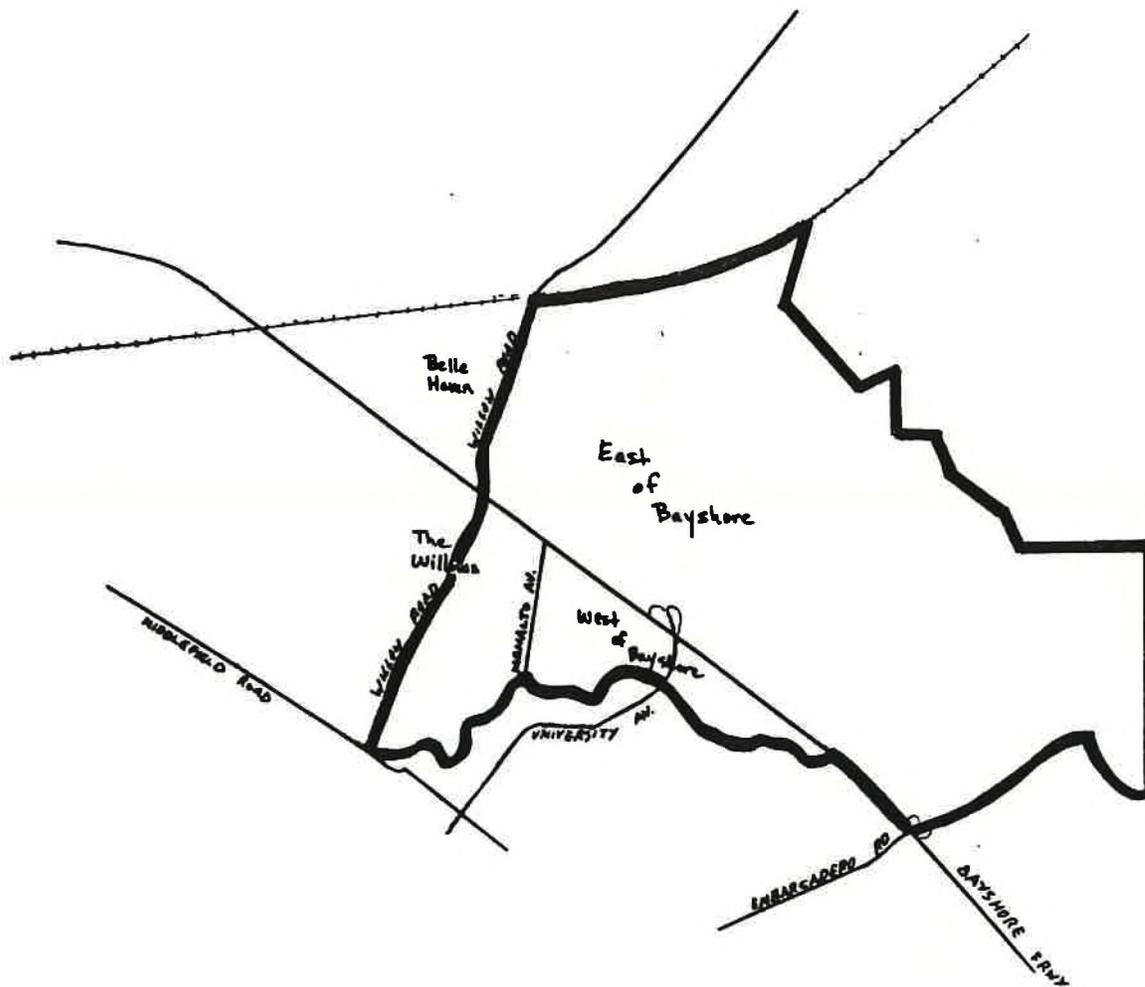
The lack of continuity in population and institutions, the absence of a collective conceptualization of East Palo Alto as a clearly demarcated area whose emerging urban

status depended on an adequate tax base, plus the geographical isolation of the community and its increasingly working class character, combined to make the area vulnerable to cavalier treatment from county and state agencies as well as from municipalities with a more refined sense of self-interest. Symbolic of the lack of consideration paid to East Palo Alto was San Mateo County's Official Map for 1950. It failed to recognize an East Palo Alto and placed Ravenswood on the original townsite, unoccupied since the nineteenth century.

Encroachments on the territory of greater East Palo Alto commenced in 1949 when Menlo Park annexed Belle Haven. In so doing it acquired one-fourth of the population and one-fourth of the property value of East Palo Alto. Plans to create a locally controlled police district died with the loss of such a substantial amount of property.¹⁹ By early 1951, Menlo Park had also garnered significant chunks of land on either side of Willow Road (see maps 2-4). Annexed areas were permitted to withdraw from the Ravenswood Park and Recreation District, severely limiting the district's capabilities to provide adequate services to East Palo Alto residents.²⁰ At the same time an already affluent Menlo Park not only enriched itself with greater taxable property, but as of 1950 each new resident entitled it to \$7.35 in state subventions for city services.²¹

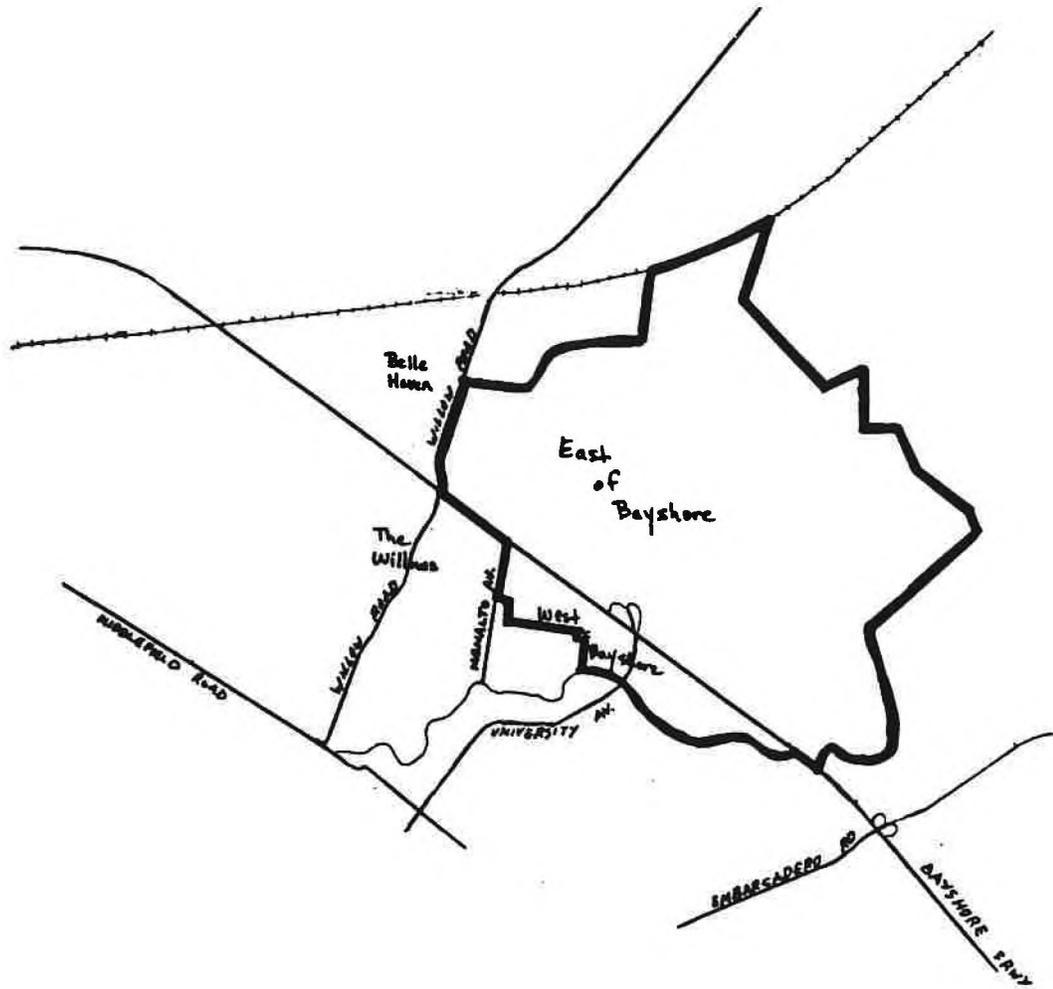
Map 3

Boundaries of East Palo Alto in 1951



Map 4

Boundaries of East Palo Alto in 1963



The savaging of East Palo Alto's territory provoked the first halting efforts to form a city in 1951. Without any form of local government or even a chamber of commerce, the matter of cityhood devolved upon the Ravenswood Boosters. In a 38 to 29 vote the Boosters decided to drop the issue. Such an outcome in all probability was influenced by the strident opposition of Clarence Kavanaugh, a leader of the organization and a member of a family whose extensive landholdings in the area dated to the 1860s. Fearing that incorporation would bring higher taxes to pay for community improvements, the Kavanaugh family would oppose successive efforts to incorporate.²²

But the threat of more incursions into East Palo Alto's land by Menlo Park, the rapidly growing population, and the bizarre welter of service districts to which residents paid taxes, encouraged additional attempts to make East Palo Alto a self-governing entity that could provide streamlined services in an increasingly urban setting.²³ Another effort to incorporate died in 1954. Although a Palo Alto Times reporter explained that this failure to form a city in part resulted from a feeling that East Palo Alto was now free of surrounding cities' rapacity, the truth was that East Palo Alto stood open to further encroachments.²⁴ In fact, part of the Bohannon industrial development, including Hublein Inc. and Park, Davis, & Co., joined Menlo Park in 1956 and withdrew from the Ravenswood Recreation and Park District

two years later. The assessed valuation of these 104 acres was \$207,530 in 1957-58 and an estimated \$398,425 for the following year.²⁵

The year 1958 marked a substantial drive to incorporate, but before this took place the building of the Bayshore Freeway significantly contributed to the underdevelopment of East Palo Alto, and perhaps the first serious resistance to outside interference revolved around the proposed route of the freeway. Virtually all the businesses of East Palo Alto lined the old four lane Bayshore. In order to preserve this commercial area, a committee formed as early as 1947 to encourage the California State Planning Commission to build the East Palo Alto portion of the highway close to the bay. Although the road did cleave to the bay as it coursed through most other communities, protecting their geographical integrity, the commission refused to adopt what would have amounted to a more costly and convoluted route through East Palo Alto for the sake of preserving a business strip comprising gas stations, motels, restaurants, and taverns.²⁶ Once the route was a fait accompli, there were few protests. Business operators were placated by the good prices the state gave them for their establishments, and large industries on the Peninsula benefited greatly from a much faster, wider traffic artery. Even Ernest Stelter, head of the zoning committee for the Ravenswood Boosters sounded

pleased. "The highway program, " he averred, "gives us a rare opportunity to plan a really well-designed business district."²⁷

Stelter, however, was overly sanguine. The freeway proved to be disastrous for the community. Of the fifty-three businesses forced to relocate, only five remained in East Palo Alto.²⁸ In addition to damaging the area's tax base and promoting floods, the highway set the "natural" attendance boundary of the future Ravenswood High School, a boundary that would encourage racial segregation in the 1960s; and because it was a much less permeable divider than the old Bayshore, it would also impede future incorporation efforts by cutting the west side off from the east, fueling some west side residents' aspirations to be part of Menlo Park.²⁹

In summary, prior to significant black settlement in East Palo Alto, the absence of stable civic institutions and concomitant lack of community identity translated into negligible political power. Contributing to fragmentation were the self-interested activity of industrialists and large landowners operating within an emerging working class entity. There resulted a concentration of the liquor trade, dissolution of the major business district, diminution in population, and disappearance of great amounts of taxable property.

Opportunity and Constraint:

Black Settlement in East Palo Alto

With the conflict over the high school boundaries and the ensuing incorporation effort of 1958, race began to insinuate itself into the politics of decision making within East Palo Alto. Before getting to these matters, it is necessary to examine the changing racial composition of East Palo Alto.

In the early 1940s, the exigencies of the war effort and the demands of A. Phillip Randolph's March on Washington Movement had opened up job opportunities to blacks in war-related work. In search of better livelihoods they left Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas for jobs in the San Francisco area. With war's end, however, the historic rhythm of last-hired and first-fired once again ensnared blacks, resulting in an estimated black unemployment rate of greater than 30%.⁹⁰ Massive layoffs at the Kaiser Shipbuilding Company, the Army Port of Embarkation, and the Quartermaster Supply Depot, spurred a southward movement of blacks that began to reach East Palo Alto in 1949.⁹¹ Drawn by the availability of jobs and the possibility of home ownership, the black population of San Mateo County rose from 1,212 in 1950 to 10,846 in 1960, roughly three-quarters of whom lived in eastern Menlo Park (Belle Haven) or East Palo Alto by the latter date.⁹²

Until 1949, however, restrictive covenants and realtors' discriminatory practices conspired to bar blacks from moving into the East Palo Alto area. Prior to that time blacks in the Mid-Peninsula were confined to the Five Points area of Redwood City and to a section of downtown Palo Alto centering about Ramona Street. The fight for access to East Palo Alto was initially taken up by the Council for Civic Unity of Redwood City, a precursor to the South San Mateo County NAACP. This interracial organization acquired houses for blacks by purchasing them under the names of whites.³³ Once a foothold was established, realtors engaged in blockbusting. As in so many other desegregating communities, they insisted that blacks were settling en masse and would bring down property values. Whites were encouraged to sell cheaply and then their homes were re-sold to black families at considerably higher prices.³⁴

The realtors were extremely thorough. One white woman who resisted their scare tactics claimed that eight agents had visited her within several months, urging her to sell. Another long-time resident recalls that realtors chartered buses to carry prospective black home buyers from San Francisco. Some community leaders began to voice the very fears realtors desired to instill. A staff member of the Palo Alto Historical Society who moved to Willow Road in 1953, recollects that she was satisfied to live in an

interracial neighborhood, but her minister told his entire congregation that East Palo Alto would shortly turn all black. Fearing that she and her husband would be the only whites left, they moved away in 1955.³⁵ Occasionally, though, there were minor slip-ups in the policy of selling only to blacks in the older sections east of the highway, and only to whites elsewhere. Future East Palo Alto mayor Barbara Mouton, for instance, was shown houses on the west side of the highway by a novice agent of Lowe Realty. Apparently the agent was promptly thereafter apprised of correct policy, for the next time out Mouton was only shown houses on the east side.³⁶

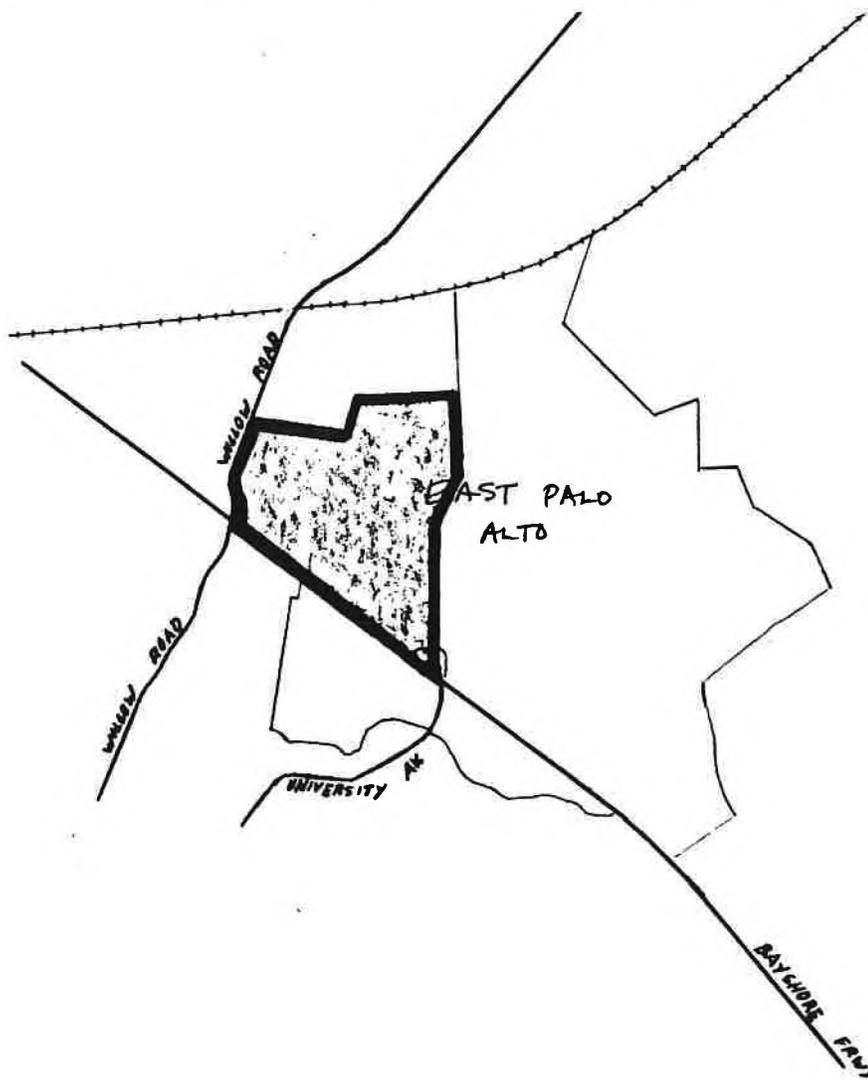
Although realtors' practices precipitated white flight, some families refused to move. Others that were economically able would have doubtless moved anyway. But the fact is that whites did leave East Palo Alto in growing numbers throughout the 1950s. And the areas where blockbusting was undertaken suffered the greatest instability. For example, of the 37 people the Palo Alto City Directory listed on Albern Street in 1948, two remained in 1954 and none in 1958. On Addison Street, 4 of the 19 listed in 1948 were present in 1954, and of these 2 remained in 1958. On Saratoga Avenue, turnover was complete between 1948 and 1954. All three of these streets again experienced approximately 50% turnover between 1954 and 1958.³⁷ At the same time, areas outside of the blockbusting

zone also underwent significant, if less dramatic, change.³⁸ Although both blacks and whites were moving into and out of the zone that would be intensely blockbusted in the early 1950s, by 1954 whites had essentially stopped moving in, leaving the area bordered by the Bayshore, Willow Road, and University Avenue overwhelmingly black by the end of the decade (see map 5).

Despite the demographic chaos, virulent acts of racism were few.³⁹ East Palo Alto suffered none of the horror of dynamite hill in Birmingham, where seven black families' new homes were bombed with impunity in the course of thirteen months. Nor did it endure the bombings and burnings that occurred in Cicero, Levittown, Kansas City, East St. Louis, Cleveland, Los Angeles and other cities during the 1950s when blacks moved into previously all-white neighborhoods.⁴⁰ When racial incidents did break out, liberal organizations were often there to mute them. Perhaps the ugliest housing-related incident took place in 1954 when a hammer was thrown at the home of the Baileys, the first black residents of the Gardens neighborhood. This act complemented a move by the Palo Alto Gardens Improvement Association to buy out the Baileys. Newly swollen with members voicing segregationist sentiments, the organization might have had vigilante potential. The situation, however, was quickly calmed by a veritable phalanx of liberal organizations--the Redwood City and Palo Alto branches of the NAACP, the Palo Alto Fair Play

Map 5

Area of Early Black Settlement in East Palo Alto



Council, the South Palo Alto Democratic Club, and the First Methodist Church of Palo Alto. The homeowners' organization backed down, and the Baileys remained. Over the next five years both blacks and whites moved into the Gardens without incident.⁴¹

There were problems in other sections of East Palo Alto. The Fair Play Council, for example, noted racial tensions in four housing developments during 1956, but claimed that it was able to "allay fears and avert panic selling."⁴² Indeed, such matters almost never got out of hand. Some black residents who settled in East Palo Alto during the 1950s, in fact, indicated there was considerable sharing and cooperation across racial lines. Others indicated that the two races essentially inhabited different worlds, interaction being minimal.⁴³ Whatever the nature of individuals' experience, it is likely that there was little basis for strong interracial cooperation, and, paradoxically, the absence of common circumstances probably limited racist behavior on the part of whites. While the majority of blacks and whites in East Palo Alto held working class jobs, whites were more likely to occupy skilled positions or to be professionals.⁴⁴ Labor market segmentation, with blacks disproportionately in the secondary market, and with employment dispersed throughout the Peninsula, would minimize on-the-job conflict.⁴⁵

More importantly, competition for living space was

reduced by a number of factors. First, whites made more money and did not face discrimination; they therefore could move elsewhere more easily--especially since the cost of housing in surrounding suburbs was not yet dramatically higher than in East Palo Alto.⁴⁶ Second, even in the unlikely case that black settlement did not spur white flight, diminishing services resulting from a declining tax base probably would have done so.⁴⁷ Third, the fact that whites on the east side of the Bayshore were very young, suggests that many families were either upwardly mobile or at the very least, nowhere near the tops of their earning curves, and they may have seen East Palo Alto as a brief stop on the way to a more affluent suburb.⁴⁸ Such a hypothesis gets support from the disproportionate number of white renters in East Palo Alto.⁴⁹ This centrifugal momentum, then, left many whites with a minimal investment in the community. If this undercut potential for "working class unity" on the part of whites, it also minimized the potential for bloody battles over turf.

Essentially a climate of civility accompanied the black settlement of East Palo Alto. At times when civic peace was disturbed, outside groups quickly stepped in to quell unrest. Indeed, it is not surprising that Palo Alto organizations swept down en masse on East Palo Alto in defense of racial justice when the Bailey family was besieged. Palo Alto had a black community that dated to the

beginning of the century, and the city had long maintained a reputation for enlightenment on social issues.⁵⁰ In the early 1940s, Roy Wilkins, then assistant secretary of the NAACP, complimented Palo Alto for its harmonious race relations.⁵¹ And as early as the 1920s and 1930s notable black speakers like William Pickens and Angelo Herndon addressed racially mixed audiences.⁵² Palo Alto residents established a branch of the International Labor Defense in the 1930s, a chapter of the NAACP in 1942, and the Fair Play Council in 1945.⁵³ The last, originally formed to help Japanese-Americans relocate after the War, by 1949 had become increasingly concerned with black civil rights--especially in housing and job discrimination.⁵⁴ In addition, black organizations and Negro history week received excellent media coverage; the NAACP with a membership of more than 500 by 1956, initiated the observance of National Deliverance Day in support of the Montgomery Bus Boycott; and the school system hired the first black principal on the Peninsula.⁵⁵

The litany of racially progressive acts that emanated from Palo Alto could be extended ad infinitum, but as the 1950s wore on, the center of civil rights activity became open housing. The Fair Play Council mixed moral suasion with economic arguments. It warned whites about the economic losses that stem from panic selling, contributing to the preservation of at least one stable, interracial

subdivision in Palo Alto.⁵⁶ In the Palo Alto Times, it listed homes for sale or rent to professional people on a non-discriminatory basis. In doing so it based its appeal on an expanded market, since "listing homes with real estate brokers usually restricts their market potential to members of only one race."⁵⁷ Also active in this issue was the Palo Alto Area Committee for Open Housing which in 1958 took out a nearly full page advertisement in the Palo Alto Times entitled, "A Friendly Welcome." It contained more than 1,500 signatures procured through the churches.⁵⁸ Finally, one major home builder in the area, Edward Eichler, refused to sell on a discriminatory basis and left the Associated Homebuilders, Inc. because it would not go on record against discriminatory selling.⁵⁹

All of this concern with open housing produced few affirmative results. Realtors and developers were largely unmoved by the entreaties of civil rights organizations. A 1958 survey by Franklin Williams, then western regional counsel of the NAACP, found that nineteen of the twenty major realtors in the area practiced racial discrimination.⁶⁰ In addition, the city of Palo Alto itself condemned a number of buildings in the late 1950s that were located in areas in which blacks did live. The NAACP commented that this policy would "intensify the concentration of occupants in those limited sections presently open to minority groups..."⁶¹

While the relatively high cost of housing must have been sufficient to discourage many black families from moving into Palo Alto, middle class status hardly guaranteed access. Even Stanford, which had a reputation for hiring minorities, refused to cover land leases with anti-discrimination clauses in its 940 acre Stanford Hills development.⁶² Ultimately, then, housing practices in Palo Alto contributed to the concentration of blacks in the East Palo Alto area.

Menlo Park also had a liberal reputation concerning social issues, if slightly less elevated than Palo Alto's. It supplied members to both the Palo Alto and East Palo Alto-Menlo Park branches of the NAACP. Its Exchange Club disbanded when the national organization insisted on a whites only policy. It was the first city of the Peninsula to appoint a black official.⁶³ Yet despite both cities' reputations for liberalism, they quietly participated in the underdevelopment of East Palo Alto. Without question, the appropriation of East Palo Alto land by Menlo Park (and by Palo Alto as well during the early 1960s), had no racial motivation, and, in fact, began before there were black residents in the area. But the consequences were to render East Palo Alto less financially viable, a situation that would make black community control problematic in the future and that for the time being encouraged the flight of those who had the means. And because of housing policies that

were prevalent in both cities, means included both money and white skin. Fair housing groups, dominated by whites, limited themselves to hortatory activity. Support for the Montgomery Bus Boycott in no way suggested that liberals on the Peninsula or elsewhere were yet ready to take forceful action. They neither took on offenders with protests or boycotts, nor did they demand low-income housing in Menlo Park, west of the Bayshore or anywhere in Palo Alto.⁶⁴ Job discrimination, too, adversely affected blacks' chances to buy housing that was unrestricted.⁶⁵

Peacekeeping efforts in East Palo Alto by liberal residents of Palo Alto and Menlo Park attested to their belief in racial tolerance. Yet their unwillingness to aggressively oppose discrimination in housing and employment as well as their local governments' appropriation of East Palo Alto land reinforced their privilege. It yielded them preserves of whites-only housing and jobs in addition to lower tax rates, while it helped underdevelop East Palo Alto and engender there a concentrated black population.

For blacks, living in East Palo Alto meant both opportunity and limitation. Housing was cheap and sturdy, jobs were generally available, and the attractiveness of living among people with common traditions was strong.⁶⁶ On the other hand, East Palo Alto's infrastructure was eroding, residents were denied the opportunity to live where they pleased both within East Palo Alto and in surrounding

suburbs, and certain kinds of work--especially clerical and sales--were generally denied them.⁶⁷

Establishing Ravenswood High School

Palo Alto and Menlo Park represented the apex of liberalism on the Peninsula during the 1950s. While the former, standing in a different county from East Palo Alto, only in limited ways could support integrated education for East Palo Altans, the latter--even had it opposed segregated schooling with more vigor than it did housing--would have had to contend with its more conservative neighbors in the Sequoia Union High School District--Woodside, Redwood City, Atherton, Belmont, and San Carlos.⁶⁸ That East Palo Alto residents themselves could have had much influence in determining the racial composition of Ravenswood High School was unlikely given that they would have the support of few other citizens in the Sequoia District, that they never had elected a school board member from East Palo Alto, that the white population there was unstable and a new and growing black citizenry had just begun to create a sense of community.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, East Palo Altans initially did influence the racial makeup of the school, but not in a way that proved decisive. I now turn to the story of the founding of the high school.

Despite the vicissitudes of the community and its seemingly ever-transient population, residents always

expressed an interest in education. The story may be apocryphal, but East Palo Alto supposedly had the first school in the county. Established in 1852, it allegedly was taught by a minister who travelled by boat to hold forth at various one room edifices that dotted the bay lands.⁷⁰ On firmer historical terrain was the establishment of the Ravenswood Elementary School in 1918 on land donated by Runnymede founder Charles Weeks. An article in the Palo Alto Times that announced the building of the school in almost mystical terms, reads as if Weeks himself had penned it: "Children from beautiful garden homes will attend the Ravenswood school, which will be in the midst of a beautiful garden which will be a continual inspiration for the love of nature and the useful."⁷¹ A 1925 advertisement by the Ravenswood Improvement Club linked much of East Palo Alto's appeal with educational opportunity. It touted both the elementary school, with its six classrooms and auditorium that would seat six hundred, and the Sequoia Union High School, a \$500,000 building that was a bus ride away in Redwood City.⁷²

Interest in the Ravenswood Elementary School District, whose boundaries coincided with those of East Palo Alto before the annexations commenced, ran high in the late 1940s and throughout the following decade. The Ravenswood Citizens Advisory Committee formed in 1947 to get higher salaries for teachers and more schools. During the 1950s,

citizens taxed themselves over and over again to accomplish these goals. Between 1951 and 1959 they approved bonds or rate increases in all elections, and they often did so by overwhelming margins.⁷⁹ Community pride in schooling was evident at the secondary level as well, even though East Palo Altans had little clout with the Sequoia Union High School District. As early as 1946, when the Sequoia District had only one school, efforts were made to encourage the district to purchase land for a high school within East Palo Alto.⁷⁴ Instead the district built its second school on the border of Menlo Park and Atherton.

When in 1954 the Sequoia Trustees finally did purchase land for a high school within East Palo Alto, it was only after they met resistance with their plan to build again in Atherton, less than a mile from the recently completed Menlo-Atherton High. The Atherton Civic Interest League and other groups who opposed the project organized to defeat a \$3,200,000 bond in February 1954. The bond did lose, the first such defeat since 1946. It is not clear whether the issue was simply street congestion and the nuisance of having so many students around or matters of deeper social import; however, the issue was not monetary, since the Civic Interest League would support the next, much higher bond for school construction in Woodside and East Palo Alto. In choosing East Palo Alto, the board was doubtless swayed by the adverse response it got to the potential Atherton

site.⁷⁵ Furthermore, its need to relieve overcrowding at Menlo-Atherton High harmonized with East Palo Alto residents' desire to have a school of their own.

In December 1954, a \$6,250,000 bond to build high schools in Woodside and East Palo Alto was defeated by 30 votes, due to opposition in Redwood City, San Carlos, and Belmont, towns that would derive no benefit from the new schools. The East Palo Alto-Belle Haven population supported the bond by a vote of 1,912 to 581, and Menlo Park also favored it in a 1,599 to 678 vote.⁷⁶ It is likely that the strong stand taken by the latter was not merely motivated by simple overcrowding at Menlo-Atherton High. At the time, all high school students from East Palo Alto and Belle Haven went to Menlo-Atherton. As early as 1951 this included a handful of black students that would grow to approximately 100 in 1955 and 225 in 1957, an increase that was predictable given the changing racial demographics of neighborhoods east of the Bayshore.⁷⁷ In addition, virtually all students from East Palo Alto were of lower socio-economic status than the average student from west Menlo Park and Atherton. In the aftermath of the bond defeat, the Menlo Park City Council petitioned the San Mateo County School Redistricting Committee to secede from the Sequoia District. It desired to set up a unified elementary and high school district that would comprise only Atherton and Menlo Park. Mayor Burgess cited benefits for Menlo Park

that included "community operation of its own schools, local responsibility, economy, and better education."⁷⁰ Beneath this efficiency argument lay a socio-economic one that silently encompassed race. The Willows Residents Association of Menlo Park and councilman George Ford, for example, were adamant about excluding East Palo Alto from the proposed unified district. The Palo Alto Times reported that Ford believed East Palo Alto should be excluded because it was "outside the 'community' of Menlo Park and Atherton."⁷¹ Further the Menlo Park City Council's petition included a plea for a "homogeneous community."⁷² Indeed the superintendent of the high school district pointed out the frivolous nature of the council's argument for local control and quality education by revealing that students in the Sequoia District tested in the top 5% of the nation, and that three of the five trustees came from the southern part of the district where both Menlo Park and Atherton were located.⁷³

In lieu of a high school in East Palo Alto, then, a plan to form a separate district emerged that would release Menlo Park families from the Ravenswood Elementary District and would exclude East Palo Alto's students from the schools that students from Menlo Park and Atherton would attend.⁷⁴ The plan, however, was temporarily dropped at the beginning of 1955 in expectation of a favorable outcome to another bond election for the new high schools. When this bond

issue lost in March--once more despite heavy support from the southern part of the district--the plan to secede was resuscitated.²³ Finally in May a smaller bond was approved, allowing construction of both high schools to proceed and quelling the secessionist effort.²⁴

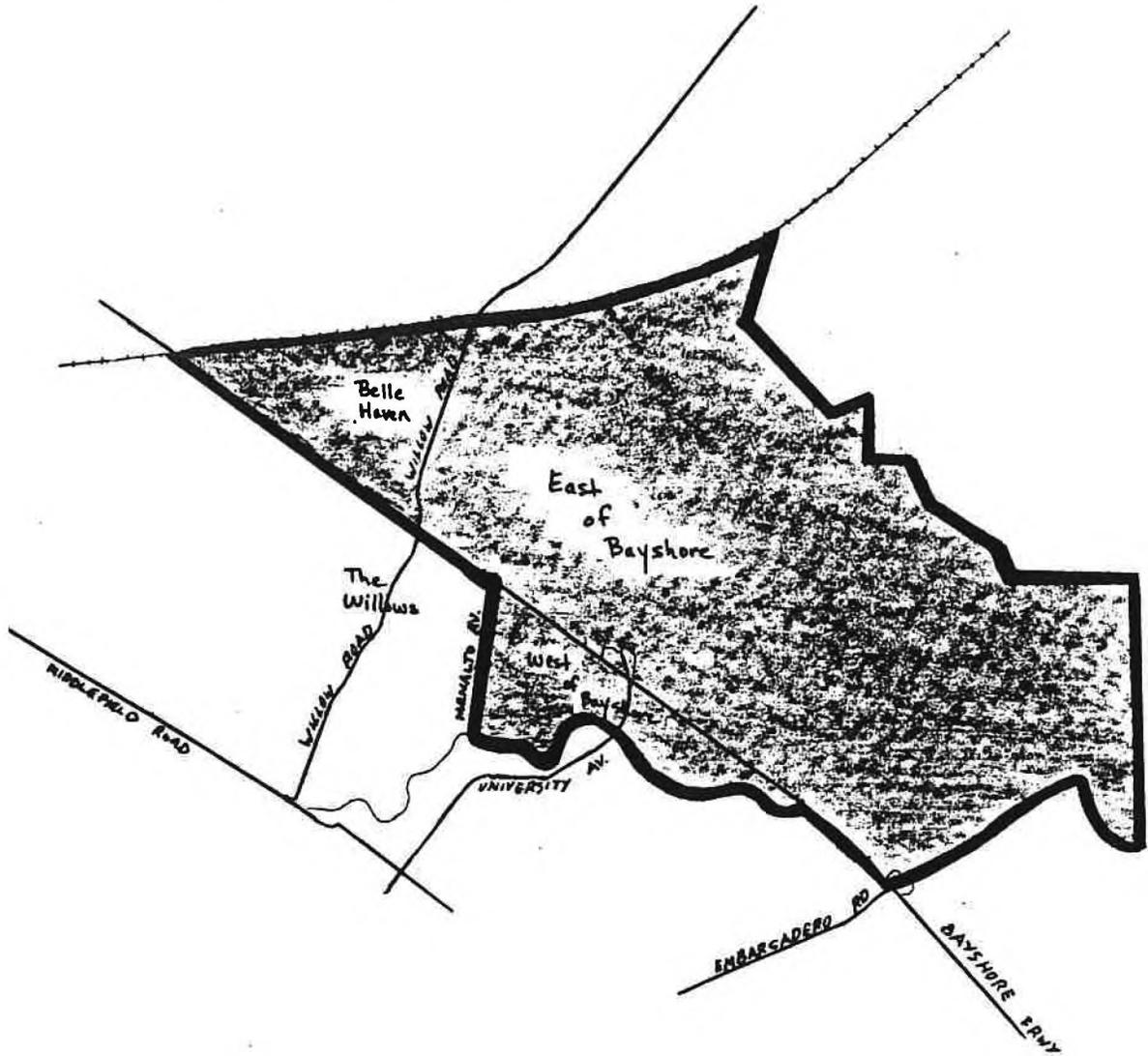
If the Sequoia Trustees originally had intended to create a segregated high school, they first would have opted for a site in East Palo Alto or Belle Haven rather than in Atherton. Certainly no one in East Palo Alto itself articulated such a motive at the time of the final bond election or for more than two years subsequent to it. The site chosen for the building did cause something of a stir which probably had racial implications. But the people most immediately affected were not black school children but Japanese flower growers. The trustees initially wanted a portion of the Kavanaughs' land that had been zoned for a housing subdivision and abutted a totally white neighborhood.²⁵ The Kavanaughs demurred, and a month later, in what the Palo Alto Times labeled "a surprise move," the trustees dropped the uninhabited Kavanaugh site.²⁶ Instead, they condemned twelve residences as well as twenty acres planted in chrysanthemums that were owned by three Japanese growers. The change, testimony to the Kavanaughs' influence, not only forced the growers to relocate, but further depleted the community's tax base. The Times

asserted that it "spelled doom for that area's rich chrysanthemum industry."⁷

The building of a high school in East Palo Alto was a matter of considerable community pride, and residents were slow to voice fears that it might become a reservation for blacks and the economically least advantaged whites of the Sequoia Union District. When the trustees provisionally introduced the attendance boundaries for the new school on February 6, 1957, they solicited written responses. Apparently none came in from East Palo Alto, and the boundaries were adopted unanimously at a subsequent meeting.⁸ Included in the attendance zone were the entire east side of the Bayshore from Haven Avenue in Redwood City to the Palo Alto border, and the west side of East Palo Alto framed by Menalto Avenue and the San Francisquito Creek (see map 6). By encompassing Belle Haven and all of East Palo Alto, such boundaries did segregate by socio-economic status, but they did not do so by race. East of the highway stood the totally white enclave of University Village, and the entire west side of East Palo Alto was white as well.⁹ On the other hand, the boundaries did not quite conform to the board's stated objectives: to minimize busing, to include the entire elementary district within the high school boundaries, and to avoid highway crossways. Actually, Belle Haven residents would soon have easy access to Menlo-Atherton High school because of a pedestrian

Map 6

Proposed Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area, 1957



overpass under construction at Ringwood Drive; outside of mostly black Belle Haven, none of the Menlo Park sections of the Ravenswood Elementary District were placed inside the attendance area of the new high school.¹⁰ It is certainly possible that Menlo Park residents' threats of secession for the Sequoia District led to the exclusion of these neighborhoods.¹¹

Though the new high school would have a majority white enrollment, it would include every black student in East Palo Alto and Menlo Park. It would alter the racial composition of Menlo-Atherton High from around 90% white to 100% white. This situation finally roused protest more than four months after the boundaries had been proposed. With prodding from the NAACP, two board members and Superintendent Rex Turner met with approximately fifty residents who were dissatisfied with the attendance boundaries. Turner laid out more elaborate criteria for the board's decision:

1. Present and future capacities of the schools.
2. Distance to the schools.
3. Reduction of bus travel to the minimum.
4. Avoidance, in so far as possible of crossing major traffic arteries.
5. In so far as possible, keeping children together who attend elementary school (K-6).¹²

Turner added that Ravenswood would have the same course offerings as the new high school in Woodside, and also contended that race did not enter the decision: "No analysis of racial backgrounds of prospective students," he claimed,

"has been made either in the case at hand or for any other Sequoia school."²³

A number of people at the meeting, however, were not convinced it was fortuitous that nearly every black student in the Sequoia Union High School District would attend Ravenswood.²⁴ A seven person Citizens' Committee was formed to request that the trustees re-study the issue. Their sentiments were articulated by Lloyd Ebert. "We might as well face it," he asserted, "this is a problem of segregation. What they've done is a social injustice."²⁵ Indeed, many residents believed the new school would be "stigmatized," that the Bayshore boundary would "freeze the area on the bayside into a suburban ghetto."²⁶

The Citizens' Committee raised the matter of the overpass at Ringwood that would make Belle Haven accessible to Menlo-Atherton. But their fundamental concern was that the trustees take into account the socio-economic status of the students. The trustees, however, agreed to reconsider on the basis of the overpass alone.²⁷ As a result, the Citizens' Committee launched a petition urging that Willow Road be the dividing line between the two high schools. In part it read: "Willow Road, in contrast to Bayshore highway, satisfies the five criteria set forth by the board for determining attendance areas and, in addition, has the important advantage of offering the students of both schools the educational benefits gained from integration, through

better distribution of the students of the district by race and family income."⁹⁹

Willows residents were not slow to respond to such a proposition. During the week before the July 24 meeting of the board, the trustees received 223 letters, all but 5 of which came from people living in the Willows area of Menlo Park who opposed consideration of the Willow Road boundary. They rejected a boundary change that would place them within the attendance zone of the East Palo Alto high school.⁹⁹

At the July 24 Board meeting, publicized by sound trucks and attended by 300 people, the Citizens' Committee presented its petition supporting a Willow Road boundary. It contained an extraordinary 3,669 signatures from adult residents of East Palo Alto and Belle Haven. A letter of support for this boundary also came from Local 560 of the United Auto Workers of Milpitas. And more general statements of support for boundaries that would foster integration came from the Palo Alto Fair Play Council and Local 428 of the Retail Clerks' Union of Santa Clara County and Menlo Park.¹⁰⁰ During the proceedings many residents of the Willows spoke against the petition, typically arguing that their proximity to Menlo-Atherton should be the only consideration in drawing boundaries. Said one, "It is illogical and a waste of the tax money to send children back and forth across a major highway in order to effect a planned integration based on any factor beside [sic]

geographical location."¹⁰¹ Others threatened to flee: "Many people who are financially able to move," it was claimed, "will leave the Willows area if the proposed boundary change is made...."¹⁰²

Announcing that his decision was based solely on the presence of the Ringwood overpass, Superintendent Turner recommended and the board unanimously approved, a compromise that would cut majority black Belle Haven in half along Henderson Drive, leaving the remaining attendance boundaries intact (see map 7). Turner estimated that such a division would make Menlo-Atherton 9-10% black and Ravenswood High 15-16% black.¹⁰³ Trustee Helen Kerwin's report on the entire issue included several reasons for denying the legitimacy of socio-economic factors in drawing boundaries. These included interference in residents' personal lives, the cost of research to monitor socio-economic trends and the cost of increased busing, the harm continual boundary shifts would cause students, and the liability of diminished participation in school affairs for students and parents who could not easily negotiate greater distances between home and school. Kerwin further buttressed the trustees' position by stating that boards of other Bay Area school districts were neither asked nor had considered socio-economic factors as an issue in deciding attendance boundaries. This, apparently, was the consensus expressed by school board members from San Francisco, Oakland,

Hayward, and Richmond at a San Francisco State University workshop. In addition, faculty members at the workshop concurred that socio-economic matters were not the responsibility of the Sequoia District.¹⁰⁴

Although the stated disadvantages of considering socio-economic factors in determining boundaries related more to potential problems in the indefinite future than the current issue, the board was neither required by law nor common practice to offer a compelling argument. Even in Berkeley, the first city in the country to undergo complete desegregation, plans for integration were not considered until the 1960s.¹⁰⁵ And when the NAACP wanted high school boundaries in Richmond that would promote racial and economic integration, in what David Kirp called a "pioneering effort," the liberal board accepted them, but claimed that racial reasons had nothing to do with the decision.¹⁰⁶ That the Sequoia Board felt it had to justify the decision, that it indeed compromised in a way that diminished segregation--albeit temporarily--spoke to the unprecedented organizing drive by Belle Haven and East Palo residents that precipitated the concession.

The board's compromise proved to be politically astute. The Palo Alto Times hailed the "diplomacy and impartiality" of the trustees.¹⁰⁷ The decision mollified residents of the Willows, as well as those securely within the Menlo-Atherton attendance area who did not want to include all of the black

high school students from Belle Haven. It did annoy a number of citizens in the west of Bayshore area, but they composed the least organized interest group. Further, had the board exempted this white section of East Palo Alto from attending a school created to serve East Palo Alto, it would have been much more vulnerable to charges of racial gerrymandering. In addition, the concession to Belle Haven residents made further attempts to organize against the district more difficult. Centrifugal force within the organized group of those who supported the Willow boundary soon tore it apart. After the compromise, the Citizens' Committee reformulated itself as the Ravenswood Civic Council in order to continue to work for boundary changes. But some previous members--especially those from Belle Haven whose children would continue to attend Menlo-Atherton--had no vested interest in further change. Others left the area. And those who remained had disparate interests. Two former members recollect that the Civic Council was a "hodgepodge." According to them, the NAACP, the Klan, and the Communist Party were all represented.¹⁰⁸

Implementation of the Willow Road boundary would have to wait until 1963, when a more organized black community was increasingly taking leadership in civil rights issues, but citizens of East Palo Alto did win the battle over naming the high school. Although their preference for "Ravenswood" was clear, the trustees considered this too

parochial a name and opted for "University High." Many found such a rationale offensive. Affirmed one resident, "Now they tell us Ravenswood is too provincial a name and that a school shouldn't be tied too closely with the community. So they name it after an institution [Stanford University] in another county."¹⁰⁹ The board finally capitulated, accepting "Ravenswood" in January 1958.

Nonetheless, it soon became clear that East Palo Altans' ability to influence more fundamental issues of policy was negligible for the time being. In the May 1958 school board elections they voted their displeasure with incumbents Ferris Miles and David Sears, throwing their support behind Sydell Peterson and Nancy Jewell Cross. Both incumbents beat Cross by more than a 2:1 margin and Peterson by nearly a 4:1 margin. Had voters in Belle Haven and East Palo Alto been overwhelmingly organized and unified, they still would have represented a pool of voters that was dwarfed by a school district in which nearly 70,000 people were registered.¹¹⁰

Unity Dissolved: The Incorporation Election of 1958

In a retrospective analysis of the high school struggle, Mary Madison of the Palo Alto Times remarked that "The high school issue touched off one of the most bitter battles ever fought in East Palo Alto, but the controversy united the area as nothing before had ever done."¹¹¹ This

unity, however, was extremely frail and would break down in the incorporation drive of 1958. At stake was the stability of the community and school alike.

Although race was not an explicit issue in the controversy over incorporation, it did not lurk far beneath the surface. Support for cityhood came largely from the Chamber of Commerce, from blacks, and from whites connected with interracial organizations. Emery Curtis, president of the Menlo Park-East Palo Alto NAACP, summed up their perspective when he declared that incorporation would give the community "a larger voice in local government and instill a greater pride in the community."¹¹² He specifically noted that control over police, zoning, and the condition of streets would follow from incorporation.¹¹³ Petitions circulated in behalf of incorporation also stressed that piecemeal annexations would be prevented.¹¹⁴

The strongest pockets of resistance were the solidly white areas--the entire west of Bayshore section, and University Village and Flood Park Estates on the east. Many residents of the latter neighborhoods belonged to the Committee Against Incorporation which made it clear that it did not want to pay taxes that would improve services in the older sections of East Palo Alto. A fact sheet entitled "It's Time to Wake Up" that was mailed to 3,400 people claimed, "Residents of the older sections live there because of the rural atmosphere...[and] are not alarmed because the

road may be narrow, no sidewalks exist and drainage may not be the best because they know that improvements cost a lot of money."¹¹⁵ A letter to the editor of the Palo Alto Times was more explicit: "Do all the people in Palo Alto Gardens, University Village, and Flood Park want to pay for streets and sidewalks for all the rest of East Palo Alto?"¹¹⁶

Financial considerations also mattered on the west of Bayshore where property values were considerably higher than the east. But in addition to those especially concerned with subsidizing the older, less affluent areas east of Bayshore--areas where blacks were disproportionately represented--a number of residents seemed more concerned with race than money. Angered by the Sequoia Trustees' refusal to allow them to stay within the Menlo-Atherton High School attendance area, they sought annexation to Menlo Park. Earl Beattie, the leader of the annexationists offered this rationale: "Maybe by annexing to Menlo Park we would have a voice in shaping school districts that we want our children to go to and not to have them shunted across the Bayshore. I'm quite furious about that!"¹¹⁷ Although supporters of the status quo on the west of Bayshore were able to prevent wholesale annexation proceedings, a small section of that area did petition to annex.¹¹⁸

Though incalculable, race doubtless played a part in forging anti-incorporationist sentiment, yet the most

decisive influence was simple economics. Virtually all the industrialists in East Palo Alto joined the Kavanaughs, the largest landowners, in opposing incorporation because of the taxes that would accompany it. With the exception of the Kavanaughs, none resided in East Palo Alto so the racial composition of the community little mattered.¹¹⁹ Fear of taxation prompted Ted Wunderlich of McCammon-Wunderlich to claim that his business would leave East Palo Alto if it incorporated.¹²⁰ More importantly, Clarence Kavanaugh formally filed to annex his 100 acre industrial tract to Menlo Park.¹²¹ This act alone convinced many people that East Palo Alto would not have an adequate tax base to run the city.¹²² Though enough signatures for incorporation were gathered, they did not represent sufficient assessed valuation to permit an election, and the matter was dropped in August of 1958.¹²³ That Kavanaugh's move was purely an attempt to thwart incorporation became clear when he tried to rejoin East Palo Alto after the drive to form a city died.¹²⁴

Anticipating Segregation

Two weeks after the incorporation effort failed, Ravenswood High School opened its doors to 650 students, one-third less than had been estimated a year and one-half earlier.¹²⁵ With significant amounts of property about to be withdrawn from East Palo Alto and no safeguards against

further encroachments, with the policies of realtors no more controllable than those of a school board that did not need East Palo Altans' votes, there was little claim the community could make on residents who were able to leave. As whites fled, blacks inherited the residue of their relative powerlessness--a gutted business district and diminished industrial base, unpaved streets and flooding, a county run police department and a county administered planning office, the Bayshore Freeway and the high school boundaries.

Though racial prejudice played a part in this white exodus, and perhaps sometimes a determining part, simple self-interest can adequately account for white flight just as it can account for the blockbusting practices of realtors and the attendance maps of school trustees. And if the dominant ideology in the Mid-Peninsula was one of racial equality, it did not include the understanding that such equality could not be attained without a willingness on the part of the more-than-equal to make sacrifices. Without any brake on the pursuit of personal advantage, Ravenswood High School would rapidly change from one-fifth black to majority black. Not until the late 1960s when there emerged an established, galvanized black community, linked to a national struggle for freedom, would the pendulum for blacks in East Palo Alto significantly swing from determination to self-determination.

1. According to the U. S. Census, East Palo Alto was 72% white and 22% black in 1960--cited in S.W. Swerdlick, "The Life and Death of an Integrated School," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1977), p. 62.
2. Quote is from San Francisco Chronicle, January 8, 1905. No good secondary source exists that treats East Palo Alto during the nineteenth century, and primary sources are unavailable. Several popular books on the history of San Mateo County offer brief histories of East Palo Alto. These include Gilbert Richards, Crossroads: People and Events of the Redwoods of San Mateo County (Woodside, Cal.: Richards Publications, 1973); and Allan Hynding, From Frontier to Suburb: The Story of the San Mateo County Peninsula (Belmont, Cal.: Star Publishing Co., 1982); also, the Palo Alto Times did a useful series on East Palo Alto's past (September 2-9, 1958), but the most widely cited reference on the early history of East Palo Alto is an almost completely undocumented undergraduate paper--Werner Foss, "The History of Ravenswood," (unpublished, unpaginated, San Mateo Junior College, 1942.)
3. See 1907 pamphlet, Ravenswood File of Palo Alto Historical Association (hereafter PAHA); Palo Alto Times (hereafter PAT), June 9, 1910.
4. See advertising brochure, circa. 1917, Weeks Poultry File of PAHA; PAT, May 18, 1922.
5. 1917 brochure; Runnymede was apparently part of the Little Lander movement. See Robert V. Hine, California's Utopian Colonies (San Marino, Cal.: The Huntington Library, 1953), pp. 144-5.
6. See Hine, Utopian Colonies, p. 147; 1917 brochure.
7. PAT, December 14, 1925.
8. See Palo Alto City Directory, 1923-44.
9. PAT, December 10, 1924.
10. PAT, June 7, 1935.
11. See the San Jose News, May 11, 1973.
12. Ravenswood Post, July 2, 1953; PAT, September 8, 1958.

13. Computed from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census Tracts, San Francisco-Oakland, California Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1960 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1962), p. 343 (hereafter cited as 1960 Tracts).

14. Although most people listed in the 1919-1920 Palo Alto Directory were poultrymen, some carpenters, bookkeepers, and teamsters were also listed. Cf. occupations listed in 1958 Palo Alto Directory for Fordham Road, an all-white street.

15. PAT, September 8, 1934.

16. See PAT, August 8, 1946, December 9, 1947; January 2, 1968; and September 5, 1941.

17. Ed Becks, a resident of East Palo Alto since the early 1950s, confirmed this in an interview, April 23, 1983, in Redwood City.

18. Ravenswood Post, May 7, 1953; PAT, November 3, 1956.

19. PAT, January 15, 1949; January 13, 1949.

20. PAT, January 4, 1951; January 10, 1951.

21. PAT, May 5, 1955.

22. PAT, April 8, 1951; November 8, 1951.

23. For a list of various service districts that claimed East Palo Altans' taxes, see PAT, July 9, 1953.

24. PAT, January 23, 1953; February 6, 1954, February 10, 1954.

25. PAT, February 26, 1958; April 29, 1958; May 28, 1958.

26. PAT, August 28, 1947; May 21, 1951; September 4, 1958.

27. PAT, January 11, 1956.

28. By 1958 this included Betty Rose Cleaners, Gregg's Television and Appliance, and the East Palo Alto Bike Shop; these were later joined by the Collins Club and Village Cleaners. A sixth proprietor, Henry Churchill, changed businesses. See PAT, January 11, 1956; Palo Alto Directory, 1958, 1961.

29. For loss of assessed valuation and flooding, see PAT, January 1, 1957; September 21, 1960.

30. Wilson Record, "Willy Stokes at the Golden Gate," The Crisis 56(June 1949), reproduced in Roger Daniels and Spencer C. Olin, Jr., Racism in California: A Reader in the History of Oppression (New York: MacMillan Co., 1972), pp. 267-268.
31. Ibid.
32. The draw of home ownership comes from Barbara Mouton interview, January 28, 1983, in East Palo Alto; that houses could be purchased for \$10,000 was mentioned in interviews with Mouton and Ed Becks; for growth of the black population on the Peninsula, see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Characteristics of the Population, Part 5: California, Census of Population, 1950, Vol. II (Washington D.C., GPO, 1952), p. 5x-164, and 1960 Tracts, p. 15v.
33. "NAACP" (unpub., n.d., anon. essay in the files of the South San Mateo County NAACP), pp. 6-8.
34. For realtors' policies, see PAT, December 2, 1954.
35. Letter to editor in Sequoia Union High School District file of East Palo Alto Library; talk with Henry Alvord, August 13, 1982, in East Palo Alto; talk with Mrs. Wilson, May 5, 1983, in Palo Alto; see also testimony of Ed Becks, Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights (San Francisco and Oakland, May 1-6, 1967), p. 223.
36. Mouton interview.
37. Palo Alto Directory, 1948, 1954, 1958.
38. Ibid.: For example, on that part of Garden St. that is north of Clarke, 15 of 34 people listed in 1948 remained in 1954. On Beech, 14 of 26 listed in 1948 remained in 1954; 7 listed in 1948 remained in 1958; and 19 of 33 listed in 1954 remained in 1958.
39. Although this is true of private individuals, the San Mateo County Sheriffs had a reputation for engaging in gratuitously violent behavior toward blacks--Ed Becks interview.
40. James L. Hecht, Because It Is Right: Integration in Housing (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970), pp. 199, 27.
41. As of 1958 the subdivision was 10% black, PAT, September 9, 1958; see also PAT November 30, 1954; December 3, 1954; December 6, 1954; December 8, 1954; September 8, 1958.

42. Palo Alto Fair Play Council, "Summary of Year's Activities," March 26, 1956 (this and subsequent references to Fair Play Council in files of PAHA unless otherwise noted).

43. The former, for example, comes across in Mouton interview, the latter in Ed Becks interview.

44. This is the perspective of Ed Becks and census data appear to bear him out. The 1960 Tracts, however, elude precise analysis. Hispanics are not distinguished from whites, though the percentage of the former is small (122 of 6,134 in tract 0085, 152 of 3,423 in tract 0083, and no count in tract 0084). In addition, in many categories blacks are not separated from non-whites and they make up only 83% of the non-whites in tract 0085. Finally, the 67 blacks in tract 0083 are not distinguished from whites (see p. 72). The following calculations, then, are meant merely to be suggestive. If anything, they probably understate the status of whites and overstate that of blacks. White males (Spanish surname included) in the civilian labor force who live in tracts 0084-0085 are 51% blue collar workers (including craftsmen/foremen, operatives, service workers, and private household workers), and in tract 0083 they are 59% blue collar. The craft/foreman category alone accounts for 24% of all their jobs in 0084-85 and 30% in 0083. 16% of white males in the labor force are professional/technical workers in 0084-85 and 8% manager/proprietors, as opposed to 14% and 11% respectively in 0083. In contrast, non-white males in tracts 0084-85 are 65% blue collar, craftsmen/foremen making up 10% of all jobs. In addition, they are 7% professional/technical and 8% proprietors. Although few white males are sales workers (about 5%), only 4 non-white males work in sales (.4%). For women, the biggest contrasts are in private household and clerical work. 27% of non-whites are household workers in 0084-85, while 10% of whites do such work in 0084-85 and 6% in 0083. Non white-women are 8% clerical workers in 0084-85, while whites are 35% in 0084-85 and 33% in 0083 (all the above computed from 1960 Tracts, pp. 248, 275).

45. The dispersal thesis is conjectural. For 1960, 2,382 of 5,603 workers in East Palo Alto did not work in the SMSA. Most of them, however, probably worked in Santa Clara County, and it is possible that many East Palo Alto residents of both races congregated in the same plants.

46. According to Harold M. Rose, "In 1960 the median value of housing in the zone of black settlement in East Palo Alto, California, was \$5,400 below the county median, but by 1970 it was \$10,900 below the county median." In Black Suburbanization: Access to Improved Quality of Life or

Maintenance of the Status Quo? (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1976), p. 72.

47. For whites' tendency to move out of neighborhoods when blacks move in, see Arnold Schucter, White Power/Black Freedom: Planning the Future of Urban America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 80.

48. Of the three census tracts that covered East Palo Alto in 1960, residents of the one with only 67 blacks (0083) had a median age of less than 17 years. For the other two tracts, median ages were 26 and 30. See 1960 Tracts, p. 175.

49. In 1960 median family income for non-whites was \$6,060 in tract 0084 and \$5,865 in tract 0085. For nearly all-white 0083, median income was \$7,563--1960 Tracts, pp. 275, 72. Regarding housing in the two tracts where blacks lived in significant numbers, in one (0085), whites occupied 91% of the rental units, but were only 74% of the population; in the other (0084), these figures were 82% and 59% respectively. Computed from 1960 Tracts, pp. 347, 276.

50. One significant exception to this enlightenment was a proposal in 1921 by the Chamber of Commerce to restrict blacks and Asians to a specific area of the city--see PAT January 15, 1921.

51. PAT, November 17, 1942.

52. PAT, November 11, 1920; November 20, 1934.

53. PAT, November 20, 1934; June 12, 1942.

54. For activities of Fair Play Council, see PAT, February 1, 1969; "Quarterly Report of Executive Director," September 27, 1957, p. 4, in Fair Play Council (hereafter FPC) File, PAHA; "Executive Director's Notes for YWCA Meeting," January 16, 1958, FPC File.

55. For publicizing black activities, see, for example, PAT, January 15, 1921; December 21, 1933; February 24, 1934; and December 8, 1938. For Deliverance Day, see The Beanstalk 4 (May 1956); for principal, see PAT, March 30, 1956.

56. PAT, March 12, 1957; January 13, 1960.

57. Fair Play Council, "Quarterly Report," September 27, 1957, p.2.

58. PAT, May 10, 1958.

59. PAT, July 2, 1958. Hecht suggest that Eichler's position on discrimination did not hurt him financially because his houses attracted "unconventional professional people who were not likely to object to a Negro neighbor." Integration in Housing, p. 65.

60. PAT, March 8, 1958.

61. PAT, April 29, 1958.

62. PAT, April 8, 1957.

63. PAT, June 25, 1954; March 6, 1957.

64. Housing discrimination was also extensive in Marin County and Berkeley in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see David L. Kirp, Just Schools: The Idea of Racial Equality in American Education (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 77.

65. "Notes for YWCA Meeting."

66. The non-white male unemployment rate for tract 0084-85 in 1960 was 7.5%, as opposed to 5% for all males in East Palo Alto (computed from 1960 Tracts, pp. 275, 248). Writing in the early 1970s Harold Rose stated that "East Palo Alto can be listed among those communities possessing enhanced employment opportunity, as it is situated in easy proximity to more than one hundred work place locations" ("The All Black Town: Suburban Prototype or Rural Slum?" in Harlan Hahn, ed., People and Politics in Urban Society [Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1972], p. 419). Also, according to Rose, 44% for all non-whites in the U.S. lived in substandard housing in 1960. Though evidence from the 1960 census is thin with respect to non-whites in East Palo Alto, being limited to only one tract and addressing just "Condition and Plumbing," it does suggest a picture quite different from the norm. In tract 0085, of 391 units with non-white household heads, all but 9 were considered sound (Rose, Black Suburbanization, p. 40; 1960 Tracts, p. 403). Finally, regarding the drawing power of cultural bonds, see Curtis Charles Henry, "The Spatial Interaction of Black families in Suburban Cities in the Bay Area: A Study of Black Subsystem Linkage," (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1978), pp. 302-3.

67. "Notes for YWCA Meeting."

68. In the 1960s, the Palo Alto school district knowingly participated in the Sneak-Out Program, initiated by Gertrude Wilks and other East Palo Alto residents who believed their

children were not getting a quality education in Ravenswood High School.

69. One index of the community's youth was the number of black churches it had in 1958. That number was three: Friendly Church of God in Christ dated to 1952 when it met in a home. St. Paul Baptist (later St. John Missionary Baptist) initially met in a garage when it was founded in 1955. The third, Mr. Carmel Baptist, was also founded in the early 1950s; see PAT August 9, 1952; August 16, 1969; January 4, 1958.

70. Foss, "History of Ravenswood."

71. PAT, August 10, 1918.

72. Palo Alto Directory, 1925, p. 238.

73. On March 27, 1953, e.g., a \$489,000 bond was approved in a 1035 to 185 vote. See Record of Special Elections Held in San Mateo County School Districts, 1951-1963 (in San Mateo County File, Cubberley Library, Stanford University), p. 8.

74. PAT, May 17, 1946.

75. See PAT, December 1, 1954; February 18, 1954; February 20, 1954.

76. PAT, December 8, 1954.

77. PAT, December 3, 1957.

78. PAT, January 5, 1955.

79. Ibid.

80. PAT, January 6, 1955. Note, however, that the city council as a whole did not take an official position about excluding East Palo Alto--see PAT, January 5, 1955.

81. PAT, January 6, 1955.

82. Note that two elementary districts operated (and still operate) in Menlo Park. Menlo Park residents living in areas annexed from East Palo Alto at that time remained in the Ravenswood District.

83. PAT, January 7, 1955; March 2, 1955.

84. A bond of \$3,975,000 was approved, see Record of Special Elections, p. 11.
85. PAT, December 14, 1954; December 30, 1954.
86. PAT, January 28, 1955.
87. PAT, February 11, 1955; February 10, 1955.
88. Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.), Vol. 6, February 6, 1957, p. 138; April 17, 1957, p. 154. There were, however, a significant number of letters from people in the Willows area of Menlo Park who wanted to make sure their neighborhood would remain outside the Ravenswood attendance area as established by the provisional boundaries. It is likely that these were choreographed by Menlo Park city official Vaughn Bornet. See Vaughn David Bornet, "Memorandum on the Setting of Boundaries, Sequoia Union High School District," n.d., in Attendance 56-57 File, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Cal. Also see letters, *passim*, Attendance 56-57 File.
89. Gelsomina Becks interview, February 11, 1983, in East Palo Alto and Ed Becks interview; also, 1960 Tracts confirm white areas east of highway, but no tract coincides with the west side.
90. SUHSD min., Vol. 6, April 3, 1957, pp. 151, 150. Some community residents recollect that the overpass had already been completed and that its expressed function was to keep Menlo-Atherton High accessible to students from Belle Haven-G. and Ed Becks interviews.
91. Note that the excluded area included the Willows section, which had been adamant about excluding East Palo Alto from any unification plan.
92. Quote is taken from Helen Kerwin's report on the high school situation, SUHSD min., Vol. 7, July 24, 1957, p. 15; the PAT paraphrases Turner's articulation of these very points--June 12, 1957.
93. PAT, June 12, 1957.
94. Several black students attended Sequoia High School in Redwood City--G. Becks interview.
95. PAT, June 26, 1957.
96. From Kerwin Report, p. 14.

97. SUHSD min., Vol. 6, June 26, 1957, p. 182.
98. PAT, July 22, 1957. Note that the Citizens' Committee was mostly white. Ed Becks recalls that there was perhaps one black leader in addition to himself.
99. SUHSD min., Vol. 7, July 24, 1957, pp. 7, 12.
100. Kerwin Report, p. 13.
101. Ibid., p. 12.
102. Ibid., p. 12; also see p. 13 for additional testimony.
103. SUHSD min., July 24, 1957, p. 7.
104. Kerwin Report, p. 15.
105. Kirp, Just Schools, p. 156.
106. Ibid., p. 121.
107. PAT, July 27, 1957.
108. G. and Ed Becks interviews.
109. PAT, January 1, 1958.
110. PAT, May 21, 1958.
111. PAT, September 5, 1958.
112. For Chamber of Commerce's interest in incorporation, see PAT, January 28, 1958; January 31, 1958; for quote, see PAT, July 24, 1958.
113. PAT, July 24, 1958.
114. PAT, June 24, 1958.
115. PAT, June 12, 1958.
116. PAT, June 21, 1958.
117. PAT, May 8, 1958.
118. PAT, July 24, 1958; February 24, 1958.
119. According to the Palo Alto Directory of 1958, McCammon of McCammon-Wunderlich lived in Los Altos; Robert Bormann of Bormann Steel lived in Belmont; Alex Isenberg of Durant

Insulated Pipe lived in Portola Valley; and Stanley Hiller of Hiller Helicopter lived in Menlo Park.

120. PAT, September 8, 1958.

121. PAT, May 28, 1958.

122. G. Becks interview.

123. PAT, August 19, 1958.

124. G. Becks interview.

125. PAT, January 1, 1957; August 20, 1958.

CHAPTER 2

CONFLICTS OVER DESEGREGATION, 1960-1966

Once established, Ravenswood High School ceased to be a center of public attention until 1962, when a protracted battle began over the racial demographics of what was rapidly becoming a majority black school. The attempts of blacks and white liberals to achieve desegregation met stiff opposition that had both a class and racial character. Even if Ravenswood had not become a black-identified school, its limited course offerings and emerging vocational emphasis were scarcely attractive to whites who saw themselves as having middle class destinies. While class was a factor in whites' opposition to attending Ravenswood, race was the primary reason why conservative whites opposed black attendance in other district schools. In addition, the school board majority did not share integrationists' conviction that school policy should include affirmative measures to redress racial imbalance. It did make concessions to integrationists that were designed to reduce conflict and stay within the boundaries of the law. Yet

these measures did not soothe integrationists who met perceived intransigence with increasingly militant tactics-- from seeking a thoroughly desegregated Ravenswood High School, to pursuing district-wide open enrollment, and finally to supporting closure of the largely black school.

During Ravenswood's first year, racial skirmishes among students occasionally broke out. Fights sometimes erupted at athletic events and in the proximity of campus. The creation of interracial discussion groups in early 1959, however, apparently reduced tensions significantly.¹ The media seemed unconcerned with the problem, and when a major dispute over Ravenswood's attendance boundaries developed in 1962, fear of violence was not vocalized. The only educational matter in East Palo Alto that did receive considerable media notice prior to the boundary dispute had to do with a tutoring program for teenagers housed in the Ravenswood Elementary School District. Edward Becks, a leader in the 1958 incorporation movement and president of the East Menlo Park-East Palo Alto NAACP, organized an NAACP sponsored tutorial program in the elementary schools. John Nichols, president of the PTA at Kavanaugh School, claimed that the program "could become part of the efforts on the part of Communists to subvert the minds of the Negro youth of California."² Apparently Becks had been identified as a Communist at a HUAC hearing. The trustees of the district, however, were unimpressed by the allegation and permitted

the project to continue. Nichols apologized shortly thereafter.³

Battles Over Boundaries

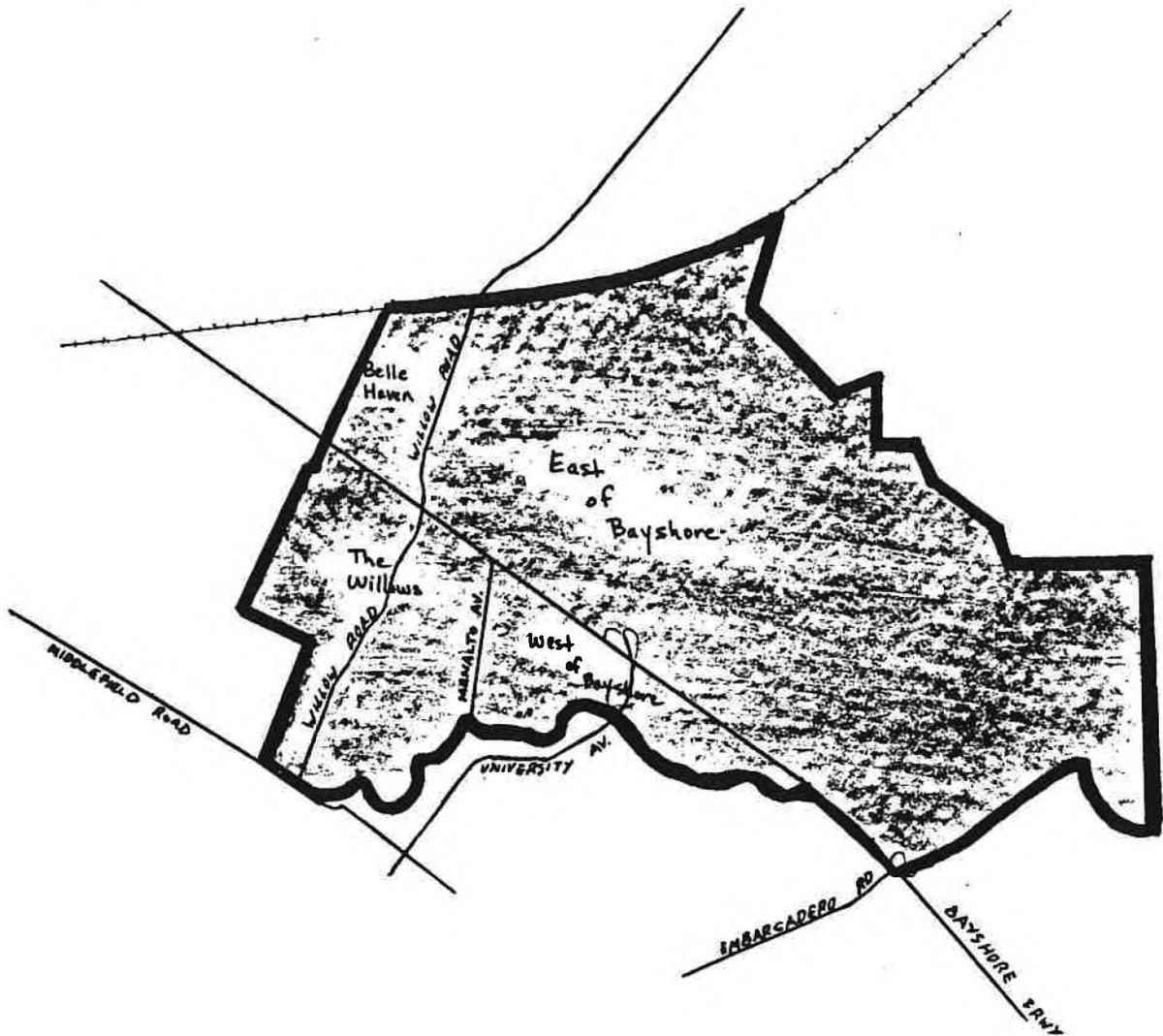
Disputes over the boundaries of the Ravenswood High School attendance area, which dominated local educational politics in 1958, again consumed the high school district in 1962. During the 1961-62 academic year, Ravenswood's enrollment reached only 906, almost 600 lower than capacity.⁴ Recognizing that Ravenswood was underenrolled while the other high schools were overcrowded, the board of trustees sought to increase the size of Ravenswood's attendance area, a move that would bring more white students into the school. At the time Ravenswood encompassed virtually all the black students in the district except those living north of Henderson Avenue. These students went to Menlo-Atherton High School as a concession to activists who fought the initial boundaries. A decision to send these very students back to Ravenswood in order to relieve overcrowding at Menlo-Atherton undoubtedly would have caused a major outcry and could have been interpreted by the State of California as intent to segregate.⁵ Thus, it might have seemed more expedient to transfer white students into Ravenswood. On the other hand, elsewhere it was common to relieve overcrowding by adding relocatable buildings, a practice the trustees avoided.

In any case, the school board planned to incorporate the Willows Area of Menlo Park into the Ravenswood attendance zone, ironically a somewhat larger change than the frustrated goal of the Citizens Committee during the earlier conflict over boundaries. Including neighborhoods on either side of Willow Road, the area was all white and of modest income by Menlo Park standards (see map 8). Residents immediately protested. By the time of the board meeting of April 25, 1962, Superintendent Turner had received 133 letters opposing the change. At that meeting, all but one of 36 speakers resided in Menlo Park or Redwood City, and the dominant complaint was inferior curricular opportunities at Ravenswood. Though a convenient way of masking antipathy to racial integration, the charge had merit. Turner admitted that certain courses like Italian and Russian were not offered, but only because low enrollment at the school prohibited some classes.⁶

Slow to make a decision, the board gave those who opposed the boundary change ample time to marshal evidence about the weak education offered at Ravenswood. The Willows Residents Association pointed out that Ravenswood had a 9.9% dropout rate in 1960-61 as opposed to 3.7% in Menlo-Atherton and 2.7% in Woodside.⁷ In addition, it contended that Ravenswood had five times the number of remedial classes as Menlo-Atherton, that Ravenswood offered only one advanced math class enrolling eight students as opposed to three at

Map 8

1963 Ravenswood H.S. Boundaries Including the Willows Area



Menlo-Atherton enrolling 75 students, and that Ravenswood held only one section of second year algebra, which met at the same time as both French 2, 3, and 4 and German 2, 3 and 4. Menlo-Atherton, on the other hand, had three sections of advanced algebra and Woodside had five. The Willows group further disclosed that there was only one section of chemistry, none of physics, and that "enrichment courses offered at the other two schools but not at Ravenswood are world literature, language and thought, developmental reading and composition."¹⁰ Superintendent Turner did not dispute these findings. He merely reiterated his statement of April, pointing out that lack of courses was due to low enrollment.⁹

Turner had meanwhile invited input from district residents on framing alternative plans to the boundary changes initially proposed by the board. One proposal made by the Willows Residents Association and supported by the NAACP called for expanding the school's capacity to 2,000, thus guaranteeing a large white majority in the school.¹⁰ This was precisely the original plan for Ravenswood and nearly \$450,000 remained unexpended for enlarging it. In early 1960, however, the board decided that such an expansion, given the low enrollments at Ravenswood, was unnecessary.¹¹ The drawing of attendance boundaries to match a 2,000 student capacity for the school in 1958 would have resulted in a low black percentage of students at

Ravenswood and might have put an end to the desegregation controversies that wracked the district until the late 1970s. By 1963, however, such an action would have been more difficult. Ravenswood had already been labeled by many whites as an inferior school and East Palo Alto, by now 35% black, might not have appealed to many suburban whites as a destination for the school busses that would carry their children. Even the Willows Residents Association, which had proposed enlarging the attendance area to 2,000, did not seem very committed to the idea. It also recommended the creation of a new high school that would leave untouched the extant boundaries at Ravenswood, freeing Willow residents from the obligation of attending it.¹²

In March of 1963 the board reached a decision. Pointing to a lack of agreement among advisory committees on how best to adjudicate the boundaries, the board adopted changes that, according to Superintendent Turner, required the fewest transfers of all the plans under discussion.¹³ In a compromise that pitted the two integrationist members of the board against the majority, only the Willows Area, encompassing those white Menlo Park residents of modest means, was added to the Ravenswood attendance boundaries. According to one of the conservative trustees, Ferris Miles, "The Board cannot set boundaries to balance social or racial groups."¹⁴ The board majority also rejected an amendment proposed by liberals to send more black students to Menlo-

Atherton High School. In explaining her negative vote, Trustee Kerwin was more politic than Miles. "Certainly," she stated, "the Board would like to equalize the racial balance, but the Board cannot divorce itself from the fact that schools have a limited capacity."¹⁵ She could not support the amendment if there was no plan to relieve overcrowding at Menlo-Atherton. Kerwin, however, failed to mention that a more significant boundary change would have increased racial balance and reduced overcrowding at Menlo-Atherton.¹⁶

The boundary change was expected to transfer 239 students from Menlo-Atherton to Ravenswood, reducing the black population of the latter from 45% to 33%. But the decision incited a protest by affected whites that Kerwin estimated at 600, an augury that many whites would refuse to allow their children to transfer. According to Kerwin, "A threat of recall was raised"¹⁷ by dissatisfied whites, and she seemed miffed that "this protest occurred despite the fact that the public had been invited to attend the board's study sessions on the problem and the reasons for the rejection of alternative solutions to the problem were carefully explained to the public."¹⁸

Throughout the 14 months of deliberations on boundaries most East Palo Alto residents generally remained bystanders. After a decision was made, however, they voted their displeasure by strongly supporting new school board

candidates over two conservative incumbents in the April election. This gesture was to no avail, as the challengers were defeated.¹⁹

To soften resistance among those to be transferred to Ravenswood in the fall, and perhaps to preempt claims by integrationists that the high school was unequal, President Kerwin tendered a statement attesting to the disproportionate resources going into Ravenswood High School. She noted that Ravenswood always had a greater allotment for supplies and equipment than any other school in the district, and it also has enjoyed smaller classes.²⁰ She further pointed out that since the boundary change, the board had generated policies that would be "an additional challenge to the academically able."²¹ Foremost among these was exempting the school from the student/teacher ratios for the rest of the district. Thus Ravenswood would have as many courses as the larger schools, and challenging classes like Advanced Standing English and Latin would be offered.²² She concluded by referring to a comment by the chairman of the Western College Association Accreditation team who, according to Kerwin, said "that only in one other school in the state had he seen such a close rapport between teachers and students."²³

Kerwin's remarks were copied and mailed to all students transferring to Ravenswood, as well as to all incoming freshman and the Ravenswood faculty. The document would

have little effect, however. Six weeks before the new school term, an interracial group called the Ravenswood Attendance Area Committee charged that "Board policy, recently and historically, has adversely discriminated against the residents of the Ravenswood attendance area and has created a condition of de facto segregation."²⁴ The group held that the new boundary would further increase the percentage of blacks at Ravenswood because of racial changes in the area. It argued for the boundary change--previously supported as an amendment by Trustees Price and Sears--that would send students to Menlo-Atherton High from the all black area between Henderson Avenue and Willow Road. The Ravenswood Attendance Area Committee asked the board to reopen the case. The NAACP and CORE also sought boundary changes and demonstrated against de facto segregation.²⁵ The board's response was that it would not know whether whites were moving out of the Willows area until school was underway, and, in any event, it would wait at least a year before addressing the issue again. Overall, the board felt that it had taken a position against segregation through its actions. Trustee Sears, however, wanted to make a more explicit statement. He moved that the board make a policy statement in opposition to de facto segregation. No second was forthcoming.²⁶

Just before school opened in the fall of 1963, Thomas Sanders, chair of the joint education committee of the NAACP

and CORE, predicted that blacks would constitute 45% of Ravenswood students and that enrollment would remain under capacity. He urged a boundary change once more, but did not anticipate any picketing in behalf of that goal.²⁷ Sanders, it turned out, underestimated the black percentage, which was announced as 49 shortly after the new term commenced.²⁸ As expected by those who opposed the boundary changes, half the students from the Willows failed to show up at Ravenswood. Some had moved; others transferred to private schools.²⁹ Though less affluent than many other Menlo Park citizens, residents of the Willows were sufficiently privileged to circumvent the board's effort to send them to a low status high school. Not only did they shun a school that housed an increasing number of black students, as the effects of blockbusting tipped the racial composition of East Palo Alto from white to black, but also they shrank from a curriculum weak in college preparatory courses.

On September 18, the board reversed its position on de facto segregation, condemning it in a unanimously adopted "Statement on Racial Segregation in the Public Schools." In part the statement held that the board "is opposed to segregation in the public schools in any form, be it racial, socio-economic, political, or religious and will take such practical steps as appear feasible...to ensure equal educational opportunity according to the needs of individual students..."³⁰ Toward that end the board agreed to petition

the County Board of Supervisors to establish a human relations commission that would "assist in eliminating barriers to employment, housing and education generally, and to aid in integrating Negro citizens into the socio-economic mainstream of San Mateo County's society."³¹

While the failure of the boundary change to promote integration at Ravenswood made the board's statement timely, the board was unwilling to take strenuous action to relieve de facto segregation. According to the school board minutes, Kenneth Washington of the NAACP argued that the board's declaration was "all very commendable, but the problem is urgent and improvement will result only by changing the attendance area boundaries."³² Of the four trustees asked whether they would support a further boundary change, none assented.³³ It is doubtful that the board's statement opposing de facto segregation did much to soften dissent, but perhaps that was not the board's main purpose. Beginning in 1962, the State Board of Education formulated positions against segregation, and perhaps the Sequoia Board, in the face of a rapidly segregating district, was merely affirming its sincerity to comply.³⁴

Toward Open Enrollment

Despite the low-key protests of traditional civil rights groups to date, several black East Palo Alto parents, anticipating the politics of more militant direct action,

attempted in 1963 to enroll their children in Woodside High School. The students were turned away perfunctorily. One of the parents was Gertrude Wilks, who would soon lead a successful "sneak out" movement and would later create an alternative school system in East Palo Alto. Another was Barbara Mouton, also an important educational activist throughout the 1960s and ultimately East Palo Alto's first official mayor. While this initial attempt to thwart the policies of the school board was unsuccessful, it did get public attention, in part because of Wilks' claim that she received hostile calls, "one threatening Birmingham-style retaliation."³⁵

Pressure on the school board to act more affirmatively on the Ravenswood situation continued to come from black civil rights groups. In March of 1964 local chapters of the NAACP and CORE joined in a suit filed against the board in Superior Court. Charging de facto segregation, their attorney argued, "It is the duty of the school board to consider race as a factor in drawing boundaries."³⁶

Superintendent Turner responded that the attendance boundaries were "the best possible under the circumstances," and that complete desegregation would require "serious gerrymandering."³⁷ Others had argued correctly, however, that complicated boundary changes were unnecessary. Significantly enlarging the attendance zone for Ravenswood and allowing it to expand to full capacity would make the

school predominantly white. But this would mean large scale busing of affluent whites into East Palo Alto, a policy that not only would meet considerable resistance, but also had no precedent. In addition, blacks were decreasingly likely to accept such a solution. For them too, Ravenswood had become marked as an inferior school. The attempt to enroll black students at Woodside intimated this as did a desire of plaintiffs in the suit that the board adopt an open enrollment plan. For both whites and blacks obligatory attendance at Ravenswood had become problematic.

Even though an open enrollment plan would put the burden of busing on blacks rather than whites, the school board was not prepared to entertain any busing to promote desegregation. The board's leader, Helen Kerwin, was recognized on the state level as an ardent antagonist of busing, and probably spoke for the majority when she labeled civil rights advocates extremists who supported "discriminatory practices to combat discrimination."³² In addition, an editorial in the Palo Alto Times supported the stand pat policy of the board by taking the position that there was no need "to force integration" since the boundaries "are honestly drawn with no intent to segregate the races."³³ While the suit against the board would be quietly dropped in November of 1964, the issue of segregation could not be dismissed so easily.

Unwilling to compromise with civil rights activists on the racial mix at Ravenswood, Sequoia officials continued to emphasize changes meant to guarantee quality education at the high school. In a Palo Alto Times article entitled "Stop Making Us a Scapegoat, Ravenswood Principal Asks," Malcolm Taylor called for improvements that included further lowering the student/teacher ratio, training counselors to work with disadvantaged students, and developing closer student-teacher relationships. An additional proposal betrayed Taylor's sense of his students' occupational destinations. He called for "a step-up of the vocational education program, particularly in industrial arts and food service."⁴⁰

Taylor's reforms did little to console Ravenswood parents. One hundred attended a September 1964 Ravenswood PTA meeting where attacks on the quality of education at the school dominated the first half of the proceedings.⁴¹ The following month a black group called Concerned Citizens for East Palo Alto asked the board to find solutions to a number of problems with the Ravenswood curriculum as well as with the lack of employment of minority personnel. Wilks and Mouton were among those who signed the request. Although the minutes of that board meeting indicate that the group was satisfied with the explanations they received, it continued to press its case. Several months later, after changing its name to the Committee of the Poor, it

successfully urged the board to hire a liaison between the East Palo Alto community and Ravenswood High School.⁴²

Some changes in the curriculum, like the introduction of physics during 1964-65, strengthened the academic program at Ravenswood.⁴³ Much curricular change, however, focused on building up vocational programs, a thrust unlikely to raise the pitiful numbers of Ravenswood students who were going on to college.⁴⁴ In 1963 42% of Ravenswood seniors planned to go to junior college and only 12% to a four year college. In contrast, the corresponding numbers for Woodside High were 35% and 43%. By 1968 6% of 1963 Ravenswood graduates had completed junior college and 10% had finished a four year institution, as opposed to 7% and 36% at Woodside.⁴⁵ And for 1964 graduates of Ravenswood, 24% were in junior colleges and only 3% in four year colleges a year following high school completion.⁴⁶ Although black residents would continue to support improved conditions at Ravenswood, for the next two and one half years efforts to escape the high school would accelerate.

A Recommendation to Close Ravenswood

Early in 1964 the board of trustees created an advisory committee charged with recommending how to end segregation in the Sequoia Union High School District. The suit filed by CORE and the NAACP, pronouncements opposing segregation by the State Board of Education, and the 1963 decision in

Jackson v. Pasadena City School District requiring "that school boards take steps, insofar as reasonably feasible, to alleviate racial imbalance in schools regardless of its cause"⁴⁷ created the environment for such an undertaking. The Sequoia District Citizens Advisory Committee on Ethnic Problems was chaired by Elliott Levinthal, a Stanford physics professor and resident of Atherton. Its report was submitted to the trustees in February of 1965. The document underscored the high degree of segregation in the district. It reported that three schools had no black students; two schools were approximately 5% black; Ravenswood was 60% black.⁴⁸ Convinced that desegregation was a moral imperative, committee members unanimously recommended that Ravenswood be phased out over a period of several years. "By refusing to tolerate a segregated school population," the report held, "the high schools provide community and students, by example, a model of moral, psychological and educational integrity. The ending of a segregated high school district may also reduce or reverse the trend toward greater residential segregation."⁴⁹ The recommendation won a favorable response from East Palo Alto residents. Six hundred and fifty people attended a Ravenswood PTA meeting to deliberate on the recommendation. While there were some advocates of keeping Ravenswood open and equally distributing black students between Ravenswood and Menlo-

Atherton, the executive committee of the PTA came out in favor of the phase out.⁸⁰

The board of trustees had been indecisive about the Willows boundary change, and it was slow to act on this matter as well. There is a strong likelihood that school board elections scheduled for April encouraged the three incumbents to mute controversy. While they all verbalized support for desegregation, none initially would take a stand on the proposed phase out of Ravenswood. In contrast, all three challengers forcefully opposed the plan.⁸¹ By election time, two of the three incumbents had committed themselves: David Sears supported the closing of Ravenswood and Ferris Miles opposed it. Richard Price remained undeclared. Sears and Price lost to Dean Watkins of Portola Valley and Ernest Nelson of San Carlos. Miles held on to his seat. In an uncharacteristic oversight, the Palo Alto Times failed to note election returns by area. The NAACP had endorsed the three incumbents, and strong support for them probably came from East Palo Alto. The challengers in all likelihood received the most votes in the northern part of the district. Be that as it may, one defeated incumbent, Richard Price, summed up the meaning of the election when he stated, "The concept of a neighborhood high school, which is a segregated high school won out tonight."⁸²

Once the election returns were in, the failure of the phase out appeared to be a foregone conclusion. Before the

matter could be put to rest, however, a ritualized discussion of finances took place. The minutes of a May 31 study session said that, "It was made clear by individuals on the Board that financial limitations would have to be a guiding influence on whatever plan was finally approved."⁵³ Levinthal's Citizens Advisory Committee estimated the cost of the three year process as \$250,000. The estimate of administrative staff, on the other hand, was 1.2 million dollars.⁵⁴ The Advisory Committee also held that phasing out Ravenswood would have long term financial advantages. The district would save the approximately \$150 extra per student currently being spent at Ravenswood, plus it could use \$250,000 of bond money reserved for Ravenswood, and there were numerous potential purchasers for the Ravenswood site.⁵⁵

The Palo Alto Times, always supportive of the school board through the middle 1960s, accepted the correctness of the administration's cost estimates which suggested that a phase out would be prohibitively expensive.⁵⁶ Others, however, challenged a status quo approach regardless of the cost.⁵⁷ At bottom, cost was not the issue. Said the Palo Alto Times, "Miles and the two new trustees voted into office in April were all candidates who had expressly opposed closing Ravenswood High School. In choosing them, the electorate said as clearly as it could that it opposed

any phasing out. To follow the course Dr. Levinthal urged Monday would be [sic] flout the will of the voters."⁸⁸

While the editorial was somewhat pious, it correctly pointed out that the board had a mandate to abandon the phase out. Still the board delayed, giving opposing sides more opportunities to organize and intensify dissension over the matter. In early July, the board decided that there was too much to study in the Advisory Committee's report for it to take action by the time school would start in September.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Wilson Riles of the State Board of Education offered succor to those who opposed the phase out. He pointed out that the Civil Rights Act would not provide funds to districts to eliminate de facto segregation. He advised that Ravenswood be turned into a "status school" that would attract students from everywhere and would "offset the effects of the image of de facto segregation."⁹⁰ Encouraged by Riles' remarks, Trustee Watkins asserted at a board meeting that a phase out "would deprive students of educational opportunities and would be a disservice to children and parents," while a more restrained Trustee Nelson simply opposed pushing people around.⁹¹

At this same meeting, students submitted petitions in favor of the phase out.⁹² Later in July, Superintendent George Chaffey, who had recently replaced Rex Turner upon his retirement, received more petitions from students advocating the phase out.⁹³ Then in August picketing took

place at the courthouse in Redwood City. Leaders of the demonstration included Jack Owens of CORE, Moses Thomas of the NAACP, and Gertrude Wilks of the Committee of the Poor.⁶⁴

The issue of the phase out once more dominated the September 1 meeting of the trustees. In an obvious attempt to mollify supporters of the Advisory Committee report, Malcolm Taylor, principal of Ravenswood, offered a now familiar litany of special advantages accruing to the high school. These included lower student/teacher and student/counselor ratios than the district average, higher expenditures for supplies, compensatory education, a tutoring program conducted by Stanford students, and planned expansion of vocational programs. Superintendent Chaffey pointed out that the cost of such resources meant a total expenditure per student of \$898.73 at Ravenswood, about \$100 more than the average.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, students favoring the phase out submitted petitions totalling 618 signatures.⁶⁶ While the school board did not record the school affiliations of previous petitioners, it did so on this one. Sixty-four of the signatures came from Ravenswood, where support for the phase out was widespread.⁶⁷ At all-white San Carlos and Woodside High Schools, 101 and 309 signed petitions.⁶⁸ While this evidence is admittedly thin, it does intimate a willingness on the part of many students to support a program of

integration opposed by the majority of parents in the district.

Two weeks later Superintendent Chaffey addressed an overflow crowd in the chambers of the school board. Though no decision on the phase out was announced, Chaffey offered a plan to accommodate the opposing factions. He called for a voluntary transfer program that would allow one student to leave Ravenswood for each willing to enter it from other schools in the district. He also supported compensatory education programs at all schools, increased faculty desegregation, and a district-wide program in human relations. Furthermore, following Wilson Riles' advice, he promised to make a "concentrated effort to change the image of Ravenswood High."⁶⁹ Yet his prescription for this was vague: The District "through innovation and other means [would] seek to improve the program of education and thereby improve the image of Ravenswood High School."⁷⁰

While the Palo Alto Times favored the Chaffey plan, many who attended the board meeting were less taken with it. There was significant support for the phase out and most likely broad agreement with the perception of Elliott Levinthal of the Advisory Committee that Chaffey's voluntary plan to promote integration had no hope of succeeding. There was simply no incentive for individual white students to transfer to rapidly segregating Ravenswood High. Gertrude Wilks, now head of Mothers for Equal Education, was

beginning to concede to the inevitable; consequently she argued for more programming at Ravenswood, including work experience projects and cultural assemblies, while she demanded that college bound students be allowed to transfer elsewhere.⁷¹

Yet the furor over the phase out continued into early October. The Palo Alto Times reported that many students liked the voluntary transfer plan, but didn't think it would work because of parental pressure.⁷² Others drew out the implications of the board's indecisiveness. In a letter to the editor of the Times, for instance, Mrs. J.G. Goerer claimed that "Each month's delay in announcing a realistic solution for the Ravenswood problem results in the departure of more discouraged families, among them the most successful Negroes as well as the white people."⁷³

The matter finally came to a head at the October 6 board meeting. Sensing the importance of the proceedings, reporters from the San Jose Mercury and San Francisco Examiner joined representatives of local papers to write about the denouement of one of the most advanced plans for desegregation in the country. Among the speakers, Gertrude Wilks took a final stab at supporting the phase out. The school board minutes stated that she "presented a strong plea for phasing out Ravenswood so that Negro children can experience real education and real opportunities."⁷⁴ In addition, Jack Marks, president of the Sequoia Federation of

Teachers, according to the minutes, claimed that "citizens were more concerned about the cost of phasing out Ravenswood High School than they are about the education of the students."⁷⁵ Both the Sequoia Federation of Teachers and the Sequoia District Teachers Association supported the phase out, as did a letter signed by 44 faculty members of Ravenswood High.⁷⁶

The Palo Alto Times reported that two-thirds of the speakers supported the phase out.⁷⁷ One of the exceptions was Robert Page of Redwood City. He carried a petition signed by 600 people who "urge neighborhood schools for neighborhood children and oppose strongly bus transportation from Ravenswood to other schools."⁷⁸ Then attacking a plan no one had proposed, he reportedly "advised the Board that they will use all legal means to oppose the involuntary mass transportation from their neighborhood schools to other areas."⁷⁹

The trustees finally put the issue to rest. The Advisory Committee on Ethnic Problems was released, and the board dropped consideration of the plan until adequate space could be found for all the students in the district and until a plan for Ravenswood could be developed that would "protect the taxpayer's investment in the facility."⁸⁰ Almost superfluously, President Kerwin added that meeting such conditions in the future did not mean that the board would act affirmatively on the Advisory Committee's

recommendation: "This action is not to be construed as a commitment to institute the recommended proposal at some future date, but rather an acknowledgment that conditions may develop which would not preclude its consideration."¹

Superintendent Chaffey, however, tried to soften the blow to supporters of the phase out by proposing to allow 100 students to transfer out of Ravenswood; thereafter, students could only leave if there were volunteers to go to Ravenswood. Black students were to be given priority in departing Ravenswood.² The board agreed to consider this policy. It also agreed to "do all in its power to develop innovations in programs and teaching methods at Ravenswood High School which will attract students throughout the district," and to "provide compensatory education programs for disadvantaged students in all the district's schools."³

The trustees took up Chaffey's transfer plan in January of 1966. It did not fare well. Helen Kerwin argued that it violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Watkins agreed. He held that transferring 100 black students out of Ravenswood was practicing racial discrimination. "I am reluctant to go along with this," he asserted. "I believe that our non-Negro students have some rights, too."⁴ In the same vein, Trustee John A. Cost considered Chaffey's plan "an invasion of (white) minority rights."⁵ While Miles and Nelson supported Chaffey's plan, the majority altered it so that no racial restriction would determine which students would

leave Ravenswood. The result was that 57 of 132 students who applied for transfer were white. Chaffey pointed out that carrying out the plan would contribute to greater racial imbalance at Ravenswood.⁹⁶ At the beginning of March, after only fourteen white students offered to transfer to Ravenswood, Trustees Cost, Miles, and Kerwin squashed the plan altogether.

The failure of the trustees to take any unequivocal action meant to correct racial imbalance provoked considerable dissatisfaction.⁹⁷ Teachers and liberals throughout the district as well as civil rights activists and many black residents of East Palo Alto had supported a bold, conscious policy of school desegregation, but these groups never banded together to the extent of the diverse constituencies that fought the initial Ravenswood boundaries, and they lacked a precedent for such a dramatic policy to overturn segregation. The board, meanwhile, had acquired a mandate to drop consideration of the phase out proposal when Nelson and Watkins had won election on that precise plank back in 1965. Whether it acted indecisively from the pressure of desegregation advocates or from incompetence is impossible to disentangle. It does seem likely that school officials had not yet become accustomed to the activist stance of a public interfering with what long had been considered the prerogatives of educational experts.⁹⁸ Be that as it may, the board opened a Pandora's

box of dissension by acting indecisively not only around the 1963 boundary change upon which it split 3-2, but also around the phase-out proposal which it unanimously opposed.

Equality of Opportunity: A Limited Perspective

Through the first half of the 1960s the trustees of the Sequoia District missed major opportunities to achieve desegregation. Decisive action to expand the attendance boundaries of the high school in 1963 or to close the high school in 1965 could have shaped public opinion, winning sufficient assent or consent to actualize a pathbreaking approach to eradicating racial isolation in the schools. The board, however, was not then philosophically disposed toward dramatic action to correct racial imbalance. It did not hold itself responsible for the rapid segregation of Ravenswood High School and, with the exception of creating programs of compensatory education, it carefully avoided policies that were race-identified. This posture was clearly articulated in comments by individual trustees who rejected Chaffey's plan to send 100 black students out of Ravenswood, saying the plan discriminated against whites. It was also clear in the trustees' position on equality of educational opportunity discussed in its progress report for 1965-66.

The report spoke of the district's effort to join in the national effort "toward providing new opportunities for

everyone: gifted, average, or somehow handicapped."⁸⁹ With the exception of remedial classes, all of the courses listed under "NEW PROGRAMS TO EQUALIZE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY" were vocational. It included Project Feast, initiated at Ravenswood, which was described as "a pilot course using an interdisciplinary, team teaching approach to the Food Education and Service Technologies," and it listed programs for training secretaries and service station attendants.⁹⁰ Tucked away in a corner of a page filled mostly with tables on expenditures and enrollments, stood the heading "UNSOLVED PROBLEMS IN THE EQUALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY." It listed four items: "Ethnic imbalance; overcrowding; understaffing in the libraries, district office, and other departments; limited new and improved teaching materials and equipment."⁹¹ The report then went on to assert that "Providing equal educational opportunity along with improving educational practice is an increasingly expensive effort..."⁹²

While pursuit of equality of educational opportunity, according to officials, required increased educational expenditures, its meaning was much the same as that maintained by administrative progressives since early in the century: each student was to receive an education appropriate to his or her presumed life destiny.⁹³ Thus, the vocational emphasis of the curriculum at Ravenswood, reflecting not so much the racial character as the class

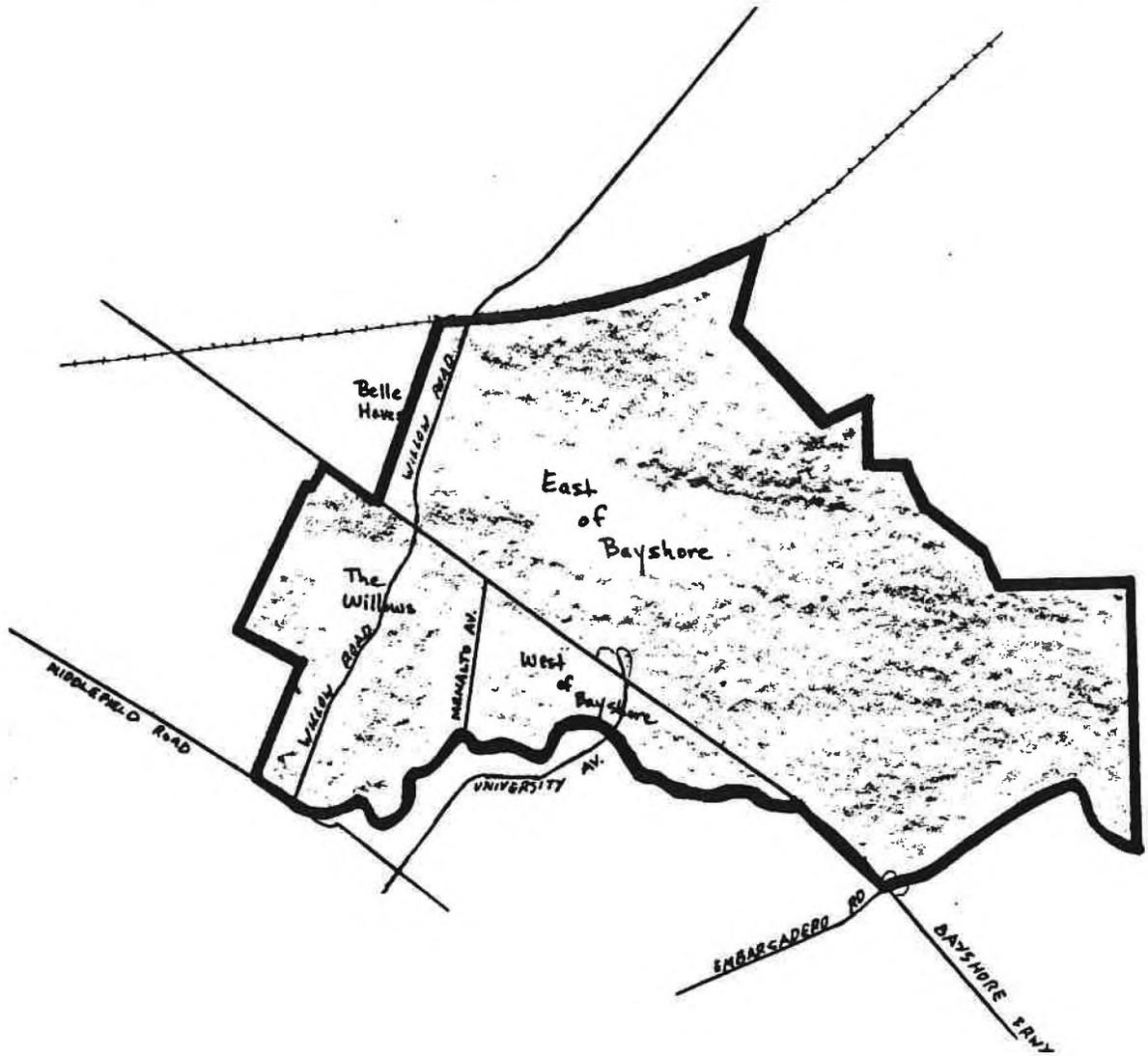
character of the school, appeared just to school leaders. A more generous definition of equal opportunity that preordained no limits on people's life chances, to say nothing of equality of results, a concept first broached by Lyndon Johnson in 1965,⁹⁴ had not yet become part of the moral lexicon of most Sequoia officials. As a result, they failed to recognize what blacks and liberal whites perceived as racial justice and their unwillingness to act more aggressively unwittingly galvanized protest in East Palo Alto, just as a similar lack of affirmative action across the United States excited increasingly vigorous dissent.

While the Sequoia Trustees failed to reverse growing racial segregation in Ravenswood High School, it would be a mistake to label them segregationists.⁹⁵ Their conception of justice demanded impartiality. Race-conscious policy struck them as a violation of equal rights for all. This was not mere hypocrisy. In 1964 the board made it clear that it opposed race-conscious policies favoring whites as well as blacks. By a 4-1 vote it supported a fair housing act that the majority of district voters opposed.⁹⁶ Also, with regard to schools, the board did not succumb to conservative whites' pressure to uphold the status quo. It did act to redress imbalance, not as racial policy per se, but, under strenuous prodding from integrationists and under the watchful eye of the State Board of Education, as a way of reducing overcrowding. In 1963, the board could have

done additional building rather than expand a boundary meant to increase the white population of Ravenswood. And in 1965, amid the furor over closing Ravenswood and before the defeated liberal board members left office, the trustees quietly changed an attendance boundary that sent 126 black students and 6 whites from Ravenswood to Menlo-Atherton (see map 9). It rejected an alternative that would have maintained the status quo by building three relocatable classrooms at Ravenswood.⁹⁷ According to the Palo Alto Times, "The boundary change was effected ostensibly as an economy move, but Trustee David R. Sears characterized it as 'a step in the right direction in slowing or reversing the effects of segregation.'"⁹⁸ In future years, the trustees would make bolder efforts to desegregate schools in the district, but not before many blacks, frustrated by the slow pace of change, would develop a different agenda altogether.

Map 9

1965 Boundaries for Ravenswood H.S. Attendance Area



1. Malcolm Taylor, "History of Ravenswood," mimeograph, January 4, 1971, p. 3, in District Attorney File, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Calif. (hereafter SUHSD).
2. PAT, November 9, 1961
3. PAT, November 10 and November 15, 1961.
4. Sequoia District Newsletter, Vol. 6, March, 1962.
5. The California Department of Education was one of only several in the country to take an interest in desegregation during the early 1960s--David J. Kirby, T. Robert Harris, and Robert L. Crain, Political Strategies in Northern School Desegregation (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1973), p. 26.
6. Trustees, Minutes of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.), Vol. 8, April 25, 1962, pp. 423-5.
7. PAT, December 1, 1962.
8. Ibid. Information on the less-than-equal educational environment of Ravenswood was apparently based on a report by Sam J. Chaney of the Sequoia District, "Annual Report on Child Welfare and Attendance, 1960-61." See the Willow Residents Association to Board of Trustees, November 26, 1962 in SUHSD min., Volume 9, between pp. 34 and 35.
9. PAT, December 1, 1962. See also Sequoia Union High school District, "Attendance Boundary Proposals," December 17, 1962, pp. 4-5 in SUHSD min., Vol. 9, between pp. 34 and 35.
10. PAT, December 1, 1962. For support by Ed Becks, President of the South San Mateo County NAACP, see SUHSD min., Vol. 9, December 20, 1962, p. 34.
11. Sequoia District Newsletter, Vol. 6, November, 1961; PAT, January 23, 1960.
12. PAT, December 1, 1962.
13. SUHSD min., Vol. 9, March 20, 1963, p. 59.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 60.

16. On the other hand, the board might have avoided changing boundaries altogether. Speaking before the state board of education, Kerwin pointed out that the trustees could have succumbed to white resistance by pursuing funds for additional facilities rather than by changing attendance boundaries, but believed that "a better educational program could be provided to meet the needs of all students if the underpopulated school had a larger and more diverse student body." (Ulysses Van Spiva, "An Exploratory Analysis of the California State Board of Education and Its Policies Toward Racial Isolation in the Public Schools" [Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1971], pp. 208, 209) This is certainly what the state board wanted to hear. The Sequoia Board was careful to adhere to the guidelines of the state board on taking ethnic composition into account when making attendance decisions, and this was an important reason for the boundary change. See SUHSD, "Attendance Boundary Proposals," December 17, 1962, p. 6 (between pp. 34 and 35, SUHSD min., Vol. 9, December 20, 1962).

17. Ibid., p. 209.

18. Ibid.

19. PAT, April 17, 1963.

20. SUHSD min., Vol. 9, June 4, 1963, pp. 79, 80.

21. Ibid., p. 80.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 83.

24. PAT, July 16, 1963.

25. Taylor, "History of Ravenswood," p. 4.

26. SUHSD min., Vol. 9, July 17, 1963, p. 99 and August 1963, p. 105.

27. PAT, September 9, 1963.

28. PAT, September 21, 1963.

29. PAT, September 13, 1963.

30. SUHSD min., Vol. 9, September 18, 1963, p. 116.

31. Ibid., p. 115.

32. Ibid., p. 117.

33. Ibid.

34. A section of the California Administrative Code approved in October 1962--title 5, sec. 2010--required school districts to "exert all effort to avoid and eliminate segregation of children on account of race or color." And Section 2011, developed in February 1963, held that school attendance patterns must consider ethnic factors--See Irving Hendrick, "Public Policy Toward the Education of Non-White Minority Group Children in California, 1849-1970," NIE Project No. NE-G-00-3-0082, March 1975, p. 227.

35. PAT, September 23, 1963; Mouton, however, disputes Wilks' story. She believes it was a fabrication designed to seek publicity. Mouton pointed out that she did not receive threats. (Interview of January 28, 1983, in East Palo Alto)

36. PAT, March 6, 1964.

37. PAT, March 7, 1964.

38. Spiva, "An Exploratory Analysis," p. 139; PAT, May 12, 1964.

39. PAT, May 16, 1964.

40. PAT, May 16, 1964; along with the creation of Ravenswood's first physics class, the program in food preparation was enlarged during the 1964-65 year--PAT, August 8, 1964.

41. PAT, September 4, 1964.

42. SUHSD Minutes, Vol. 10, October 7, 1964, p. 18 and January 20, 1965, p. 40. Other members of the organization included civic activists Ida Berk and Reverend James Branch.

43. Physics apparently was not offered at Ravenswood annually. It was not listed in the curriculum for 1966, for instance, though it was listed the following year. See Sequoia High School District, "Enrollment Statistics and Average Class Size Studies," September 30, 1966 and September 29, 1967, in Shelton File, SUHSD.

44. In 1966, for example, only Ravenswood and Sequoia had Food Services Laboratory, Food Service English, and Radio Electronics; only Ravenswood had Power Mechanics and Advanced Radio Electronics. In 1967, only Ravenswood and Sequoia had Food Service English. Only Ravenswood had Power

Mechanics, Power Mechanics English, Power Mechanics Math,
and Advanced Radio--Ibid.

45. "Brief Summary of College Entrance Data," March 7,
1972, in Shelton File, SUHSD.

46. Ibid., March 10, 1972.

47. Cited in Sequoia District Citizens Advisory Committee
on Ethnic Problems, "A Recommendation to End Segregation in
the Sequoia Union High School District," February 11, 1965,
p. 4.

48. Ibid., p. 1.

49. Ibid., p. 3.

50. PAT, March 5, 1965.

51. PAT, April 2, 1965.

52. PAT, April 21, 1965.

53. SUHSD min., Vol. 10, May 31, 1965, p. 84.

54. PAT, June 1, 1965.

55. "Recommendation to End Segregation," pp. 15, 12-14.

56. PAT, June 2, 1965.

57. See, for example, letter to editor of Palo Alto Times,
July 20, 1965.

58. PAT, June 2, 1965.

59. SUHSD min., Vol. 10, July 6, 1965, p. 60.

60. Ibid., p. 94.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. SUHSD min., Vol. 10, July 21, 1965, p. 101.

64. PAT, August 16, 1965.

65. SUHSD min., Vol. 10, September 1, 1965, p. 113.

66. Ibid., p. 114.

67. At Ravenswood's commencement, the four speakers (two blacks, one white, and one Asian), according to the Redwood City Tribune, "emotionally and eloquently argued for the closing of the school." Yet typical school loyalty also existed, and it was accompanied by the belief that Ravenswood was something special. Senior Class President Ellesseo Sumaraga spoke to Ravenswood's superiority, claiming the best faculty in the district and an environment that nurtured racial understanding. He said, "We are integrated...not only in race, but in thought and behavior. Since we are a true mixture of many races, we have an advantage over the other district schools." Redwood City Tribune, June 14, 1965.

68. SUHSD min., September 1, 1965, p. 114.

69. SUHSD min., Vol. 10, September 15, 1965, p. 121.

70. Ibid.

71. PAT, September 17, 1965; September 16, 1965.

72. PAT, October 1, 1965.

73. Ibid.

74. SUHSD min., October 6, 1965, p. 129.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., pp. 129, 127.

77. PAT, October 7, 1965.

78. SUHSD min., October 6, 1965, p. 129.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid., p. 130.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., p. 127.

83. PAT, October 7, 1965.

84. PAT, January 16, 1966.

85. Ibid.

86. PAT February 17, 1966.

87. See, for example, PAT, March 17, 1966.
88. David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1982). It is curious that the board authorized a committee so unrestrained that it created serious problems for the district. It was also odd that the board majority publicly conflicted with Chaffey over his transfer program.
89. Sequoia Union High School District, "New Dimensions of Equal Educational Opportunity," 1965-1966 Annual Progress Report, n.d., n.p.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. See, for instance, 1908 statement of Boston school superintendent in Marvin Lazerson, Origin of the Urban School: Public Education in Massachusetts, 1870-1915 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 189.
94. Borrowing from the work of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Johnson talked about equality of results in a speech at Howard University, June 4, 1965. See Diane Ravitch, The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 161.
95. The board was not homogeneous in outlook, however. At one extreme was the aggressively integrationist David Sears, who, along with Richard Price, lost a reelection bid. At the other extreme were John Cost and Dean Watkins who were particularly concerned with white rights. My sense is that Helen Kerwin, the board's leader, represented its central tendency.
96. See SUHSD min., Vol. 9, June 3, 1964, p. 194.
97. It also rejected a plan to send fewer blacks and more whites to Menlo-Atherton, see SUHSD, minutes of special meeting, May 12, 1965, p. 76.
98. PAT, May 13, 1965.

CHAPTER 3

BLACK POWER IN THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT, PART I: THE RISE OF SELF-ACTIVITY

Until the middle 1960s blacks were not a major independent force in the educational politics of the Sequoia District. They primarily had supported the Willows Residents Association proposal for desegregation through boundary changes and the Citizens Advisory Committee Recommendation for phasing out Ravenswood High. By the late 1960s, in contrast, blacks had become the prime movers in educational change. Frustration with the unwillingness of the Sequoia District to integrate its schools engendered a variety of efforts to acquire quality education. These ranged from setting up private educational ventures to pursuing interdistrict desegregation. Key to understanding the rise of black power in educational issues is the forging of a militant black community which nourished proactive, confrontational tactics. This chapter will first turn to the matter of community development and will then look at black efforts to transform education.

Forging Black Power

Pushed by a declining economic base, block busting, an inferior and increasingly black high school, whites left East Palo Alto en masse during the 1960s. Constituting 71% of the population in 1960, whites had declined to 27% in 1970. One index of white flight was the decline of membership in East Palo Alto churches. In 1964 there were three predominantly white churches. All-white Our Savior Lutheran had suffered a decline from 400 to 200 members since the end of the 1950s. Over the same period the membership of the Community Church dropped from 400 to 150. And the largest church, St. Francis of Assisi, underwent significant attrition as well.

In the latter two churches, new black membership to some extent compensated for white flight. Membership at St. Francis was reportedly 30% black, and the Community Church had five black families. Reverend Baker, the pastor of the Community Church, made it clear that only a certain class of blacks was welcome. "We want to become integrated," he asserted, "but we want to keep the climate on a high cultural level. We don't want to resort to emotional-type services."¹ By the middle 1960s, there were a number of black churches, the largest of which, St. John Baptist, had 800 members.²

At the same time blacks were developing an institutional foundation in East Palo Alto through the

creation of largely separate churches, a panoply of black organizations sprang up that demanded greater participation in decisions that affected their lives in the community. In 1964, for instance, the white, Presbyterian-run Community House of San Mateo County sought \$201,100 from the Office of Economic Opportunity to provide services in East Palo Alto. Protests immediately erupted. Gertrude Wilks' group, the Committee of the Poor, petitioned the Department of Labor to reject the proposal due to lack of black input. Similarly, Harry Bremond of the NAACP complained, "People in the affected community were not included in determining what is best for us."³ He held that many members of the Community House had never been to East Palo Alto.⁴ Finally, a CORE leader denounced the colonial mentality of the group.⁵

In addition to demanding influence on the kinds of social services that were brought into the community, blacks sought ways of making the police force accountable. Attached to the San Mateo County sheriff's office, the police who patrolled East Palo Alto did not live in the community nor did the sheriff's job depend on the will of East Palo Alto voters. Relations were often strained between the white deputies and black residents of East Palo Alto. The latter rejected police interference in their domestic affairs, were especially antagonized by the deployment of dogs, and objected to surveillance of civil rights activities.⁶ Comparisons were made between the

police in East Palo Alto and nefarious southern counterparts Bull Connor and Jim Clark. Sheriff Earl Whitmore, on his part, did little to assuage discontent. He decried complaints of harassment, vowing, "We're going to protect these people, whether they want it or not."⁷

An effort in the early 1960s to advise the police on matters of concern to local residents was supplanted in 1967 by an organization dedicated to self-policing. While East Palo Alto never became as "hot" as many riot torn cities, there were disturbances, usually taking the form of minor property damage.⁸ An organization called the Black Community Relations Association responded by creating "cool it squads." The Palo Alto Times introduced this group to its readers with the less than flattering headline "'Young Vigilantes' cool off hoodlums." But they were neither vigilantes nor agents of the sheriff's department. Founded by James Cartwright, a Rhodes Scholar, the group wanted to stop police harassment and create self-rule for East Palo Alto. Cartwright wished to quell aggressive, non-productive behavior of black youth, but warned that this might not be possible in the future given that blacks were legitimately "tired of getting shot down like dogs all over this country."⁹

Sheriff Whitmore had doubts about working with the Black Community Relations Association. He stated, "If squad members listen to those who try to convince them that all

police are their enemies under all circumstances, cooperation with the groups will have to end."¹⁰ Whitmore did not have to fret about this long, however. That fall Cartwright returned to Oxford and the "cool it squads" disappeared. The squads, in fact, had posed no fundamental threat to the police. Their strategy was to preempt police violence by calming unrest rather than by addressing police accountability.¹¹ Yet the matter of police brutality was a vivid issue that would not die.¹² Hostility to the police was so strong that any activity on their part was suspect. In the fall of 1967, for instance, a number of black organizations demanded that the trustees of the Ravenswood Elementary School District reject a plan that would permit deputies to administer physical fitness tests to students. In December, the program was cancelled.¹³ Concern with the police, increasingly seen as an army of occupation, gave impetus to a burgeoning interest in community control.¹⁴

In 1966, community activists, including Harry Bremond, Edward Becks, and Robert Hoover, organized to make East Palo Alto a city.¹⁵ Unlike the incorporation movement in the late 1950s, however, this effort never built sufficient momentum for an election. But it did win a concession from the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors. In 1967, the board approved the creation of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council. It would differ from its predecessor, the Alto Park Community Council, by receiving county funding and

sanction from the board of supervisors.¹⁶ Yet like the prior organization, it would have no decision-making authority--often leaving residents and members frustrated by their ultimate powerlessness.¹⁷

Despite the absence of authentic community control, East Palo Alto was gaining a reputation as a center of black power. Over the Labor Day weekend in 1967, a Black Action Conference was held at Ravenswood High School. Closed to whites, invited guests included separatist Ron Karenga, comedian and social critic Dick Gregory, jazz singer John Hendricks, and Black Panther leader Huey Newton. Organized by Ida Berk of East Palo Alto, the conference drew 1500 participants and gave rise to an all-black organization called the San Mateo County Black Action Council. Its program included setting up black businesses and getting more blacks into office.¹⁸ The following year a second Black Action Conference featured Karenga, Stokely Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver. By this time East Palo Alto was widely known as Nairobi, and the event had acquired national stature.¹⁹

Despite these activities, it is difficult to get an ideological fix on residents of East Palo Alto in the late 1960s. Speakers at the above conferences represented different political perspectives. Karenga and Carmichael were categorical separatists, while Cleaver and Newton belonged to a militant, blacks only organization--the Black

Panther Party--that sought alliances with white groups. Contrary to the revolutionary goals of the speakers, the planks of the Black Action Council were distinctly reformist. Furthermore, differences between organizations in East Palo Alto defied easy ideological explanations. Given their lack of substantive disagreement on matters that affected the community, it may well be that the dividing line was the degree of aggressiveness with which gains were pursued rather than ideological stance. Matters of who controlled what turf were probably at stake also. Whatever the case, tensions between moderates and militants were obvious, but disparities in their goals were not.

The first election for the East Palo Alto Municipal Council resulted in victory for four moderate blacks and one white woman. This outcome was denounced by Gertrude Wilks and others. She held that white voters west of the Bayshore made the difference.²⁰ For their part, the new council members excoriated militants who, they claimed, had taken over the programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity and tolerated no opposition.²¹ Still, it remains unclear how the Municipal Council differed on matters of practice from more militant groups. It supported an autonomous police station, staffed in part by black officers; it advocated incorporation of East Palo Alto; and it even favored changing the name of East Palo Alto to Nairobi.

The name change had two fundamental advantages: it

disassociated East Palo Alto from Palo Alto, and it associated the community with the African roots of what was now a majority of its population.²² In order to assess interest in the change, 20% of East Palo Alto's adults were surveyed. Sixty-eight percent of these supported Nairobi, prompting the municipal council to stamp its approval on the new name.²³ In the election, however, the proposed name change lost by nearly a 3-1 margin. While whites had petitioned against the change and probably opposed it in great numbers, the 3,052 to 1,262 outcome suggested that many blacks too were uncomfortable with the new name.²⁴

The election did not spell the end of black nationalism or even the name Nairobi, however. In 1969, a third Black Action Conference was held, a "Buy Black Week" took place, and a college devoted primarily to black development was founded. The institution was named Nairobi. In fact, the name was widely used and nationally identified with the community despite the election defeat. According to the Palo Alto Times, "More than a dozen businesses, schools, a shopping center and a cultural center have officially adopted the name along with residents who are using it as a mailing address on personal checks, business cards and letters."²⁵

By the middle of the 1960s, community activism in East Palo Alto became largely the province of blacks. Few whites intended to stay in the community, and consequently they

felt little stake in its future. While working class whites at one time had allied with blacks to fight emergent segregation at Ravenswood High School, this tenuous unity had collapsed.

By the late 1960s, opposition to black demands had become the *raison d'etre* of sporadic white attempts to organize. In the white west-of-Bayshore area, for example, the Suburban Park Association was organized to fight the name change of East Palo Alto to Nairobi.²⁶ Whites also organized against incipient black control of the Ravenswood Elementary School District. The selection of a black superintendent, the election of two militant trustees, the demands of Mothers for Equal Education (previously the Committee of the Poor) that included the addition of Afro-American studies to the curriculum and community involvement on the part of teachers, spurred the formation of the Committee of Concerned Parents. The group adopted a resolution that stated, "We do not condone unbecoming public utterances by the school trustees at board meetings; nor do we condone the support of movements having nothing to do with education."²⁷ It also excoriated Mothers For Equal Education "as disruptive of the educational process."²⁸ It is likely that their work contributed to the election of a white elementary school trustee in May of 1968, just as it is likely that the Suburban Park Association helped defeat the name change; whites, however, were mostly "birds of

passage" who only occasionally mustered the strength to fight black agendas they found particularly obnoxious.

While most whites fled, some were drawn to East Palo Alto during the 1960s, in part by the availability of relatively inexpensive housing, but also by the political activity burgeoning. These included a few members of the Peace and Freedom Party who supported black demands for community control.²⁹ Others, including the commune that put out the anti-war publication Resist, maintained agendas that seemed strangely remote from the immediate interests of the community. Given East Palo Altans' concern with the repressive nature of the police, a statement by David Harris, a nationally known member of the commune, was startlingly incongruous, symptomatic of a mind set far removed from local issues. While in Santa Rita prison, Harris wrote, "Oddly enough, and far from the minds of judges and presidents and dentists and machine operators that built a world with such a notion as prison, in its essentialities, it [prison] is a liberation."³⁰ While the civil rights movement of the early 1960s probably inspired Harris's posture, race and class differences now apparently informed incompatible politics of liberation.

By the end of the 1960s, East Palo Alto had become a nationally renowned center of black power. It had put on three major black conferences plus a Nat Turner Days celebration; it had identified itself with an African city;

it housed diverse black-led organizations ranging from the NAACP to Friends of SNCC; and blacks dominated membership in the East Palo Alto Municipal Council as well as held leadership positions on other boards that affected life in East Palo Alto.³¹ Sixty-one percent black in 1970--with some twenty churches, two black-edited newspapers, social organizations like The Strivers, long-standing service organizations like the Community Activities Committee, and a welter of political action groups--East Palo Alto had come of age. After 120 years it finally had become an established community, and though far from affluent, it was better off than some. According to urban geographer Harold Rose, blacks received a median of ten years of education at the end of the 1960s, but black East Palo Altans received approximately 11.5 years.³² Rose also found that East Palo Alto was one of five black towns "developing a modernizing occupational structure."³³ This meant "growing strength of the professional category and female clericals."³⁴

Economic frailty and lack of political power nonetheless shaped life in East Palo Alto. Rose's assessment of the community's occupational structure, for instance, did not quite square with the results of a 1972 survey of East Palo Alto that Rose cites. While 15% of the labor force was clerical, only 3% was professional, and laborers composed 68% of the work force.³⁵ Certainly, East

Palo Altans when compared to other residents of San Mateo County had little access to good jobs, had little capital to start their own businesses, and had little taxable property to provide public services. The latter was the result of the various annexations of industrial property initiated by surrounding neighbors--activities that continued into the early 1960s.⁹⁶ (See maps 2-4, Chapter 1.)

In addition to the economic vulnerability of East Palo Alto, real political power eluded residents. Because the area remained unincorporated, the Municipal Council was never more than an advisory body whose concerns were subject to the whim of county officials. The police department also was county controlled and throughout the 1960s remained unresponsive to the community. Rising militance of various ideological hues was a response to the indignities of daily life and to lack of access to conventional ways of exercising leverage.

While black East Palo Altans were not homogeneous in style and tactics and while there sometimes was bickering, common conditions of subordination as well as common traditions created a high level of unity that, against a national landscape of unrest and exhortation for change, inspired bold demands and a politics of confrontation. Given the difficulty of assaulting inequities in the labor market or even the prerogatives of the county government, the community focused on its schools--particularly

Ravenswood High School. Here was an institution affecting residents' life chances that the community had some opportunity to influence.

The failure of the movement to phase out Ravenswood High School did not dampen activism around the schools. Much to the contrary, efforts to make schools responsive quickened in the middle and late 1960s, involving not only parents and community leaders but students themselves. Reflecting on the failure of the Sequoia Trustees to close Ravenswood in accord with the recommendations of the Levinthal Report, 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.⁹⁷ The tactical nature of this goal was most clear in the late 1960s, as leaders in the community urged both community control and desegregation, depending on the context. Indeed, unequal power gave rise to a multiplicity of tactics--from desegregation within Sequoia to desegregation through a sneak-out program into Palo Alto schools, from setting up private schools to pursuing control within public schools. Often the same activists, responding to barriers to full equality, pursued several of these vehicles.

Phase Out's Last Stand

In early 1966, Gertrude Wilks began the first black-run educational venture in East Palo Alto. Enrolling more than 100 students, the East Palo Alto Day School held classes two evenings a week and Saturday mornings. Fed up with the quality of public instruction, Wilks had begun the process of creating an alternative by supplementing the meager fare provided by the elementary schools.³⁹ Wilks, however, had not given up on the idea of phasing out Ravenswood High School. In early September of 1966 she threatened a boycott and initiated demonstrations in support of closing Ravenswood.⁴⁰ Later that month the board of trustees faced the anger of Wilks and other East Palo Alto residents. Wilks informed the board that she would never again beseech its members to end segregation, but, according to the minutes, she would "resort to other measures to make the Board listen and to take action on segregation."⁴¹ Wilks received support from Reverend James Branch who declared, "We in East Palo Alto consider the Sequoia school board our enemies." He went on to state, "We are through talking to the school board. Since they have chosen to ignore us, they will pay for it."⁴¹

One form of payment under consideration was a student walkout at Ravenswood, a possibility raised by community activist Robert Hoover.⁴² Another was legal action. Jim Dunlap, the white chairperson of the Alto Park Community

Council, joined in criticizing Ravenswood High. Maintaining that the education at Ravenswood was inferior, he threatened a suit to deprive the Sequoia District of funds.⁴³ Trustee Kerwin responded to these concerns by reiterating that a phase out was financially impossible "because of the lack of facilities in other schools and the failure of the bond elections to provide funds for additional schools."⁴⁴

There ensued a battle in the pages of the Palo Alto Times over the quality of education at Ravenswood. An editorial denounced the threatened boycott and strongly defended the high school. "The continued attacks on the quality of the Ravenswood faculty and administration," it stated, "are a slur on a well-qualified group of adults who are doing an excellent job."⁴⁵ The editorial also claimed that graduates did well in college and that the "basic purpose" of boycotters "is to create turmoil."⁴⁶ A flurry of letters followed. John Partanen's praise of the high school brought a rebuke from Jim Dunlap, who pointed out that there were 104 National Merit semi-finalists in the Midpeninsula, but not one came from Ravenswood.⁴⁷ Other letters came in that tried to support the school by mentioning the names of students from Ravenswood who had graduated from college.⁴⁸

Teachers also joined the fray. Many were less than impressed with what was going on at the high school. At a meeting of 500 teachers, eight from Ravenswood excoriated

the school that was now 67% black. Yet rather than focusing on delivery of instruction or limited course offerings, they blamed the students. They held that the performance of students in academic subjects was much lower than at other district schools in part because they had a weak sense of reality. "Most students," it was argued, "have false concepts of the world in general. Many of them regard police, whites and welfare workers as their enemy."⁴⁹ Other explanations included low self-esteem, lack of space to study at home, uneducated parents, and absenteeism. The result, they claimed, was "fantastic" teacher turnover. They stated that 20 new teachers had to be hired for the 1966-67 year and four had already resigned.⁵⁰ Turnover indeed was a problem. Several months later district registrar Hal Zindell noted the high number of requests to leave Ravenswood: "One-third to 40 percent have requested not to be there or will not be there next year."⁵¹ If teachers and community activists traced the problem to different sources, they agreed on the need for desegregation. In March of 1967 the Negotiating Council of district teachers announced its desire that segregation be ended within three years and requested that the board reconsider its policy statement on de facto segregation.⁵² While the board remained perfectly satisfied with its policy statement, it considered commissioning a study of educational parks that would create racial balance.⁵³

Sneak Out

One way East Palo Alto residents dealt with the seemingly intractable problem of growing segregation was to send students out of the Sequoia District. The "Sneak Out," as it was called, began in 1963 when four students, three of whom had attended Ravenswood, stayed with families in Portola Valley during the week so they could go to school there.²⁴ Paradoxically, as concern with community control grew so did the Sneak Out, which, like so many educational initiatives from East Palo Alto, was led by Gertrude Wilks. By December of 1966 some 50 black students, according to the Palo Alto Times, had transferred to schools in Palo Alto, again by staying with families there during the week. Sequoia officials were less than happy with this and claimed a "brain drain" was taking place. Referring to the negative climate at Ravenswood, Helen Kerwin stated, "Pulling out the best students is just contributing to that problem."²⁵ Wilks, however, was adamant about the necessity of the Sneak Out. "Our position is clear," she stated. "We are trying to save our children. The district has shown no real interest in their salvation."²⁶

Over the 1966-67 academic year, 43 high school students and approximately 160 elementary school students participated in the program. Apparently, many had positive experiences. A group of them discussed the benefits of going to integrated schools at a conference in April, and

few of the participating high school students returned to the Sequoia District during the year.²⁷

Conflicts at Menlo-Atherton

Mothers for Equal Education not only worked to provide students with quality education through its Day School and Sneak Out Program, it also vigorously addressed policies within the Sequoia District that affected black students. In 1967 it turned its attention to Menlo-Atherton High. A school that drew the majority of its clientele from extremely affluent families in Menlo Park and Atherton, it also included students from a section of nearly all-black Belle Haven. Due to overcrowding at Ravenswood, the board had moved the attendance boundary for Menlo-Atherton several blocks deeper into Belle Haven, doubling the black percentage of the school to 15. Mothers for Equal Education complained of the second class status of black students there. They sponsored a meeting of some 20 parents at Menlo-Atherton in February. The Palo Alto Times paraphrased parental concerns as follows: "They claimed that Negro students were relegated to remedial and vocational courses, are not allowed in the 'regular' classes, are educated 'to be janitors and red caps,' and often leave high school without the ability to read or write."²⁸

The district leadership was compelled both to address

criticism by Mothers for Equal Education and the racial tension at Menlo-Atherton, but it did not admit culpability. In April 1967, Judge Roy Seagraves of the Municipal Court asked the county Human Resources Commission to look into what the Times called "deteriorating race relations at Menlo-Atherton High School."⁵⁹ In a memorandum the following month, Helen Kerwin reported on the proceedings of the Human Resources Commission. She pointed out that the judge's request "followed on the heels of a Tribune front page story on a letter to the editor from a Menlo-Atherton student complaining that the Menlo-Atherton administration has refused proffered assistance from the student government to resolve racial tensions."⁶⁰ Kerwin went on to say that the Human Resources Commission agreed that newspaper publicity "had alarmed parents of students at Menlo-Atherton and had exaggerated Menlo-Atherton's problems to the detriment of the school's image...."⁶¹

Turning to the issue of remedial classes for black students, Kerwin said, "Some question was raised as to the advisability of the elimination of remedial classes to achieve better racial integration within Menlo-Atherton. It was felt that such a move might have a detrimental effect in overcoming the educational handicaps of the Negro students."⁶² Sequoia representatives to the Commission did express their willingness to implement programs suggested by the superintendent that included in-service training for

staff at Menlo-Atherton, as well as a community liaison worker for the school and a human relations consultant for the Sequoia District."⁶³ Representatives also "made clear," according to Kerwin, "that the District was aware it did not have all the answers to the problem of achieving integration and would welcome constructive help from any source...."⁶⁴ She concluded that "the majority of the Executive Committee [of the Human Resources Commission] felt that the Sequoia District was not only aware of its problems but had an able Board and staff which were obviously doing everything in their power to solve a problem for which no one had yet found a total solution."⁶⁵

Sequoia administrators clearly aimed to take charge of the situation by making concessions in the form of human relations--concessions that in no way touched the policy-making prerogatives of school officials. It would soon become evident, however, that they could not completely hold the line on their authority. After repeated protests by Mothers For Equal Education concerning the disproportionate placement of black students in remedial classes at Menlo-Atherton, Superintendent Chaffey agreed at the end of the 1966-67 academic year to eliminate most of them. He refused, however, to agree to their demand that a black principal be hired. Chaffey maintained the quality must be the only criterion for hiring.⁶⁶

The Demand for Black Teachers

Undaunted by Chaffey's rebuff, MEE broadened its focus. The board was confronted by fifty singing protestors who demanded the hiring of additional black teachers. (At the time only 12 of the 605 teachers in Sequoia were black.) According to the Times, "The angry singers showed up at the board meeting to demand the hiring of more Negro teachers and to ask why five Negroes who had applied recently had not been hired.⁶⁷ The board referred the issue to Dr. Chaffey, a move that failed to mollify the protestors. Subsequently, the NAACP and CORE joined Mothers For Equal Education in pursuing the matter of minority hiring. They proposed a lay committee that would interview candidates for certificated positions. The board unanimously denied the request.⁶⁸

In November of 1967, the board, which had conducted an unsuccessful minority recruiting effort the previous school year, agreed to recruit again, this time in the South. It planned to send Assistant Superintendent for Personnel John Bunting, whose previous failure was castigated by civil rights groups.⁶⁹ By the time Bunting departed for the South in February, there were 17 black teachers out of 789 in the district. Blacks were dubious about the prospects for success, and some questioned the purpose of such distant travel. Mrs. Wilks argued that qualified black teachers lived in East Palo Alto. Bunting did little to assuage the

concerns of the black community, since he returned after isolating only six black candidates.⁷⁰

Civil rights organizations at least were able to push the district to go through the motions of hiring more black teachers. They were also influential in facilitating the departure of a vice principal at Menlo-Atherton who had been accused of racial discrimination.⁷¹ The district held the line, however, on maintaining control over hiring, and they rejected targeting positions for minority staff.

Tension over the Teenage Summer Project

Another area of conflict with the black community was the use of district facilities for community projects, particularly the Teenage Summer Project begun in June 1967. Initiated by Robert Hoover, a trustee of the Ravenswood Elementary District, along with Gertrude Wilks and members of the Black Community Relations Association, the project in part took the place of an Upward Bound program that had recently shut down. High school students took courses in the mornings at Ravenswood and then tutored elementary school students in their homes during the afternoons. The Federal Office of Economic Opportunity was to pay both instructors and high school students. Board president Kerwin indicated displeasure with this arrangement because the board had not been consulted, and she felt that programs of this sort should be conducted by the district.⁷²

While the school board initially did nothing to hinder the program, there was a negative reaction to a course entitled "Blackology" that high school students took as part of the summer project curriculum. In early August, two members of the county sheriff's department complained to the Human Resources Commission about the course because they believed it taught students to hate whites.⁷³ Robert Hoover responded that the course was part of a black agenda for self-determination. "The next thing black people have to do," he affirmed, "is to get themselves educated so they can organize and control their own communities."⁷⁴ Shortly after the Human Resources Commission meeting, school district officials reclaimed the rooms the summer project had been using--a move that precipitated a demonstration by teenagers and directors from the project.⁷⁵ It was assumed by leaders of the project that it was the course in black studies that informed the district's decision to oust them; interestingly, though, Ravenswood's facilities were offered to the exclusively black and overtly militant Black Action Conference over the Labor Day weekend.⁷⁶

A Battle Over Busing

When school reopened in September, the trustees of the Sequoia District immediately faced a further challenge to their authority. As a cost-cutting measure, high school bus service that had been offered to those residing more than

one and one-half miles from school became available only to those students living at least two miles distant. It is very unlikely that an important implication of this policy was foreseen: virtually all black students attending Menlo-Atherton High would lose free bus service. The board's decision prompted considerable unrest and a host of demands by black students. Fights of an interracial nature erupted. One altercation, apparently started by a white student, resulted in injuries to two whites and arrests of two blacks.⁷⁷ Citing the dangerous situation, the NAACP urged black students to stay away from the school. Meanwhile, the student senate at Menlo-Atherton agreed to support several demands of the Black Student Union, including restoration of the previous bus boundary, requiring black history of all students, and providing hot lunches. At the school board meeting of September 20, many white students strongly supported these demands. Bus service was restored to those living between one and one-half and two miles from Menlo-Atherton. The Times held that the board rescinded its earlier decision "in a move to head off threats of violence and a student boycott at Menlo-Atherton High."⁷⁸

The MERI Plan

The battle over bus service had nothing to do with busing for integration. In fact, concerted black pressure for the integration of the Sequoia District dissipated after

the community failed to dissolve Ravenswood High in accord with the recommendation of the Levinthal Committee. By the 1967-68 year Ravenswood High School was 75.1% black, while Menlo-Atherton had the second highest percentage of black students with 15.5.⁷⁹ Black energy focused on the sneak out program into other districts, on efforts to make the Sequoia District high schools more responsive to the needs of black students, and on the development of black-controlled private educational ventures. Pressure for desegregation within the district now came from predominantly white groups--both organized teachers and Citizens United for Relevant Education (CURE). The latter was formed by middle class white women from Portola Valley, but it had some representation from East Palo Alto. It wanted a desegregation plan created by June 1968 and implemented by September 1970. It believed that each high school should have approximately the same minority enrollment.⁸⁰ CURE sponsored and later endorsed a study by Management and Economic Research, Inc. (MERI) designed to desegregate the Sequoia District. In February of 1968, MERI released a plan that would phase out the current high schools and create two or three huge educational centers that, according to the Peninsula Bulletin, "would require extensive enrollment-area redistricting and large-scale student busing."⁸¹

The MERI plan, however, essentially was doomed from the beginning. The creation of educational centers would not

only require busing, but approval of large bond issues as well--expenditures district voters had long shown reluctance to support. As it was, the district was in financial straits and was considering cuts in teachers' salaries and restrictions on busing.²² The trustees, in addition, were split on the MERI plan, with Kerwin leading the supporters and Watkins the opposition.²³ Watkins, in fact, had been pushing a proposal to turn Ravenswood into a technical high school which he would rename Bayshore. The segregationist intent of this plan was transparent. According to the Times, which favored the notion, "Watkins thinks more students from the present Ravenswood attendance area than any other would be selected to attend Bayshore High after thorough talks by counselors with eighth graders and their parents about job goals and college hopes."²⁴ While few blacks were likely to advocate Watkin's proposal, the MERI plan was unpopular with blacks also.²⁵ By the time hearings on the plan took place in the fall of 1968, it had become a dead issue.

If the MERI plan did not appeal to blacks, this did not necessarily signify a collapse of interest in desegregation. In part black disapproval represented a conviction that district officials would do nothing. In part, the plan offended because it would dissolve a high school that the community was beginning to perceive as a viable black institution. Blacks, consequently, simultaneously sought a

stronger Ravenswood High and desegregation options beyond the Sequoia District.

A Voucher Plan For Ravenswood High Students

The spring of 1968 had been relatively calm. Following the death of Martin Luther King, Ravenswood students, in the words of the Times, "went on a short-lived rampage after classes were dismissed...."⁶⁶ But neither at the high school nor in the community at large did sorrow and anger ignite prolonged unrest. For the most part that spring, dissatisfaction focused on the Ravenswood curriculum. There was criticism of Project PLAN, a programmed learning curriculum not employed in any of the other high schools; in addition, the general paucity of course offerings was condemned. The student government and Black Student Union jointly authored a list of recommendations that, with the exception of calling for more black teachers, asked for a broadening of curricular offerings which did not bear the impress of specifically black demands. Their list included instruction in Italian and German, plus a language laboratory and foreign language library; courses in journalism and dramatics; and greater offerings in music.⁶⁷

During summer vacation, however, educational conflict heated up, and it would come to a boil with the resumption of school in the fall. In June the South San Mateo County branch of the NAACP shocked local liberals and the national

headquarters of the organization when it came out in support of community control. As the Times noted, "The action of the NAACP group, considered more moderate than other civil rights factions, aligns it with militant elements of the East Palo Alto community which also have been demanding more Negro control of the community."⁸⁸ The NAACP statement in part read: "Since it is not possible to integrate the schools to create a situation where teachers, counselors and administrators will be concerned with the educational achievement of all students, then we must give our black children in our ghetto schools teachers, counselors, and administrators who will be concerned with their self education."⁸⁹ It went on to say that "Survival depends on self-determination and self-respect by the black community. In all black communities in this country, this is the new feeling of the people, and it is time we accept this fact."⁹⁰

The NAACP set the tone for a concentrated drive toward self-determination, and Mothers For Equal Education took the lead. Earlier that year nationalist Stokely Carmichael had spoken at an assembly of the MEE Day School, and by that summer Wilks was working to create a full-time, black-controlled private school.⁹¹ Yet self-determination did not necessarily imply separation. At the same time that Mothers For Equal Education developed their school, they put forward a plan that struck at the core of district

official's authority. It all started on August 7 when Gertrude Wilks attempted to offer a resolution that had not been placed on the board's agenda. She was overruled by the chair. She then placed the resolution on the chairperson's desk. "At this point (9:00 p.m.)," according to the minutes, "several members of the audience approached the Board members' [sic] and administrative tables, took the microphones off the stands and proceeded to interrupt the meeting with singing and chanting of songs and disrupting the Board meeting."² Police were called and protestors left after some 15 minutes. The Times, in contrast, reported that approximately 100 people disrupted the meeting. It noted that police would be present at the next meeting and fines might be assessed if disruptions persisted.³

Wilks' resolution was taken up at the August 15 meeting of the board. Emphasizing the many years of frustration with the district that blacks had endured, it called for the release of Sequoia funds to parents to sponsor the cost of black students attending the district of their choice:

WHEREAS, the quality of education received by young people attending Ravenswood High school has been deteriorating steadily every since the school opened; and

WHEREAS, despite our ten years of pleading, studies, discussion, studies, protest, studies, demonstrations-- and more studies, the Sequoia Union High School District has done nothing significant to reverse this trend, or

WHEREAS, many of us, as parents residing in the Ravenswood High School attendance area, have felt compelled to end the de-education of our children by sending them to live and attend school in other districts; and

WHEREAS, others of us are still waiting for the opportunity to end the de-education of our children, but cannot sneak them out since not enough sponsors are available; and

WHEREAS, all of us are still paying taxes to the Sequoia Union High School District, which either does not have our children or is de-educating them; and WHEREAS, those of us who have children going to school in other districts are made to feel freeloaders inasmuch as our children must live away from home because the district where they attend school does not receive our dollars;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Sequoia Union High School District do whatever is necessary to have our school tax money released and turned back to us so that we may send it to whatever district is educating our children, thus freeing our young people to live at home and still go to school where they can be educated.⁹⁴

The superintendent responded to this Sequoia-funded voucher plan by stating that tax funds could not be given to parents. Yet rather than relying on Chaffey's statement to reject the entire resolution, the trustees, in essence, agreed to fund interdistrict desegregation. By unanimous assent the board resolved "...that the Superintendent attempt to work out an inter-district transfer policy with neighboring districts for one year which will permit non-Caucasian students at Ravenswood and Menlo-Atherton High Schools residing in the Sequoia District to attend the district of their choice and for the Sequoia District to pay an equitable cost for the education of those students to

the districts receiving the students."⁹⁵ In what was tantamount to an unprecedented admission, then, the district was allowing that it was not able to serve black students adequately, and it would therefore make financial sacrifices to compensate them. In addition, the trustees were questioning color-blind policy. Kerwin made it clear that this plan was only for non-white students. She said, "I don't see any reason to allow white children, who can get a good education in the district, to transfer to another district."⁹⁶ For the first time in the history of the district, a policy was articulated that seemed to subscribe to principles of affirmative action. This did not mean that the motives of other board members were as pure as Helen Kerwin's. Kerwin, for example, proposed a resolution that would permit some black students to attend the three nearly all-white schools in the district. It died for lack of a second.⁹⁷ While it would be a mistake to make too much of this, for some trustees, especially Watkins, who had never supported desegregation, interdistrict transfer was most likely a solution to the problem of increasingly militant black students inside the district. In any case, the Times accurately captured blacks' response to the board decision when it said, "Although they seemed pleased with the success of their efforts, the black speakers left no doubt that they felt the program should be unnecessary, that they would have preferred to see radical changes within the

Sequoia District itself.⁹⁸

If changes in district policies toward blacks had been less than overwhelming, gains had been made nonetheless. The favorable boundary change, the abolition of remedial classes and the creation of a course in black history, at least some effort to hire black teachers, and sponsorship of interdistrict transfer all contributed to a potentially better high school experience for black students. In addition, it appears that Helen Kerwin's stance not only indicated rejection of color-blind policy, but concession based on principle rather than merely on the need to quell disruption. This sympathetic attitude would broaden and engender a receptive environment for further change.

1. Palo Alto Times (hereafter PAT), April 10, 1964.
2. Ibid.
3. PAT, September 23, 1964.
4. Ibid.
5. PAT, November 5, 1964; Also see PAT, August 28, 1964.
6. PAT, February 15, 1975. For instance, a student from Germany complained in a letter to the editor of the Palo Alto Times that sheriffs attended a discussion on civil rights at Ravenswood High School, intimidating those present by taking their pictures. Criticism of the sheriffs by Gertrude Wilks and by James Branch, pastor of St. John Missionary Baptist Church, echoed these concerns. See PAT, March 25, 1966.
7. PAT, April 8, 1966.
8. See, for example, PAT, August 2, 1967.
9. PAT, August 7, 1967.
10. PAT, September 5, 1967.
11. Accountability later became an issue with the BCRA, however. In the summer of 1969, for example, it pushed for a police force made up of residents, and both an end to the use of dogs and calling outside police departments. See PAT, July 10, 1969.
12. See, for example, the activity of the Committee For Equal Representation regarding police dispersal of a crowd after an officer killed a Menlo Park man: PAT, October 31, 1967.
13. PAT, October 10, 1967; October 24, 1967; October 25, 1967; November 10, 1967.
14. See PAT, July 10, 1969.
15. PAT, May 20, 1966; June 15, 1966; January 25, 1967.
16. PAT, March 10, 1967.
17. See, for example, PAT, January 21, 1969 and Peninsula Bulletin, February 15, 1969; PAT, July 23, 1969; August 20, 1969.
18. PAT, August 30, 1967; August 31, 1967; September 5, 1967.

19. PAT, August 29, 1968.
20. PAT, November 15, 1967.
21. For conflicts between militants and moderates, see PAT, January 3, 1968; Redwood City Tribune, January 3, 1968; PAT, January 10, 1968.
22. PAT, April 2, 1968.
23. PAT, August 20, 1968.
24. PAT, November 6, 1968.
25. PAT, August 18, 1969.
26. PAT, October 15, 1968.
27. PAT, March 26, 1968.
28. Ibid.; also, for the program of Mothers For Equal Education, see PAT, November 30, 1967.
29. See, for example, PAT, March 2, 1968.
30. David Harris, "Santa Rita Waltz," Resist (December 1967): 3.
31. Leadership positions were held in the Ravenswood City School District and the Ravenswood Recreation and Park District. In addition, Ed Becks was made director of the San Mateo County Economic Opportunities Commission. For the latter, see PAT, December 14, 1968.
32. Rose, pp. 110-111. It is likely that Rose's figures on East Palo Alto actually come from a 1972 survey.
33. Ibid., p. 198.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 206 (Table 5-1).
36. In 1960, for example, Leslie Salt, Southern Pacific Railroad, Hiller Aircraft, and Ideal Cement took \$1,700,000 worth of property out of the Ravenswood Recreation District. The following year Bohannon Industrial Park transferred to Menlo Park its last 65 acres remaining in East Palo Alto. This property had an assessed valuation of just under one million dollars and included Johnson and Johnson, Sierra Electronics, Upjohn, and Zenith. Such a transfer

significantly contributed to a 12.5% increase in assessed valuation in Menlo Park, which made it possible to increase the budget by \$81,500 without raising the tax rate. Finally, the airport and golf course were annexed by Palo Alto in 1962. See PAT, January 22, 1960; March 5, 1961 and August 15, 1962; May 8, 1972.

37. Barbara Mouton Interview, January 28, 1983, in East Palo Alto.

38. PAT, January 19, 1966.

39. PAT, September 2, 1966; September 5, 1966.

40. Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.) Vol. 11, September 21, 1966, p. 227.

41. PAT, September 22, 1966.

42. Ibid.

43. SUHSD min., September 21, 1966, p. 227.

44. Ibid.

45. PAT, September 24, 1966.

46. Ibid.

47. PAT, September 29, 1966; October 3, 1966.

48. PAT, October 5, 1966.

49. PAT, December 1, 1966.

50. Ibid.

51. PAT, March 14, 1967.

52. SUHSD min., March 1, 1967, vol. 11, p. 280.

53. Ibid., p. 279.

54. PAT, September 18, 1963.

55. PAT, December 14, 1966.

56. PAT, December 15, 1973.
57. PAT, May 29, 1967; April 10, 1967.
58. PAT, February 17, 1967.
59. PAT, April 17, 1967.
60. Helen Kerwin, President Board of Trustees, to Sequoia District Trustees and District and Menlo-Atherton Administrative Staff, May 2, 1967, p. 1, in Human Relations File, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office (hereafter SUHSD), Redwood City, Calif.
61. Ibid., p. 2.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. SUHSD min., vol. 11, May 17, 1967, p. 309; PAT, June 20, 1967.
67. PAT, June 22, 1967.
68. SUHSD min., vol. 11, July 5, 1967, p. 330.
69. PAT, November 2, 1967.
70. PAT, February 23, 1968; March 6, 1968.
71. PAT, August 15, 1967.
72. Helen Kerwin to Board of Trustees, June 30, 1967, Human Relations File.
73. Concern for the "hate whitey" nature of this course was also noted in the minutes of the East Palo Alto-East Menlo Park Interagency File, SUHSD, September 11, 1967, p. 2.
74. PAT, August 11, 1967.
75. PAT, August 21, 1967.

76. Robert Pittman, Director of the Black Community Relations Association, remarks that officials dropped the course in minutes of the EPA-EMP Interagency Committee, September 11, 1967, p. 3.
77. PAT, September 19, 1967.
78. PAT, September 21, 1967; SUHSD min., vol. 11, September 20, 1967, p. 358. The Sequoia Board also took seriously the demand for black history. An evening course was offered beginning in January 1968, and commencing the following fall "The Negro in the Americas," using Lerone Bennett's Before the Mayflower, would be offered in every high school--see Peninsula Bulletin, January 18, 1968; SUHSD min., Vol. 11, April 17, 1968, p. 424.
79. SUHSD min., vol. 11, October 1, 1967, p. 379.
80. PAT, November 8, 1967.
81. Peninsula Bulletin, February 8, 1968.
82. PAT, March 7, 1968.
83. PAT, July 18, 1968.
84. PAT, December 17, 1967.
85. See, for instance, PAT, September 26, 1968.
86. PAT, April 5, 1968.
87. Peninsula Bulletin, May 9, 1968.
88. PAT, June 25, 1968.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. See PAT, February 24, 1968; May 8, 1968.
92. SUHSD min., vol. 12, August 7, 1968, p. 13.
93. PAT, August 14, 1968.
94. SUHSD min., vol. 12, August 15, 1968, p. 16.
95. Ibid., p. 17.

96. PAT, August 16, 1968.
97. SUHSD Min, vol. 12, p. 16.
98. PAT, August 16, 1968.

CHAPTER 4

BLACK POWER IN THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT II: TOWARD SEPARATE AND EQUAL

Prior to the fall of 1968 most efforts to change district policy emanated from adult organizations. Beginning with the strike at Ravenswood, however, initiative would shift to the students. At times student behavior reflected adolescent exuberance. Some of their demands were trivial, and their growing sense of empowerment could engender activity that even some student leaders viewed as wanton disregard for order. Certainly through the eyes of many teachers Ravenswood had become a dysfunctional institution.

An element of chaos notwithstanding, there was another way of seeing what had taken place--that students had taken purposeful action rooted in a critique of an order that missserved black students. In a radical departure from typical juvenile concerns, black students wanted freedom from tracking as well as more personal autonomy; they sought an expanded curriculum of traditional courses as well as

black studies. And their growing sense of command over their destinies influenced not only the educational order at Ravenswood, but also their futures. This chapter will look at students' self-activity in the late 1960s and assess the extent to which it transformed Ravenswood High School.

Ravenswood Rebellion

The battle over interdistrict integration ended in a compromise that limited board sanctioned transfers to 100 students. The board would pay to allow 75 Ravenswood students to transfer into the Palo Alto Unified School District and 25 students to attend the Mountain View-Los Altos District. In addition, the board agreed to allow 15 Ravenswood students to go to all-white San Carlos High within the Sequoia District. As unprecedented as the interdistrict agreement was, it did nothing to alter the conditions at Ravenswood, where most black students in the Sequoia District would continue.

With the beginning of school in 1968, dissatisfaction erupted. Students seized Ravenswood. On the morning of Tuesday, September 10, a group known as Students for Higher Education 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. Similar to the previous spring, 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 contemporary music should be taught by a black instructor; and that Swahili should be offered.¹ 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.²

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 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. 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."³ The students retorted, "We'll give you 10 minutes to get out of here."⁴ 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. Ed Becks, Gertrude Wilks, Robert Hoover, and other 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."⁵

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."⁶ His 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."⁷ 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.⁹ Finally, students found fault with his remoteness as a leader, and Taylor allowed that his style indeed was non-directive."⁹

Irrespective of students' reasons for demanding Taylor's resignation and the concerns that animated their other demands, a number of public officials expressed consternation with what had taken place. Superintendent Chaffey stated that "this kind of thing clobbers teacher morale."¹⁰ And James Fitzgerald, chairperson of the San Mateo County Supervisors, ordered an investigation of the situation. He called it "a precedent with very bad implications."¹¹

But 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."¹² 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."¹³

When the dust had settled, it was not really clear what demands district officials had agreed to honor. This was true not only of students' demands, but of the complementary ones of 64 Ravenswood teachers who took the position that more black counselors and teachers had to be hired at Ravenswood by October 15 and that 30 new black teachers must be brought into the district by the beginning of 1969.¹⁴ Taylor's resignation was of considerable symbolic import, probably reducing scrutiny for the time being of the board's compliance with other demands. As Chaffey pointed out, however, even Taylor's resignation was not official until the board approved it. It did so at its annual meeting of September 18, when it announced as well 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

While both the Palo Alto Times and the Ravenswood Post believed that officials had recognized most of the other demands, the board minutes do not mention these. The

concessions above, at least, ended the Ravenswood revolt, but they hardly put officials in good stead with the residents of East Palo Alto. The September 18 board meeting was packed with 800 people, many of them black, many of them un placated by the board's actions. Charles Boulding, president of the student government at Ravenswood, noted that the community "took complete control of the meeting and more pressure was applied on the board to act immediately upon the removal of Mr. Taylor...."¹⁶ Although the board agreed that Taylor's last day would be two days hence, this did not get it off the hook. According to the Times, "Numerous speakers from the audience lambasted the trustees and the district during the session. Some invited anyone supporting the Board members to get up and defend them. Nobody rose to the occasion."¹⁷ Residents of East Palo Alto vented a decade's worth of anger at an institution that had neglected them. But it was not the catharsis that was most significant here, it was, as young Charles Boulding pointed out, "the fact...that finally the community had a strong voice in a majority white district...."¹⁸

Protest Spreads

During the 1968-69 academic year demands for greater control of secondary education and greater access to and influence over the shape of collegiate education coalesced in militant actions throughout the San Francisco Bay area. The struggle

to implement black demands at Berkeley's high schools, the student strike at San Francisco State College, and the Third World Liberation Front strike at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, oxygenated one another and created a climate that not only empowered blacks, but other minority groups, women, and youth in general. In the Sequoia District, the actions of Ravenswood students were followed by protests by black students at Sequoia High School. Composing only 5% of the student population at Sequoia, they tendered a list of demands that included hiring more black staff members and offering courses about African culture. A boycott followed that was sponsored by the Black Student Union and supported by about half the students in the school. Of immediate concern was the one and one-half mile limit on the provision of bus service. Most black students, apparently, lived more than a mile from the school, but less than 1.5 miles. The matter was a prominent issue at a school board meeting attended by some 800 people. The trustees, however, refused to reduce the limit to one mile.^{1*}

Meanwhile, black students at Menlo-Atherton High School conducted a sit-in at the office of the principal, whose resignation they demanded. They also demanded that the Dad's Club be expelled from the campus. This interracial group of parents was formed in the previous spring to quell unrest on the campus. According to the Times, "Black

students claim it is a repressive police force."²⁰ The Human Relations Committee of San Mateo County found the sit-in justified and criticized district trustees for "lack of communication."²¹

Pressed by disorder in the schools, the trustees approved "A Proposal for a Cooperative Approach to the Improvement of School-Community Communications." It noted that the immediate concern of the district was the "disruption of the learning process through intimidation, violence, sit-ins and boycotts instigated primarily by activist students and public who feel alienated from the educational 'establishment' and are demanding meaningful involvement while resisting any proposals originating from the Sequoia Union High School District for short or long term solutions."²² The report blamed this situation, in part, on matters beyond its control. It underscored "the rise of black power and black separation and the intimidation by their advocates of the 'silent majority'-- both black and Caucasian--resulting in demands from the white community for repressive measures."²³ The trustees' report furthermore blamed their own inability to implement a suitable desegregation plan on the failure of bond issues, making it impossible to increase capacity of the already overcrowded predominantly white schools. This lack of funding, it claimed, also hindered the board from making "needed curricular and organizational changes to provide a

more meaningful educational experience for all students, including minorities."²⁴ In addition, the report pointed to the lack of a unified stance toward integration on the part of residents of East Palo Alto.

On the other hand, the report did admit to a lack of communication with black people, a shortcoming that allowed blacks to misconstrue school leaders' motives. It noted "the failure of the high school system to establish a meaningful dialogue with the black community, with resulting suspicion of the Sequoia Union High School District's motives in regard to the black community and the latter's reliance on rumor and misstatement of facts."²⁵ The report concluded by voicing a commitment to better communication with and involvement by the black community to expand educational opportunity.

Despite the interest of the trustees in pursuing orderly change, disruptions continued in the district. Some were informed not so much by racial injustice as by the expression of a rebellious youth culture. In December, for instance, the refusal of Menlo-Atherton officials to permit a "slacks day" resulted in a protest in the course of which 57 windows were broken, two students were arrested, and several were suspended.²⁶ Less frivolous were the demands of black students from Ravenswood, Menlo-Atherton, and Sequoia High Schools who jointly sought action on 31 matters during a PTA meeting at Menlo-Atherton, including the

removal of police from campuses, an end to the educable mentally retarded program, abolition of the tardy system, termination of arbitrary black suspensions, and transfer of teachers insensitive to blacks. These demands had been formulated in a meeting of 300 blacks out of approximately 1300 in the district. Failure to meet the demands, claimed a spokesperson, would result in an effort to separate Ravenswood from the district and create a unified black system with the Ravenswood elementary schools.²⁷

Unrest also spread to surrounding districts. In February, 20 blacks, some of them from East Palo Alto, were suspended from Cubberley High in Palo Alto. Sixty students had shouted black power slogans in a hallway in response to the distribution of a piece of literature captioned "Support Society for Prevention of Niggers Getting Everything."²⁸ Many white students supported the blacks, and, according to the Times, "Another 39 students--most of them white--were suspended at Cubberley High School...for staging a strike to support demands that all 20 black students suspended...be reinstated."²⁹ In addition, San Mateo High School, just north of the Sequoia Union High School District, closed for a time in the spring due to racial conflict.³⁰

The Impact of Black Power on Ravenswood High

Barraged by demands for educational change, school officials made many concessions, but refused to give up

ultimate control. They paid for Ravenswood students to attend school outside the district, but limited the number to 100. They agreed to let the community have input in finding a successor to deposed principal Malcolm Taylor, but contrary to what the Times labeled "a commanding voice in the selection of a replacement," the advisory committee, according to the trustees, would not "determine or evaluate the professional competence of the applicants."²¹ In addition, some demands, like providing bus transportation to those living beyond one mile of the Sequoia High School, went unheeded by trustees. On the other hand, while school leaders did not give up their power, their actions were shaped by black concerns to an unprecedented extent. For Ravenswood High School, this meant students and the community had 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.²² Pressure from the East Palo Alto community and minority students 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 1969.³³

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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

Increasing leverage in the affairs of the district in general and Ravenswood High in particular seemed to have influenced the performance and aspiration of some Ravenswood students. Nancy King, a student who had gone to Ravenswood for four years, was awarded a National Merit Scholarship, an award never attained when the school was majority white.³⁶ And of the graduating class of 1969, 47 were listed as going to four year colleges. 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 Carleton, Wellesley, Pembroke,

Yale, UCLA, and University of California-Santa Cruz.³⁷ 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 four year colleges had risen to approximately 20%.³⁸ At the same time, Stanford and other universities were responding to pressure from black undergraduates to expand minority enrollment, granting increased access that Ravenswood graduates could enjoy.³⁹

Imperfect Harmony

During this heady period an exchange student from Cubberley High in Palo Alto commented on the spirit and unity that pervaded Ravenswood in contrast with the individualism prevalent at her own school.⁴⁰ Yet what transpired that year was far from orderly and engendered grave concern among many teachers. The personnel office reported that as of March 1969, three teachers at Ravenswood had retired during the academic year, and thirty-three requests for transfers had been made, of which fifteen already had been honored.⁴¹ It is unlikely that recent events alone were responsible for this exodus, since there had been very high teacher turnover at Ravenswood in previous years.⁴² Nonetheless, forty-seven of the ninety teachers at Ravenswood jointly requested an investigation of

teaching conditions by the California Teachers Association.⁴³

In June of 1969, a study committee of the CTA issued a 22 page report. It found that "the prevailing mood at the school is one of distrust, hostility and fear."⁴⁴ And it asserted that "witnesses generally concurred in the opinion that the present condition of Ravenswood High School is utterly hopeless."⁴⁵ The report placed considerable responsibility for the problems at Ravenswood on the shoulders of the principal. It criticized Menneweather for tactlessness toward teachers and for a failure to support them on disciplinary matters.⁴⁶ Not all staff agreed with this assessment, however. Katie McCall, a community worker employed by the district, blamed the teachers themselves. She believed that the majority of teachers resented Principal Earl Menneweather who replaced Malcolm Taylor after the student protest. According to McCall, "Teachers absolutely refused to take orders from a black man."⁴⁷

McCall's remarks provoked an angry response from a group of Ravenswood teachers. According to the Palo Alto Times, "Five Ravenswood High School teachers, stung by a community worker's charge that teachers are largely to blame for the East Palo Alto school's problems, this morning unveiled a story of conditions at the school that makes 'Blackboard Jungle' look like Sunday school."⁴⁸ All five were white coaches planning to leave Ravenswood. They had

been particularly distressed by the protests the previous fall--especially by other teachers' support. Said one, "During the sit-in, there was about 40 per cent of the faculty that encouraged the students...."⁴⁹

It is difficult to assess the accuracy of the report and the motives of teachers who condemned Ravenswood. There were probably teachers who simply did not want to instruct black students or be associated with an overwhelmingly black school. This at least was the perception of black students who, according to the CTA study, felt that white teachers had low expectations for them.⁵⁰ At the same time, it had been a difficult year. If many students felt empowered by their ability to make changes in the school, many teachers were appalled by a breakdown of traditional authority relations. The CTA study noted, for instance, students' abusive behavior toward teachers outside of class and a tendency of students to wander in and out of classrooms at will, making it "impossible for the teachers to direct a sequential learning process."⁵¹ On the other hand, the CTA document does not indicate whether all teachers were subject to student disrespect. Nor does it indicate any racial breakdown in teachers' responses to conditions at Ravenswood High School. It is perhaps significant that only one of the thirteen black teachers wanted to leave the school.⁵²

The CTA study acknowledged that "some of the students show an identification with the school that is absent on other campuses in the same district. They feel that the school is 'theirs,' and that it exists for them."⁵³ Nevertheless, criticism of what transpired that year did not only come from teachers. In November, writing in the Torch, black student Wendy Bourgeois was one of several people who commented on growing chaos within the black movement:

In the beginning days of school, Ravenswood was transformed from a mild meek mannered soldier into an aggressive, bold, exciting Trojan Warrior. In following weeks however, our might [sic] Warrior took on the appearance of a raving lunatic. His mind was muddled with the maggots of chaos and confusion. Our poor Trojan floundered aimlessly blowing his mind in the insanity created by misused power. Secretly behind the locked doors of A-13, exclusive meetings involving 'certain black-garbed crusaders' managed to destroy the very thing for which they laid down their souls.⁵⁴

The new principal, Earl Menneweather, was also disconcerted by the continuing tumult at Ravenswood. In a December interview with the Torch, he stated, "There's no more need, at Ravenswood, to rebel. All of the demands are being implemented now." "To be frank," he continued, "I'm upset that this Black student body has not supported me. I'll never get anything done unless the students are with me. I think we should forget confrontations and disturbances and get on with the business of learning."⁵⁵

Without knowing more about the incidents that engendered such concerns, it is hard to evaluate the

observations of Bourgeois and Menneweather. Certainly, as in the larger East Palo Alto community, there were political differences between students. But it is not clear that these were responsible for spurring conflict. Despite the militance of many students, most could be described as supportive of integration, if a student poll responded to by slightly less than 25% of Ravenswood students was indicative. Sixty-nine percent supported busing to achieve racial balance as opposed to 29% who were against it, and only 9% wanted a mostly black high school. On the other hand, just 3% wanted integration that left blacks in the minority as opposed to 43% for whom it did not matter and 35% who wanted a school half black and half white.⁵⁶ Students were also likely to be politically liberal. In a mock election held in November 1968, 304 students voted for Hubert Humphrey, as opposed to 130 for Eldridge Cleaver, 15 for Richard Nixon, and 6 for George Wallace. Two hundred ninety-one supported an immediate pullout from Vietnam, while 52 advocated military victory; and 507 students opposed changing the name of East Palo Alto to Nairobi in contrast to 297 who supported it.⁵⁷

The foregoing suggests that relatively few students were consciously leftists or black nationalists. At any rate, it is unlikely that political differences translated into disharmony. Rather, unrest most likely sprang from teenagers testing their incipient power in an environment of

loosening restraints. Clearly an image of them as perfectly disciplined scholars launching a single-minded assault on inequitable education falls short of an accurate picture. It is not surprising that there were students as well as faculty who chose to leave Ravenswood in 1969. Whether prompted by unrest or by continuing inequities at Ravenswood, more than 100 departed in the first year the district permitted open enrollment.⁵⁰ Yet students had engendered some positive changes that enabled them to begin to see their own concerns embedded in curricula and their own people as adult role models in the district. With understatement, an editorial in the Trojan Torch summed up the year: "It's been a rough year; the school has lost many students. But if you look, we've got some pretty good things going for us."⁵¹

Black Power Sustained

When Ravenswood High opened for the 1969-70 academic year, it continued to bear the impress of black power activated by the protests a year earlier. Ravenswood 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 who obtained a bachelor's degree from Morehouse and doctorate from the University of Pacific, a teacher with a

degree from Stillman College who had done graduate work at Kent State, and another instructor with degrees from Tuskegee and San Francisco State. In addition to various new courses, the Swahili instructor offered a regular "lesson" in the Torch, and a number of recent library acquisitions focused on black issues.⁶⁰

The president of the Ravenswood student body ended his first message in the Torch with "Power to All Ravenswood Students."⁶¹ Indeed, the above changes suggest that Ravenswood students were exercising considerable influence over the school. It is not easy, however, to assess the quality of life, let alone academics, within the school house walls. As in the previous year, critics pointed to turmoil at Ravenswood, and again their concerns are difficult to evaluate. The high school was under attack by integrationists and segregationists alike. The former were eager to paint a negative picture of Ravenswood as an argument for the necessity of breaking it up, while the latter saw in it a kind of disaster it did not want white students to share in. In addition, the local press was not averse to a touch of sensationalism. Whatever the actual conditions, some Ravenswood students and staff felt that the school was being unfairly maligned, and they leaped to its defense. At the end of November, for instance, an editorial in the Torch held that "a grave injustice had been done to Ravenswood students." "Some people across the highway," it

continued, "are trying to make it appear that Ravenswood High School is a complete racial holocaust."⁶² Apparently two area newspapers had reported that a white teacher and white student had been attacked by a group of black students. The white student allegedly suffered serious injuries and one black female brandished a gun. The Torch, on the other hand, relying on the testimony of a teacher who was present, stated, "The truth is that no gun was waved, no teacher was attacked, the student involved was black, not white as reported, and the student did not suffer serious injuries."⁶³ Thus, the editorial contended, "The accounts were not only untrue in most aspects but they went on to demonstrate the idea that when some 'people' can't find trouble at Ravenswood High School they invent some to keep Ravenswood's bad reputation intact."⁶⁴

The need to combat negative images of Ravenswood added to the sort of loyalty that typically binds students and some staff to their school. Of course this chauvinism makes it difficult to accept at face value the comments of Ravenswood advocates. At any rate, one defender was Thalia D. Arnold, who was in charge of scholarships and student activities. Writing in the Torch, she celebrated students' accomplishments--including those of Harriet McNair, who has written, produced, and acted in a play on black history, and those of "three seniors who are in the running for Outstanding Teenager of America...."⁶⁵ Arnold, who had been

at Ravenswood for eight years, also lauded the discipline of the "'great silent majority,'--who are no longer so 'silent,' but are expressing themselves by deeds that are educational and constructive--taking pride in being a predominantly Black school and expressing that pride--not by shouting and disrupting and spouting hate, but by doing things they enjoy (their own thing) and expressing love."⁶⁶ Like the editors of the Torch, Arnold complained about press coverage. "Our students believe in themselves," she contended, "but only because we adults believe in them. If they project a positive image why not report that accurately, graphically?"⁶⁷

There were indeed indications of a positive climate at Ravenswood. A number of students, for instance, were actively involved in campus life. There was a student court, with students acting as judges, prosecutors, and defense counsels in cases of minor infractions, such as smoking and littering. In one humorous case reported by the Torch, a jury of five students and three faculty members found the Dean of Students, Mr. Whelchel, guilty of smoking. He was fined one dollar.⁶⁸ In addition, students participated in Ravenswood's mini-board, which advised the Sequoia Board.⁶⁹ Finally, students acquiring a 3.0 or higher average during the first marking period included 27 freshman, 22 sophomores, 27 juniors, and 35 seniors out of a student body then numbering about 850.⁷⁰

Apparently there were compelling reasons for students to write about Ravenswood in a laudatory fashion. At the same time, their remarks did not degenerate into pure boosterism. There was vocal criticism of various policies. These critiques perhaps sprang as much from the generic rebelliousness of youth during the 1960s as from black militancy. Harriet McNair, for example, complained that students were outnumbered by adults on Ravenswood's mini-board. Here the issue was not specifically race, since adults on the board were black. The issue was self-determination for students. Said McNair, "No one can better convey the ideas, the problems, the concerns of the students than the students themselves."⁷¹

There was also, according to McNair and other students, a problem with censorship. A poem by McNair, "Here Come the Pigs," was stricken from the Torch. Principal Menneweather reportedly said, "It stank," and a teacher called it "irresponsible journalism."⁷² The journalism class that put out the newspaper was not pleased with this decision to ban a poem that had been printed already in the "Colonist," a publication of the black students at Stanford, and "UMOJA," produced by Nairobi College. An editorial by McNair and Violet Smalls argued that a violation of freedom of speech had occurred because Ravenswood staff felt the poem "was criticizing a so-called 'social agency,' and because it was promoting 'hate.'"⁷³ As far as the alleged smell of the

poem was concerned, the writers exclaimed, "Well, the truth of the matter is that it did have an odor. An odor indeed! The poem smelled like the truth and most people's noses reject such odors."⁷⁴ The editorial ended with the slogan, "FREE speech forever. RIGHT ON!"⁷⁵

Echoing not only the black power revolt, but the free speech movement and the generation gap, the poem and ensuing protest were indicative of the multifaceted influences that were shaping a youth culture critical of existing institutions, hostile to traditional conventions of civility, and confident not only in the appropriateness of critique, but also in the power to make change. And this power was not merely illusory. While "Here Come the Pigs" never made it into the Torch, strenuous criticism of staff censorship did. In fact, the student newspaper was surprisingly free of censorship. One guest editorial, for example, laid out the goals of the Black Panthers and denounced the government's response to them. "Since the government is not willing to make a financial or moral commitment to these goals, or to black people in general," the editorial said, "they have resorted to a fascistic suppression of the organized protest movement. They intend to scare the disenfranchised black communities into submission."⁷⁶ The editorialist was confident, however, that "This plan will never succeed!"⁷⁷

In addition to serving as a forum for support of the

Black Panther Party, the Torch commented supportively on the national moratorium against the war in Vietnam, and covered the visit of three people involved in the Indian takeover of Alcatraz.⁷⁰ The student paper also carried criticism of the effort to desegregate the district. In a guest editorial, Harriet McNair attacked what she saw as the underlying thinking that informed desegregation policy, and she criticized black students who accepted such an orientation.

Integrated education seems to be the issue now days (sic). What they're really saying is that Black students cannot learn in all Black schools. Everyday (sic) they want to close Ravenswood but Woodside which is now 'fully integrated' will be open forever. What appalls me is that many Black students go along with the idea and some really and truly believe it.⁷¹

McNair's solution to unequal education was community control: "If the community is behind the educational system, making the decisions concerning it, and puts their hard-earned money into it, then it cannot fail whether it be segregated, integrated or dilapidated."⁷²

There are those who would condemn the political interests of McNair and other students for distracting them from acquiring a proper education, if not for expressing points of view subversive of the social order.⁷³ Yet there was, at least on the part of students who wrote for the paper, a serious attempt to powerfully articulate deeply felt concerns--an index of the intellectual health of the school. Other indices of Ravenswood's health did not have a purely political cast, but suggested a vibrant environment.

Speakers for the 1969-70 academic year included Nate Branch, a Ravenswood graduate of 1963 who played basketball for the Harlem Globetrotters, and Tommie Smith, winner of the 200 meters in the 1968 Olympics who, along with Lee Evans, gave the black power salute at the awards ceremony. Smith, who had broken six world records in track, became a coach at Ravenswood in the spring of 1970.²² Also that year, the home economics class published the illustrated Ravenswood Soul Power Cook Book, with 100 recipes.²³

As in the past, visitors felt that Ravenswood was a comfortable environment. A group of students from Sequoia High School who had spent the week at Ravenswood, perceived a united student body that was friendly and took pride in its school. Also as before, some of the praise offered a mixed message. One student commented, "There's a looser atmosphere overall at Ravenswood."²⁴ Assuming the statement was accurate, perhaps academic rigor was being sacrificed for a congenial environment.

More direct criticism of the academic environment came from Lucy Gonzales, a graduate of Ravenswood in 1969. In a guest editorial for the Torch, she did not equivocate about the education she had received. She stated, "I have come to the conclusion that the education students receive at Ravenswood is lousy and does not prepare one at all for what he is faced with in college."²⁵ Criticism also came from the editors of the paper. One editorial stressed the

importance of developing greater harmony between teachers and students and "more student and teacher concern for the need of an education for the student."⁶⁶ Much of the burden was placed on students. It was up to them to take greater responsibility for education in their community. To those contemplating transfer, the editorially apocalyptically warned, "Your school is going down, down, down. If you don't attempt to build it back up, then all that will be left is ashes, baby, ashes."⁶⁷

Over the course of the year, criticism was also voiced about lack of participation. It was argued that a few students "dominate all the clubs, organizations and board of the school."⁶⁸ And in the final editorial of the academic year, student apathy was condemned and dire predictions made: "Speculating on what's coming down next year, we see overcrowded foreign language and math classes, over 40 classes doubled up, and more suppressive administration, a very dull and partially irrelevant curriculum and a great deal of unconcerned students."⁶⁹ It was felt that these conditions could be changed if students would organize to act on them, but "if outsiders see that the students don't care, then they will pull anything..."⁷⁰

The meaning of such demoralization expressed at the end of the year is open to interpretation. First, it is not clear how representative it was. Second, it could indicate the necessary disparity between experience and ideal at a

time when an ideology of black unity and black power was at its zenith. It could be argued that the very verbalization of this concern through a medium that was so vibrant, articulate, and--despite the censorship of "Here Come the Pigs,"--unfettered spoke to a level of education, both intellectual and affective, that was not without substance.

While there are difficulties with interpreting the experience of Ravenswood students during the 1969-70 academic year, it is clear that students achieved a measure of self-determination through their newspaper, the court, and the mini-board. The black community at large also exerted pressure that made the miniboard a reality, that increased the number of black staff, and that, at least indirectly, created the low student-teacher and student-counselor ratios.

Assessing the acting out of black power during 1970-71 is much more difficult. Archival holdings do not carry the Trojan Torch after June 1970 and local newspapers--perhaps because desegregation had become such a major issue--are essentially silent about what went on within the school. A desegregation plan, however, which intended to make Ravenswood a majority white school in 1971, met considerable hostility from Ravenswood students, and the termination of Principal Menneweather's contract at the end of the year created a stir.²¹ Disturbances the final day of school

perhaps indicated that the demoralization predicted by the Trojan Torch the previous year had indeed set in.²²

In addition to the activities and conflicts described above, quantitative data, though unsystematic, add something to our understanding of the quality of life in the high school over the 1969-70 and 1970-71 academic years. In assessing student empowerment, these data are suggestive rather than decisive.

For 1969-70 graduates only, some information on post-secondary placement is available. Twelve students graduated in January of 1970. Of the eight whose futures were discussed, none was planning to attend a four year college. One was going to fashion school; another was apprenticing to be a butcher; a third worked for the Jehovah's Witnesses, selling the Watch Tower; a fourth was enrolled in beauty college; a fifth planned to work or go to junior college; and three were searching for clerical work.²³ It is likely that these students, rather than early graduates, were late ones who had academic difficulty. In any case, many June graduates appeared to have more promising futures. 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 (Harriet McNair), and one to Barnard. Some students received multiple scholarships. Cynthia Ammand, for

example, received the Stanford Business Wives Scholarship, California State Scholarship, Robert P. Dallison Scholarship, and Faculty and Friends of Ravenswood Scholarship. 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 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 that year, down from 35% of the total during 1967-68.²⁶

It is possible that the decline in disciplinary action merely indicated laxer standards. On the other hand, the decline could suggest a more orderly environment than the CTA study reported. A greater feeling of ownership over the school might support the latter hypothesis. In fact, daily attendance at Ravenswood increased significantly between 1965-66 and 1970-71, an indication that students felt 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 district during 1965-66 and the lowest in 1970-71.⁹⁷

Ravenswood also had the lowest number of illnesses for October 1970 and the lowest average for all of 1970-71.⁹⁸

At Ravenswood High School the period between 1968 and 1971 was a chaotic one that defies easy assessment. On one hand, student disruptions and demands were sometimes frivolous and downright irresponsible; positive changes in the curriculum did not necessarily bring Ravenswood up to the standards of other Sequoia schools;⁹⁹ and many teachers felt alienated if not threatened, an unlikely foundation for promoting an effective learning environment. On the other hand, 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. A white principal partial to vocational education and lacking ties to the community was ousted and replaced with a black. Teachers accused of racism were transferred and a number of black instructors hired. Progress was made in establishing Afro-American studies and adding other academic courses. And the percentage of students going to college rose, while suspensions and absences declined. If sporadic disruptions

and continuing complaints about curricular weaknesses suggest an imperfect situation at Ravenswood, it was less imperfect than previously.

1. Ravenswood Post, September 18, 1968, p. 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 1.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 3.
7. Ibid., p. 2.
8. Ibid., p. 3.
9. Ibid., p. 2. Also, for a general discussion of the protest, see Palo Alto Times (hereafter PAT), September 10, 11, 12, 1968 and Trojan Torch (hereafter TT), September 20, 1968.
10. Post, p. 3.
11. Ibid., p. 1.
12. PAT, September 12, 1968.
13. Ibid.
14. PAT, September 13, 1968.
15. Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.), vol. 12, September 18, 1968, p. 30.
16. TT, October 7, 1968.
17. PAT, September 19, 1968.
18. TT, October 7, 1968.
19. PAT, October 4, 1968; October 8, 1968; October 17, 1968.
20. PAT, October 7, 1968.
21. PAT, October 18, 1968.
22. SUHSD min., vol. 12, November 6, 1968, pp. 50-51.
23. Ibid., p. 51.

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. SUHSD min., vol. 12, December 18, 1968, p. 78.
27. PAT, January 7, 1969 and Redwood City Tribune, January 7, 1969.
28. PAT, February 8, 1969.
29. PAT, February 11, 1969.
30. PAT, April 17, 1969.
31. PAT, October 3, 1968; SUHSD min., vol. 12, October 2, 1968, p. 35. See also Elbert Mitchell's criticism of interviewing procedures, SUHSD min., vol. 12, November 6, 1968, p. 50.
32. TT, December 20, 1968 and February 10, 1969.
33. SUHSD min., vol. 12, February 19, 1969, p. 112.
34. TT, March 28, 1969, p. 1.
35. See, for instance, TT, October 28, 1968 p. 4 and February 10, 1969, p. 3.
36. TT, April 30, 1969, p. 1.
37. TT, June 10, 1969, p. 7.
38. For the 3% figure, see Sequoia Union High School District, "Brief Summary of College Entrance Data," March 7, 1972, in Shelton File. Officially there were just under 1,000 students enrolled at Ravenswood in 1968-69, although the Torch put the figure at 850 in an article of April 30, 1969. While the number of graduates in June 1969 is not available, a 20% figure on planned college attendance would require approximately 250 graduates. In all likelihood, the number of graduates was lower so the percentage would have been higher than 20%. See George P. Chaffey to Board of Trustees, "Report on Studies Related to Desegregation," Appendix C, October 18, 1972, Voluntary Transfer Files, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Calif. (hereafter SUHSD).
39. See the Stanford Observer, April 1987, p. 24, which states that on April 8, 1968, Stanford officials promised to double minority enrollment and begin a special admissions

program for at least 10 minority students. Irving Horowitz and William Friedland argue that the Black Student Union's demands were strengthened by the threat of action by students in East Palo Alto: "...the Black Student Union had a social base of support in the Negro community, particularly in the East Palo Alto ghetto area. As one of the demonstrators observed during one of the sit-in meetings, the action of the black students bore an implicit threat that 'a group of East Palo Alto students will invade the campus' much as had been done at San Francisco State." ("Sit-in at Stanford," in James McEvoy and Abraham Miller, eds., Black Power and Student Rebellion: Conflict on the American Campus (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1969), p. 126.

40. TT, April 30, 1969.

41. Ibid.

42. See Chapter 3, p. 129.

43. PAT, March 20, 1969; Peninsula Bulletin, March 29, 1969, p. 3.

44. 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, p. 11.

45. Ibid., p. 11.

46. Ibid., p. 13.

47. PAT, June 10, 1969.

48. PAT, June 11, 1969.

49. Ibid.

50. Personnel Standards and Ethics Commission Report, p. 12.

51. Ibid., p. 11.

52. PAT, March 3, 1969. By analogy Gerald Grant's The World We Created at Hamilton High (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) emphasizes the chaos created by black power in the late 1960s. His view is based on the perspective of white teachers, however. Black teachers apparently saw matters quite differently. See especially

pp. 243-244; also see Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe, "Reform or Reaction," Harvard Educational Review 59 (February 1989):134-135.

53. Ibid., p. 12.

54. TT, November 18, 1968.

55. TT, January 20, 1969.

56. TT, April 30, 1969.

57. TT, November 18, 1968.

58. The total number of students transferring from the Ravenswood attendance area was 232, but only 127 of these were already attending Ravenswood. It is unlikely that all of the latter group were black. See Ravenswood Post, April 30, 1969.

59. TT, February 10, 1969.

60. 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, SUHSD; TT, October 6, 1969, pp. 1,2 and October 31, 1969, pp. 4,1.

61. TT, October 6, 1969.

62. TT, November 26, 1969.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. TT, December 19, 1969.

69. TT, November 26, 1969.

70. TT, December 19, 1969. According to Chaffey, "Report on Studies Related to Desegregation," Appendix C, Ravenswood had 849 students in 1969.

71. TT, November 26, 1969.

72. TT, December 19, 1969.

73. Ibid., p. 2.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. TT, December 19, 1969.

77. Ibid.

78. TT, October 31, 1969; March 18, 1970.

79. TT, March 18, 1970.

80. Ibid.

81. One who objects to both is Diane Ravitch. See The Troubled Crusade: American Education 1945-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

82. TT, February 10, 1970; March 18, 1970.

83. TT, February 10, 1970; June 11, 1970.

84. TT, March 18, 1970.

85. TT, February 10, 1970.

86. TT, March 18, 1970.

87. Ibid.

88. TT, December 19, 1969.

89. TT, June 11, 1970.

90. Ibid.

91. According to Thalia Arnold, the student activities director at Ravenswood, Menneweather had received a letter from the superintendent informing him that he lacked the

support of his staff and focused too much on athletics. Curiously, 48 of the 53 teachers at Ravenswood signed a petition in Menneweather's behalf; it is not clear what students felt about his dismissal, however. At any rate, Chaffey might have felt that Menneweather did not project an image suitable for drawing white students into the school. See Redwood City Tribune, October 6, 1970.

92. According to the Palo Alto Times, fires were set; sixty windows were broken; teachers and administrators were pelted with eggs--June 19, 1971. It is not clear to what extent this was rowdy exuberance marking the end of the school year, dissatisfaction with the departure of Menneweather, or unhappiness with the imminent desegregation of the school.

93. TT, February 10, 1970.

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

95. "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.

96. 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 Chaffey, Appendix C.

97. 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.

98. 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."

99. 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.

RAVENSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
IN THE SEQUOIA UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

VOLUME 2

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
AND THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Robert Lowe

September 1989

CHAPTER 5

THE DECISION TO DESEGREGATE THE SEQUOIA DISTRICT

As black people began to influence the nature of schooling at Ravenswood High School, they also began to exercise broader control over education in East Palo Alto through electing a black majority to the board of the Ravenswood Elementary School District and through establishing the private Nairobi schools which extended from the elementary years through junior college. In addition, evidence of influence on Sequoia District policies included the creation of a holiday commemorating Martin Luther King's birthday, the adoption of an affirmative action program for contractors, and the initiation of community advisory boards.¹

Yet there were limits to the black community's ability to shape policy at the district level. One important indicator of this was that it never succeeded in electing a black trustee. It is true that pressure from activist groups was instrumental in prompting the County Board of Education to select Henry Organ to fill a vacant

seat on the Sequoia Board in the fall of 1968.² A militant nationalist then, he is remembered today with only slight distortion as the only trustee never to get a second for a motion.³ Recognizing the futility of his situation, Organ resigned after nine months.⁴ The Sequoia Board then filled his slot with another black trustee. Thomas Turner was a moderate with no apparent constituency in East Palo Alto. He chose not to seek election when his term expired. Since then no black person has been elected or selected to the Sequoia Board.

Even a unified black community would have had no conduit through which to participate in official discourse at the district level. And differences of opinion on the merits of desegregation meant that a politics of confrontation no longer carried the full moral force of the community. When district-wide desegregation came to the forefront of the school board agenda between 1969 and 1971, it ironically was not by the initiative of black people who had struggled so long for it. Thus at the very time an empowered Ravenswood student body was reshaping its school, blacks were playing a diminutive role in a district-wide debate that would have profound implications for the high school's future.

This chapter will account for the decision of the district to undergo district-wide desegregation. Deliberations on desegregation were bracketed by the

beginning of an Office for Civil Rights investigation of the district and by OCR's finding against the district fourteen months later. It is not likely, though, that the OCR decision alone was sufficient to compel desegregation, since future boards would defy the agency. As of 1969, however, a majority of the school board, as well as Superintendent Chaffey, actively supported desegregation, as did the California Teachers Association and various predominantly white liberal organizations. In addition, an integrationist ideology, albeit one compatible with inaction, became virtually hegemonic among white people in the district, encouraging even militant anti-busing interests to pay lip-service to desegregation. Finally, despite significant nationalist sentiment in East Palo Alto, the black community never took a major role in the proceedings and made no effort to disrupt them. To the extent that black voices were heard, they were more likely to articulate support for the continuation of Ravenswood High than resistance to desegregation.

Voluntary Desegregation: First Steps

Early efforts by the Sequoia District to go beyond boundary changes in promoting desegregation were very limited. As a way of preempting the Sneak-Out Program, 100 black students were permitted to leave the district to attend school in Palo Alto or Mountain View during the 1968-

69 academic year. In addition, fifteen students at Ravenswood--four blacks, five Asians, and six whites--were permitted transfer to San Carlos High, a school that never before had enrolled black students. The Palo Alto Times considered this "as part of an effort to ease de facto segregation in the Sequoia District."⁵ It was an infinitesimal effort, of course, and one that at least initially left some of the participants questioning whether they had made an appropriate decision. In October, the Trojan Torch interviewed four students who had transferred. Two attending San Carlos High indicated a desire to return to Ravenswood, and a third had already returned from Mountain View. A sense of discomfort in these new environments seemed to have been the primary reason for their dissatisfaction.⁶

In March of 1969, the board took up the question of expanding this very modest desegregation program. The Palo Alto Times noted that the discussion took place "hours after the district was marked for federal investigation for possible violations of segregation laws."⁷ Ravenswood High was now 87% black, and the Times pointed out that the Office for Civil Rights inquiry might find this a violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Such a possibility did not influence two of the trustees, however. A proposal to send 140 Ravenswood students to other schools in the district died in a 2-2 vote, though the continuation of the transfer of 100

students to Palo Alto and Mountain View was approved for the 1969-1970 academic year.⁹

The effort to send more students out of Ravenswood had been defeated by the vote of Dean Watkins, the most conservative trustee, and Henry Organ, the most radical. This curious alliance no longer held sway when Helen Kerwin returned for the board meeting of March 19. In a 3-2 vote, with Watkins and Organ dissenting, the trustees agreed to an open-enrollment plan. While this plan evoked the tokenism of open enrollment plans in the South and could be seen merely as an effort to placate the Office for Civil Rights which was then conducting its investigation, there is no evidence that the board saw this as a ruse. It did require that students apply within a restricted period--April 21 through 25--but by ensuring busing for those desiring transfer, the board removed the biggest logistical obstacle to the selection of any school by a student.⁹

Conservative whites seemed unperturbed by this new policy, but some black advocates of community control took offense. Israel Harris, for instance, said of the plan, "We'll do everything possible to keep it from working and I think I speak for most of the black community."¹⁰ And Trustee Henry Organ, fearing an influx of white students into Ravenswood would change its character, offered one of his many motions that got no second. He asked for the creation of a committee to screen applications to

Ravenswood.¹¹ Had the committee been approved, it would not have had much to do. On April 26, the Palo Alto Times reported that 232 students had applied to transfer out of Ravenswood, while only one had sought admission.¹² Of those leaving Ravenswood 170 were black--a situation unlikely to please advocates of community control.¹³ This number, however, did not necessarily reflect significant dissatisfaction with Ravenswood since many of the transfers were eighth grade students living in the Ravenswood High attendance area.¹⁴

While some black residents opposed the voluntary desegregation plan, agreeing with Trustee Organ that "Black unity is our only salvation,"¹⁵ others, as evidenced by those transferring, had fewer qualms. Included in this category were the members of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council who approved the program unanimously, despite its support for the continuation of a black-identified high school in East Palo Alto.¹⁶ There was no contradiction in the thinking of the council. While the voluntary desegregation plan increased the options of students attending or bound for Ravenswood High School, there was no danger of Ravenswood becoming predominantly white. Indeed, voluntary desegregation had the predictable effect of increasing segregation at the high school. Not only would this be a problem for the Office for Civil Rights, it was also a grave concern of organized teachers in the district.

In September of 1968 Orrin Cross presented to the trustees the recommendations of the Legislative Council of the Sequoia District Teachers Association. It called for total desegregation of the district to commence September of 1969 and be completed within three years.¹⁷ While this position perhaps encompassed a desire for just schools, the proximate cause of distress among Sequoia teachers was the situation at Ravenswood. The following June, the CTA study demanded more forceful action. It called for the temporary closure of Ravenswood and its reopening a year later as a district-wide school.¹⁸ When this recommendation was discussed by the board, however, the trustees for once sided with the "militant blacks [who] trooped to the lectern...."¹⁹ They voted to keep Ravenswood open despite the threat of a teacher walkout.²⁰ Nonetheless, Superintendent Chaffey was becoming increasingly concerned with the situation. He summarized a letter from the Sequoia District Teachers Association:

The SDTA has already notified the California Teachers Association and the National Education Association to the effect that it considers Ravenswood an undesirable place to teach and, therefore, urges the above organizations to notify placement offices of the conditions. The SDTA has also indicated that it would urge teachers not to accept employment at the school.²¹

Apparently swayed by the seriousness of the teachers' stance, Chaffey called for closing Ravenswood as a comprehensive high school as of July 1971.²²

Odd Bedfellows

Chaffey's proposal immediately stirred opposition. Trustee Hugh Taylor, attending his last board meeting, was reported as saying that "the least undesirable of all the alternatives is to give the East Palo Alto community greater participation in Ravenswood. He felt that in a sense the community destroyed the school and it is up to the community to restore it."²³ In a letter advocating essentially the same stance, but without any of Taylor's animus toward the black community, social studies teacher Jack Marks noted that requests for transfer out of Ravenswood by only 170 of its black students indicated no mandate for closing the school. While he believed that transfer options should be maintained, he asked the board to "commit itself to support the AB 2118, providing for a Self-Determination School similar to the Ocean-Hill-Brownsville [sic] effort in New York."²⁴ In the meantime, he argued that the board should "commit itself to do everything possible within the law to delegate to a Mini-Board such powers as are necessary to encourage the community to participate in whatever way they can devise, to change the climate from a 'no-school' into a 'go-school' that is relevant to Black youth."²⁵

Also rejecting the position of the CTA study was Redwood City Citizens Against Racism (CAR), whose chairperson Merle Fruehling would later become

superintendent of schools. CAR called for a referendum to be held in East Palo Alto that would enable residents to choose between closing Ravenswood and attaining more control over the school through a mini-board "with considerable power in hiring of school personnel and determining the school's curriculum."²⁶ Like Jack Marks, CAR encouraged the board to support community control legislation.²⁷

Marks and CAR made it clear that a segment of white liberal opinion concluded that community control might best serve the interests of the black community. At the same time white conservatives also took this position, if only as a tactical measure to avoid desegregation. Thus, State Superintendent of Schools Max Rafferty supported the community control orientation of Mothers For Equal Education. In addition, Charles Chase, a newly elected school trustee whose platform called for a "return to law and order"²⁸ and who got wide margins of voter support from San Carlos, Belmont, and Redwood City, could sound like he represented East Palo Alto. In a written statement, Chase held that "The CTA recommendation is opposed by and is repugnant to all the various factions within the East Palo Alto community. It is their children and we have an obligation to listen to them and act accordingly."²⁹ He further argued that "some positive influences are just now appearing at Ravenswood, and those positive influences may not be available to black youngsters at our other

schools."²⁰ Chase, therefore, advocated the creation of a community advisory board for Ravenswood High.²¹

Organized teachers and Superintendent Chaffey were not alone, however, in their support for changing the nature and racial make up of Ravenswood. In preparation for district-wide discussion of the matter to be held on June 28 and 29, a Menlo Park group called the Council for Intergroup Education put out a leaflet which asked the following questions:

1. Shall Ravenswood High School be discontinued for one year with students sent to other district schools--to be re-opened in September 1970 with a new attitude and program?
2. Does the community want Ravenswood to become a completely separated all-black school? Is this good preparation for young people to 'make it' in a world with all kinds of people?
3. Shall planning begin now to close Ravenswood in two years in order to achieve a totally integrated educational program for all young people?²²

While the leaflet asked for ideas from its readers, its authors--as the transparent nature of their questions indicate--had a clear position on the merits of desegregating Ravenswood.

As the hearings on the future of Ravenswood High drew near, the two camps had odd bedfellows indeed. Advocates of community control included conservative whites, liberal whites who believed that the black community should define the sort of schooling they wanted, and militant blacks who--if school board correspondence is a valid indicator--were

least vocal at this time. Arrayed on the other side were both liberal, presumably white groups that saw integrated schools as a way of achieving an integrated, equal society and organized teachers who saw desegregation as a way of altering what they perceived as intolerable conditions at Ravenswood. To further perplex matters, the majority of the board supported maintenance of the status quo at Ravenswood, while the Superintendent favored changing it.

In a move that favored matters as they were, the sites selected for hearings were San Carlos and Ravenswood High Schools--located in the two areas where resistance to changing the racial demographics of Ravenswood were strongest. Predictably, the prevailing sentiment of speakers at both schools was to keep Ravenswood open.³³

When the trustees met to decide the fate of Ravenswood, they chose a course that would neither please nor immediately antagonize opposing interests. In a series of unanimous resolutions made possible by the resignation of anti-integrationist Trustee Organ a month earlier, the board determined that Ravenswood would remain open during 1969-70; that racial balance in all the district's schools would be achieved "hopefully not later than September, 1971;" that a plan to achieve racial balance be developed by June of 1970; that educational opportunities be expanded for Ravenswood students; and that a "local education council" be created at Ravenswood by September 15, 1969.³⁴

While the Palo Alto Times pointed out that the decision to refrain from immediately closing Ravenswood meant that the trustees had "braved the threat of a teacher walkout...",³⁵ no such action materialized. It is likely that the promise of future action to desegregate the school softened teachers' resistance. On the other hand, conservatives and downright racists were placated by the absence of immediate change. One anonymous letter to the trustees praised them for keeping Ravenswood open. "Putting the negroes (sic) in other schools," it contended, "is not solving any problems. It's only spreading the problem around, it's just spreading it not solving it. They were the ones who ruined it anyway(,) no one else."³⁶ Though crudely stated, the letter spoke to a conviction that other whites held--that blacks themselves were responsible for the less-than-favorable educational environment at Ravenswood.³⁷

While the board had effectively defused a potential crisis in the short term, it had agreed to move forward with an effort to desegregate the schools. It set January 24, 1970 for a conference to discuss alternative ways of accomplishing this. Meanwhile, it continued the district-wide voluntary transfer program for another year--a plan that had aroused little controversy.³⁸ The January conference, on the other hand, would engender considerable dissension.

Considering Desegregation Options

The conference, which had been closed once 800 reservations were received, was organized to set a positive attitude toward desegregation. The keynote speaker was superintendent of the Berkeley Schools, Neil Sullivan, who maintained that "segregated education spells inferior education for white or Black students...."³⁹ The conference also included a movie called "The Mythology of Racism," which, among other matters, debunked the notion that integration brought property devaluation. While it is impossible to assess the overall attitudinal effects of the conference, both students at Ravenswood and conservatives from the northern part of the district found it unsettling. An editorial in the student newspaper, the Trojan Torch, expressed doubt that Ravenswood students would be served. "Whatever proposal they come up with," it stated, "Ravenswood will get a bad deal, as far as keeping the school together, whether they close it or not."⁴⁰ On the other hand, George Kerska of San Carlos complained that the conference was a "biased brain wash [sic] by people who are determined to force total integration for the sake of integration with no concern for education or the problems brought about by uprooting children all over the District."⁴¹ Kerska, soon to organize the anti-busing

organization, Parents for Neighborhood Schools, issued a string of antagonistic questions:

1. Who will guarantee white students' safety from physical violence[?]
2. Who will provide discipline when teachers and administrators fear the blacks[?]
3. Where will the money come from if not from the actual needs of education[?]
4. What will replace after school activities at Ravenswood or Menlo-Atherton since no white person in his right mind would go into that area at night[?]
5. Why is the District willing to downgrade education for all in order to integrate[?]
6. Why look to Menlo-Atherton for salvation when the problems still are there even though they are kept out of the press[?]
7. How do you help the situation by granting militant black demands and denying white requests[?]
8. How do you help education by lowering credentials in order to hire more black culture teachers[?]
9. How will the District select the students who will undergo this tragedy[?]
10. How does the District plan to avoid conflict with the 1964 Civil Rights Act that does not allow busing solely for the purpose of integration[?]⁴²

Kerska apparently had concluded from the conference that some level of mandatory busing would be initiated. His response lacked any pretension of civility. It was clear to him that white rights were being violated and that an integrated education would spell an inferior education for white students. Policy decisions in the school district as well as at the state and federal levels would help Kerska

organize around his concerns. But the conference that precipitated Kerska's outpouring, though clearly committed to desegregation, adopted no plan for mandatory busing. Its purpose, rather, was to generate alternative models of desegregation, and that it did in profusion.

Many of the proposals inspired by the conference received little attention from the trustees. Some of the plans, in fact, were baroque. A Stanford Research International study, for example, posited the closing of Ravenswood and the transformation of the Ravenswood plant into a constellation of centers that would include:

A center for the development of innovative education.

An experimental Community-Participation High School.

A center for facilitating contact between community and school.

A training center for teachers, administrators, and parents.

A conferencing facility.⁴³

According to this plan, all students would spend time at Ravenswood (to be renamed the Martin Luther King Center for Educational Excellence), ranging from one-half day every other week for ninth graders to half of twelfth graders' time.⁴⁴ Another unusual plan would proliferate schools within schools. Eight of these would occupy Ravenswood, but there would also be schools within schools at other area high schools, plus there would be a district-wide school within a school.⁴⁵

Such plans for desegregation were imaginative, but unwieldy and did not win serious attention from the trustees. In the end the board, bound by the constraints that neither additional money nor facilities could be attained to foster desegregation by the fall of 1971, decided to consider three options seriously, and agreed to significant community feedback on these alternatives before a final decision would be made in June of 1970.

A district internal report outlined and critiqued these proposals. One option entailed the closing of Ravenswood and the creation of racial balance in the remaining high schools according to the percentage of blacks in the district. The report pointed out, however, that such a move would create overcrowding, necessitating either larger classes or staggered schedules. In addition, it was noted that students in East Palo Alto would bear the full burden of busing and "the possibility of a high school's being a unifying force in the East Palo Alto community would be lost."⁴⁶ A second plan would create two ninth grade schools and four senior high schools. Such a scheme would utilize all the existing schools and would spread the burden of busing in a non-discriminatory fashion. It was felt, however, that the plan could make it difficult to maintain sequential curricula. In addition, ninth graders would be deprived of competitive sports and older role models.⁴⁷ A

final plan would achieve racial balance in all six area high schools.

It is not clear whether it was Superintendent Chaffey or a committee of the board who wrote the analyses of the three alternatives, but it is clear that the last one was favored. According to the author(s), "It is difficult to formulate a list of disadvantages in this proposal for the reason that it is little more than a modification of our existing system, a system which we find reasonably successful and generally accepted."⁴⁸ The assessment, however, went on to say that "the primary disadvantage, which actually is more a problem of societal attitude, is that the movement of many Caucasian students out of their white communities and into the east of Bayshore setting for a period of four years, regardless of the merits of the educational program in the high school located there, likely would generate much resistance from our white communities."⁴⁹ This resistance did not await the board's forthcoming decision. Animated by the threat of a desegregation plan that would require the busing of white students into Ravenswood and emboldened by changes in the composition of the State Board of Education, opposition became more vocal.

Opposition Crystallizes

By March of 1970 Governor Ronald Reagan had appointed

all the members of the State Board of Education. This body rescinded guidelines that supported busing to achieve racial integration. Praising the decision, an editorial in the San Mateo Times held:

This made it apparent that the state board had no difficulty in seeing what any unbiased observer can perceive, that the forced busing of children is autocratic, discriminatory, uneconomic and socially unsound practice to a degree far more unjust than the imbalances it is supposed to correct.⁵⁰

While hardly clear that "unbiased observers" would concur with the assessment of the San Mateo Times, the action of the state board fueled George Kerska's opposition to desegregating the Sequoia District. In a letter to Superintendent Chaffey, Kerska announced:

We respectfully request that the Board of Trustees reconsider the entire integration question and consider alternate proposals. The mandatory date of June 1, 1970 for selecting a plan must be abandoned and easily can be since the guidelines set by the State Board have been repealed.⁵¹

Kerska would try out a number of different arguments in a series of letters to school officials. In this one he argued busing would divert money from educational activities, would pose physical dangers for children, and, stretching a bit, would contribute to air pollution.⁵²

Chaffey responded with a characteristically terse, uncompromising response. "The schools in the district," he maintained, "cannot be desegregated without the transfer of some students to schools other than those they are now attending."⁵³

One of Kerska's complaints was that the communities of Belmont and San Carlos--despite their virtually total absence of non white people--were minorities subject to discrimination because they were underrepresented on the board. He noted that two board members lived in Menlo Park, one in Atherton, and one in East Palo Alto (Thomas Turner, whom the board selected to replace Henry Organ). Only one trustee, on the other hand, lived in Belmont.⁵⁴ With the intent of shifting the burden of desegregation, Kerska advocated neighborhood schools brought to capacity through the enrollment of those students who lived nearest to them. In a letter to Trustee Kerwin, he accurately predicted the consequences of such a proposal:

Some white students in Menlo Park and Atherton would be assigned to Ravenswood....This proposal would of course place the burden of equal education on the shoulders of your neighbors instead of mine but then you maintain that you represent the entire district.⁵⁵

While Kerska's formulations sometimes bordered on the crackpot, he had a point here. Racial balance could be brought to schools in the southern part of the district through boundary changes. This, of course, would leave Kerska's community free of desegregation. Kerska meanwhile had rapidly trimmed the racist rhetoric obvious in his initial letter to Chaffey and transformed it into modulated support for desegregation constrained by a commitment to neighborhood schools. In defense of this position he cited not only the new ruling of the California

State Board of Education, but also President Nixon's stand against busing.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Kerska pointed to blacks' urge for autonomy at Ravenswood High School as well as the Mexican-American Unity Council's interest in the same at Sequoia High School. He concluded "that the best solution would be to grant autonomy not only to Ravenswood but to San Carlos and Carlmont."⁵⁷

With the suspension of desegregation guidelines by the State Board of Education, a clamor was raised by Kerska and others to bring to a halt consideration of all three plans by the Sequoia District. By the time the board met to take this matter up, Kerska had become president of an organization called Parents for Neighborhood Schools. Having adopted a more moderate tone, he claimed that the group supported integration. But busing remained anathema to it.⁵⁸

Sentiment was mixed, however, on whether the board should drop its effort to develop a desegregation plan by June 30. The Council for Intergroup Education made an impassioned plea that school officials actualize a desegregation plan. In a memorandum to the superintendent and trustees, its leaders argued:

If this district with all its potential cannot integrate an 11% black minority, then surely our failing will be multiplied many times with tragic nationwide results. It is our belief that now more than ever it is the responsibility of local communities to act in good faith by sustaining the momentum toward fully integrated education.⁵⁹

While it is not clear whom the Council represented, it was clear that opponents of the board had no mandate. In the weeks leading up to the meeting of April 1, school officials had received thirty-five letters supporting the creation of a desegregation plan by June and thirteen letters in opposition. Fourteen of the former came from Menlo Park and most of the latter issued from San Carlos. East Palo Alto was not represented.⁶⁰ In addition, in various presentations on desegregation by school officials, 41 spoke in favor of board action and 18 spoke against. Again much of the support came from Menlo Park and opposition from San Carlos. The only voice from East Palo Alto supported the development of a desegregation plan.⁶¹

Testing the Water

In a 3-2 vote the trustees decided to proceed as scheduled. Their decision precipitated a frenzy of activity. New advocacy organizations formed, local governmental bodies issued countless resolutions, and school leaders held sixty public meetings to test--and doubtless to sway--opinion. George Kerska often complained about the board's hegemonic influence in meetings. "We feel," complained Kerska, "the board...has structured the meetings in such a way that the audiences are given sales pitches by Mrs. Kerwin and Mr. Robertson, who are known proponents of

Dr. Chaffey's plans, while opponents find it difficult to be heard on other points of view."²

Kerska attempted to neutralize what he saw as the bias of the above school officials by developing a questionnaire upon which he wanted all school attendance decisions to be based. Essentially it allowed students the choice of remaining at their current school or being assigned to their nearest neighborhood school--a choice which in either case would leave the students of San Carlos and Belmont in virtually all-white institutions.³ While Trustees Chase and Schneider approved of Kerska's scheme, it was tabled by a 3-2 vote "until a more meaningful instrument could be developed."⁴

Meanwhile, letters and resolutions had been pouring into the district office ever since the decision was made to select one of the desegregation plans. Toward the end of April, when queried about letters supporting mandatory busing, Trustees Kerwin and Robertson said their mail had endorsed it, while Trustees Schneider and Chase said their's were mostly antagonistic to busing.⁵ Given the various board members positions' on the matter, the kind of mail they received was predictable and said little about attitudes toward busing or desegregation within the district as a whole. Nor was it definitive that the great majority or resolutions located in school district files supported desegregation. Still the number of these was impressive.

Several resolutions favorable to desegregation came from area elementary school districts, including Menlo Park, Las Lomas, and Redwood City. Given the similarity in the wording of these documents, it is likely that support had been solicited and a model resolution disseminated.⁶⁶

Similar resolutions were forthcoming from the Menlo Park City Council and the Redwood City Chamber of Commerce.⁶⁷ In all these instances, confidence was expressed in the Sequoia Board to choose an appropriate desegregation plan.

Sometimes, however, statements of support included specific recommendations. The recently created Alliance For The Integration of The Sequoia District included 23 parents representing, according to its resolution, "individuals and groups from San Carlos, Redwood City, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto, Woodside, Portola Valley, and Atherton."⁶⁸ It supported a plan that would subscribe to the following stipulations:

- 1) Must keep Ravenswood High School open;
- 2) Must provide improved education for all students;
- 3) Must provide inservice training directed against racism for all students, teachers, and members of the administration;
- 4) Must provide adequate ethnic identity within each school;
- 5) Must be viewed as only a short range plan with a continuing effort to develop a long range solution.⁶⁹

On the other hand, Parents For Neighborhood Schools was not the only group leery of the forthcoming board decision. The Trustees of the San Carlos Elementary School District, located in the area where Parents For Neighborhood Schools

was organizing, offered less than sanguine support for desegregation. The board resolved to support "the commitment of the Sequoia Union High School District in its continuing study of a desegregated educational program but feels that the target date of September, 1971 is too early and that forced bussing is not a feasible solution."⁷⁰ A petition supporting this resolution contained 103 signatures.⁷¹

A number of organizations from San Carlos and Belmont, however, did support desegregation. Some took a stand even before the board's decision of April 1. Included were the Community Councils of Carlmont and San Carlos High Schools, the San Carlos-Belmont Committee for Social Justice, the San Carlos Branch of the American Association of University Women, the Human Relations Commission of San Carlos, the Social Concerns Commission of the Carlmont United Methodist Church, the Session of the Trinity Presbyterian Church of San Carlos, and the Student Senate of San Carlos High School. The latter came out for desegregation in a 20-0 vote with 3 abstentions. Its resolution argued that "the school system is the first step toward total integration of society..., and desegregation offers a broader education to every student..., and desegregation offers one of the only means to a true and sincere understanding of our fellow men, and segregation is an immoral system which denies students their right to an equal education."⁷²

It is impossible to determine the extent to which these signs of support for desegregation represented the northern part of the district. In a letter expressing solidarity with Chaffey, Robert Paulus, Pastor of the Belmont Baptist Church, counseled, "Whatever decision you make you will be assured of some support but the opposition will be heard loud and clear."⁷³ Chaffey's response indicated he was undeterred by opposition. He said, "I believe that desegregation, and ultimately integration, is the only hope for our Country. I believe that young people will be able to work out most of the problems if given a fair opportunity."⁷⁴ For Chaffey, as well as for Trustees Robertson and Kerwin, integration appeared to have become a vision of racial justice that transcended political self-interest. Any of the desegregation plans under consideration was likely to require busing and inspire resistance, especially in the northern part of the district and in East Palo Alto. The various resolutions of support that came in, however, even if they had been aggressively solicited, at the very least indicated that there was not monolithic opposition to a serious desegregation plan. In addition, activity in opposition to desegregation that emanated from East Palo Alto was less than overwhelming. Residents were clearly divided over its desirability. So too was the school board of the Ravenswood Elementary School District. Unlike the Menlo Park, Las Lomitas, and Redwood

City districts which had all unanimously supported the Sequoia District in its plan to achieve complete desegregation by September 1971, the Ravenswood District penned essentially the same resolution, but narrowly approved it in a 3-2 vote. Supporting it were Andrew White and the two non-black trustees, Doris Landman and Mario Regalado. Opposing it were nationalists Robert Hoover and Syrtiller Kabat.⁷⁵

To the extent that blacks addressed the issue in the spring of 1970, they focused not so much on busing or desegregation, but on keeping Ravenswood open. This position was articulated before the board by Andre Laval, student body president at Ravenswood, as well as by many parents in the area.⁷⁶ In a Palo Alto Times article entitled "East Palo Alto parents warn against closing Ravenswood," the newspaper reported on a Ravenswood PTA meeting attended by eighty parents. "Most speakers...", according to the paper, "emphasized the quality education could be obtained at Ravenswood if the district made an 'extra effort to provide more qualified teachers.'"⁷⁷ While the matter of desegregation itself was often finessed, it did receive some public support from blacks. The Alliance for the Integration of the Sequoia District took out an advertisement in the Redwood City Tribune the day before the board's decision. As in its previous statements, the Alliance supported integration, but insisted

on keeping Ravenswood open and providing "adequate ethnic identity within each school...."⁷⁸ Of the approximately 900 signatures, about 125 issued from East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park (Belle Haven).⁷⁹

In the weeks before the board would announce its decision, school leaders actively sought to interpret as well as sway public opinion. At the sixty public meetings the board held, questionnaires were passed out and some 1400 were returned. The tabulated results must have been less than encouraging to the Board and Superintendent. Fifty-five percent of the whites surveyed opposed all the desegregation options. On the question of busing to achieve racial balance, only 24% of whites were favorable, while a significant plurality of blacks--85% supported it. Black support of busing spoke to widespread belief in the value of desegregated schools, but this did not mean a commitment to schools that everywhere placed blacks in the minority. Of those blacks surveyed, not one supported closing Ravenswood High School.⁸⁰

In addition to the questionnaires, the school board conducted a survey meant to sample whites, blacks, and Hispanics in a 3:2:1 ratio. Due to various difficulties, however--including reluctance on the part of minorities to be interviewed and, in the aftermath of the Cambodian invasion, the intense involvement of minority student interviewers in campus politics at Stanford--a small number

of blacks completed surveys. The returns included 237 whites, 50 hispanics, and only 31 blacks.²¹

The survey suggested that residents of the district largely held in common a belief in equal rights. For example, 312 agreed and 53 disagreed with the statement "All racial groups should have the same job opportunities;"²² 238 agreed and 53 disagreed with the assertion "All racial groups should live in the same neighborhoods;"²³ and 266 agreed and 36 disagreed with the statement "All racial groups should go to the same schools."²⁴ Although the survey found a broad majority favoring an integrated society, it uncovered a significant split in opinion over what measures were appropriate to achieve that equality. Thus, while 203 agreed with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and only 11 disagreed, actions to enforce rights received smaller majorities.²⁵ One hundred sixty-five supported and 113 opposed the "use of federal troops to enforce integration...."²⁶ And 166 agreed that "State and federal funds should be withheld from any school district that fails to integrate," while 124 disagreed.²⁷ Although 237 approved of legal pressure on the part of the civil rights movement, with only 56 disapproving, 159 favored and 149 opposed "marching and picketing," and 99 supported and 212 opposed sit-ins and going to jail.²⁸

Those questions that addressed militant behavior or came closer to home--implying action or sacrifice on the

part of the respondent--yielded a more conservative response. The most favorable responses to ways of achieving school desegregation, therefore, supported those plans that were likely to cause the least personal disruption. Two hundred sixty-four respondents approved "free choice of schools if space is available," while 47 disapproved.²⁰ Such a plan would require no sacrifices and would create virtually no desegregation since all the high schools except Ravenswood were overcrowded. On the other hand, a plan that would change boundaries to foster desegregation would, without bizarre gerrymandering, only affect schools in the southern part of the district. One hundred fifty-three respondents approved such a measure, while 112 disapproved. Finally, busing to achieve racial balance predictably was supported by a minority--112 as opposed to 174 who disapproved.²⁰

It is not clear how school trustees assessed the survey information they received. While few residents opposed desegregation, most opposed busing and the number in opposition probably would have been higher had the word "mandatory" or "forced" been employed by the survey makers. In addition, respondents predicted trouble if the school district were completely integrated by the fall of 1970, though few anticipated violence or a white boycott.²¹ Since thorough-going desegregation of the district in all likelihood would require mandatory busing, the trustees had

no mandate to accomplish it. Still the integrationist commitment of the superintendent and three board members might well have led them to such a plan, even if it hurt their chances of re-election. Regardless of the strength of their convictions, however, in the end they were pushed to act by the federal government. On June 2, more than a year since the Office for Civil Rights had examined the Sequoia District, it was found to violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

OCR Finds Discriminatory Intent

In a letter to Superintendent Chaffey, Floyd Pierce, Regional Civil Rights Director of OCR, enumerated several violations. These included the assignment of students to create segregation at Ravenswood High School, discrimination in hiring and assigning faculty, and the existence of inferior educational services at Ravenswood when compared with offerings in other District high schools.²² Chaffey, though committed to integration, was not pleased by what he clearly perceived as a gratuitous intrusion in district business. His response to Pierce emphasized that 180 black students were currently attending school outside of their neighborhood high school and 250 were slated to do so the upcoming year. He also informed Pierce that the district had undertaken a serious program of inservice training focused on issues of race in education.

Chaffey asked for the full report, so he could understand the basis for OCR's findings, but he clearly felt that the agency was out of line. Not veiling his disgruntlement, he asked, "What real help can your department provide districts such as ours that have made the commitment, are about to approve a plan, and have set the date for implementation?"⁹³

Sequoia was one of only 84 districts outside the South that underwent a review by OCR.⁹⁴ Given what Chaffey believed was an evolving, serious commitment to desegregation that was about to reach completion and given OCR's apparent ignorance of what had transpired in the district over the previous 14 months, the Superintendent was angered, perplexed, and perhaps hurt by the ruling.⁹⁵ Also perplexed was Lem Summey, Deputy District Attorney for San Mateo County. Summey wrote to Chaffey that "we join with you in your questions as to the nature and extent of the acts of the district which, it is claimed, constitute a violation of said Civil Rights Act." "Prohibitions against discrimination," he continued, "are so vague as to shed no light upon the basis for the charges as set forth."⁹⁶

On June 22, OCR's Pierce wrote back to Chaffey in a tone as acidic as the one he received. He informed Chaffey:

In *Alexander v. Holmes* and *Green v. School Board of New Kent County* (copies enclosed), the United States Supreme Court has held that the time to eliminate discriminating educational practices is now. I urge you and your Board to reconsider your intended implementation date of September 1971.⁹⁷

In addition to the two Supreme Court decisions, Pierce enclosed a copy of the OCR report. Chaffey and Pierce had some reason to be dubious about the findings. Alexander and Green were Southern decisions meant to take the deliberation out of the unfortunate formulation "all deliberate speed" found in Brown II. They aimed to put an immediate end to legally enforced separation. It was not clear how these decisions spoke to a situation in the North where separation was not legally sanctioned and where segregation was a recent phenomenon inextricably linked with housing patterns. Not until 1973 in Keyes v. Denver, would the Supreme Court rule on de jure segregation in the North.⁹⁸ In any case, OCR, according to the National Center for Policy Review, focused on six areas to determine whether a school board held responsibility for segregation: "student assignment and attendance zone policies, site selection for building schools, over- and under-utilization of facilities, inferior educational services at certain schools, rescission of desegregation plans, and teacher assignment policies."⁹⁹ In the Sequoia case all the above except "rescission of desegregation plans" were at issue.

The OCR report certainly had its facts right, but the extent to which discriminatory intent could be read into those facts is not as obvious as the report would have it. The report pointed out that Ravenswood High School had two-thirds of the black students in the Sequoia District and

argued, "Because there have been (and still are) both minority persons and Anglos living in an area accessible to Ravenswood, if the school had been normal size for the District, it could easily have been integrated through the years."¹⁰⁰

In order to show that this eventuality was tantamount to discrimination, the report rightly examined the historical record. Going back to 1954, it observed that a high school located on the proposed site of Watkins Avenue could have meant that Menlo-Atherton would have "continued to serve the students later assigned to Ravenswood, and Menlo-Atherton would have been (and might still be) an integrated school."¹⁰¹ The report is appropriately indefinite about this hypothetical outcome, but it doesn't establish a racial motive for the decision to abandon the Watkins Avenue site.¹⁰²

A more compelling argument focused on locating Ravenswood High School in an area that contained the vast majority of the District's minority population, a population that was growing rapidly. The study cited a report by the Palo Alto Fair Play Council that disclosed an increase in the non-white population east of the Bayshore in Menlo Park from 349 in 1950 to 2,949 in 1957. Consequently, OCR believed that school officials could have predicted that Ravenswood would become a segregated institution over time.¹⁰³ Clearly, the original boundaries proposed by the

district indicated an acute understanding of racial demographics by including all of overwhelmingly black East Menlo Park. But massive protest prompted the board to split the area between Menlo-Atherton and Ravenswood.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, the concentrated black population stopped at Willow Road, which divided East Menlo Park (Belle Haven) from East Palo Alto. It was less than clear that East Palo Alto would become predominantly black. Furthermore, the Ravenswood attendance boundaries included sufficient whites that the school opened to a population that was only 21% black and would not become majority black until the middle 1960s. The board had not created instant segregation with its boundaries and certainly violated no law in creating them. Finally, growing segregation in Ravenswood during the 1960s emerged not as a result of segregation-augmenting policies on the part of the board, but rather by efforts at desegregation that were too anemic.¹⁰⁵

The OCR report found a second arena of discrimination in curricula offerings. It cited the 1962 survey of the Willows Residents Association which uncovered fewer course offerings in Ravenswood than in Menlo-Atherton and Woodside.¹⁰⁶ By 1968, according to OCR, Ravenswood lacked 40% of the district's electives, and "a Visiting Committee of the Commission for Secondary School, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, recommended immediate action to bring the number of courses offered and the quality of

courses offered at Ravenswood up to acceptable standards."¹⁰⁷ OCR acknowledged the relatively puny curricular offerings of Ravenswood resulted from the small size of the school, but it found the district responsible for its size. The report noted that the original bond issue had supported a school of 2000, but Ravenswood was initially constructed for a population of 1200, initially enrolled 629, and by 1960 had a student population of 876--only a little more than half that of Woodside, which had been built at the same time.¹⁰⁸ The report therefore concluded:

Thus, the District was in the position of building Ravenswood when it must have known the school would be small and not only contain most of an increasing number of minority students, but also where, because of its size, it would be at a disadvantage in offering educational opportunities equal to those offered at other schools in the District.¹⁰⁹

It is questionable, however, that the district did foresee a small student population at Ravenswood. Like the rest of the Peninsula, East Palo Alto grew enormously after the Second World War. Between 1950 and 1960 the population of East Palo Alto increased from 8,000 to nearly 20,000. Given that East Palo Alto had a fair amount of undeveloped or agricultural land, there is no reason why school officials would have anticipated a flattening out in the growth curve of the area after 1960. And district projections confirm their inability to prognosticate accurately. In 1957, three different projections were made. A projection of enrollment that did not include in-migration

predicted that Woodside High School would have 1487 students by 1962-63 and Ravenswood would have 1574, while the older schools would range from 2332 at Carlmont to 3036 at Sequoia.¹¹⁰ A county prediction that included in-migration forecasted 1627 students at Ravenswood and 2424 at Woodside by 1962-63.¹¹¹ And a prediction made several months later anticipated 1962-63 enrollments at 1600 in Ravenswood and 1825 in Woodside, numbers that by 1970-71 were expected to change to 1700 and 3400.¹¹² Although two of the three forecasts saw Ravenswood becoming significantly smaller than Woodside and the other schools in the district, they all predicted a student body large enough to carry broad curricular offerings. Furthermore, whatever size the trustees anticipated, it is difficult to imagine that they saw the size of the school population as an opportunity to provide an inferior education.

A final major concern of OCR had to do with teachers. The report found, "In 1968-69, 52 percent of the teachers at Ravenswood had less than three years experience in the district as compared with 24 and 25 percent at Carlmont and Sequoia, respectively."¹¹³ For all schools in the district, 6.88 years was the average time teachers had been at their school. For Ravenswood, the average length of tenure was 3.88.¹¹⁴ In addition, 35 of the district's minority teachers worked in either Ravenswood or Menlo-Atherton, and minority administrators were disproportionately assigned to

the same.¹¹⁵ But this information does not clearly convict the district of discrimination either. In fact, it raises a number of questions: Were the less experienced teachers hired as a result of a plan to place new teachers in the schools with significant black populations or were these hires necessary to replace experienced teachers who chose to leave Ravenswood? Were teachers with fewer years of experience necessarily less competent than those with more? Where did minority teachers, many of whom were likely to be among the least experienced, want to teach?¹¹⁶ Where did the minority community want them to teach? While evidence is lacking to provide adequate answers to all these questions, we at least know that by the late 1960s, a significant number of teachers were transferring to other schools in the district, and we know that the East Palo Alto community clamored for more black teachers and administrators to work at Ravenswood.

Even though some of the evidence of inferior educational opportunity marshalled by OCR was ambiguous, by the late 1960s no one maintained that equality existed. From conservative white residents of Belmont and San Carlos, to school trustees, to residents of East Palo Alto, there was consensus on the unequal conditions at Ravenswood, but there were sharp disagreements as to the causes. Conservatives blamed the black community; others saw it as the accidental consequence of demographics and board

policy; and still others saw it as the effect of intentional board action. The OCR report, in finding the district in violation of the Civil Rights Act, subscribed to the last position. Yet in the absence of discriminatory laws or school board documents that expressed discriminatory intent, categorical proof was absent. While OCR read into the history of Ravenswood High School a systematic effort by school officials to render Ravenswood separate and unequal, later court decisions would see virtually heroic efforts on the part of school leaders to create quality, desegregated education for the students at Ravenswood. Neither lens accurately captured the dynamic.

The Board Commits

Regardless of the merits of the OCR report, the district was bound to heed it, since loss of federal funds could follow non-compliance. Ironically, though OCR had goals for the district similar to those of Chaffey and the board majority, its demand that Sequoia be fully desegregated by September 1970 made it one more antagonistic force to contend with. Yet the board must have been encouraged somewhat by the white consensus that desegregation was acceptable in principle. And if blacks paradoxically were now often indifferent or even antagonistic to the desegregation effort, it should have been clear that their major concern was not desegregation per se, but the potential threat to the high school they had

significantly transformed. In the end, whatever the calculus of ethical propulsion and legal compulsion, the board acted on what the Palo Alto Times called "the most emotional issue in the history of the Sequoia Union High School District."¹¹⁷ It chose a plan that would unequivocally desegregate all six high schools.

1. For affirmative action plan, see Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.) vol. 12, January 8, 1969, p. 84. For community boards, see Palo Alto Times (hereafter PAT), July 3, 1969.
2. The county board intervened when the Sequoia Board failed to act. See PAT, October 3, 1968.
3. Barbara Mouton interview, January 28, 1983, in East Palo Alto. Organ did have some influence in the drafting of the affirmative action program, in protecting students from the prying of State Superintendent Max Rafferty, in developing clearer guidelines for student suspensions, and in creating the community boards--See, for example, SUHSD min., vol. 12, January 8, 1969, p. 84; November 20, 1968, p. 63; April 16, 1969, p. 137 and PAT, April 17, 1969; PAT, July 3, 1969. These were exceptions, however. As an editorial in the Palo Alto Times pointed out, "Organ...saw most of his proposals either shelved or flatly rejected...." (July 3, 1969).
4. Upon his resignation in June of 1969 Organ stated, "I seem to be too fundamentally at odds with the rest of the board. I've come to the conclusion that the district is not prepared to take the progressive steps necessary to deal with the problems." (PAT, June 3, 1969.)
5. Palo Alto Times, September 18, 1968.
6. Trojan Torch (hereafter TT), October 7, 1968.
7. PAT, March 6, 1969.
8. Ibid.
9. TT, April 30, 1969; SUHSD min., March 19, 1969, p. 130.
10. PAT, April 3, 1969.
11. Ibid.
12. Estimates on the number of students who applied to transfer to Ravenswood vary from one to seven. The Ravenswood Post reported the latter on April 30, 1969, and Helen Kerwin's historical study stated six. See "The Background of the Problem of Racial Imbalance in the Sequoia Union High School District," mimeo., January 24, 1970, p. 5, in District Attorney File, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Calif. (hereafter SUHSD). Apparently, only one student actually enrolled, see PAT, February 18, 1970.

13. Jack Marks to Board of Trustees, June 19, 1969, in Sequoia Close-Out 1969 (hereafter Close-Out) File, SUHSD.
14. Of the 232 students transferring, 105 were eighth graders. It is not clear, however, how many of these were black. See Ravenswood Post, April 30, 1969.
15. PAT, April 26, 1969. See also opposition of Mothers For Equal Education which had garnered support for community control of Ravenswood High School from conservative state school superintendent, Max Rafferty--PAT, March 29, 1969 and SUHSD min., vol. 12, April 2, 1969, p: 127.
16. SUHSD min., vol. 12, May 21, 1969, p. 151; Herbert Rhodes to Board of Supervisors, Redwood City, July 1, 1969, in Close-Out File.
17. SUHSD min., vol. 12, September 18, 1968, p. 29.
18. 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, p. 11.
19. PAT, June 17, 1969.
20. Ibid.
21. George Chaffey to Board of Trustees, June 18, 1969, in Close-Out File.
22. Ibid.
23. SUHSD min., vol. 12, June 18, 1969, p. 166.
24. Jack Marks to Board of Trustees, June 19, 1969, in Close-Out File. The 170 students include transfers from eighth grade. See Ravenswood Post, April 30, 1969.
25. Ibid.
26. Redwood City Citizens Against Racism (CAR) to Board of Trustees, June 20, 1969, in Close-Out File.
27. Ibid.
28. PAT, April 16, 1969.
29. Charles E. Chase, "Impressions and Proposal Concerning the CTA Report," n.d., in Segregation Phase-Out 1969 File, SUHSD.

30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Leaflet of Council for Intergroup Education, June 29, 1969, in Close-Out File.
33. See SUHSD min., vol. 12, June 27, 1969, p. 172 and June 28, 1969, p. 173; see also PAT, June 28, 1969 and June 30, 1969.
34. SUHSD min., vol. 13, July 2, 1969, pp. 3-4.
35. PAT, July 3, 1969.
36. Anonymous handwritten letter, July 1969, in Close-Out File.
37. See, for instance, Mrs. V. Roberts to Board of Trustees, July 7, 1969, in Sequoia Close-Out 1969 File, SUHSD. This was also the position held by Trustee Hugh Taylor. See SUHSD min., Vol. 12, June 18, 1969, p. 166.
38. SUHSD min., vol. 13, January 21, 1970, p. 116.
39. TT, February 10, 1970.
40. TT, February 10, 1970.
41. George T. Kerska to George Chaffey, March 8, 1970, in Parents for Neighborhood Schools (hereafter PNS) File, SUHSD.
42. Ibid.
43. Martin Luther King Center for Educational Excellence (located at the Ravenswood Plant), n.d., summary, 1970, in Segregation Integration Plans: Final Decision File, SUHSD.
44. Ibid., body of report, p. 2.
45. Schools Within Schools, summary, n.d, in Segregation Integration Plans: Final Decision File.
46. "Alternative Plans For Desegregation Presented To The Board of Trustees of The Sequoia Union High School District," February 4, 1970, pp. 5-7 and 10, in Integration Plans General File, SUHSD.
47. Ibid., pp. 10-12.
48. Ibid., p. 15.

49. Ibid.
50. San Mateo Times, March 19, 1970, p. 26.
51. Kerska to Chaffey, March 15, 1970, in PNS File.
52. Ibid.
53. Chaffey to Kerska, March 18, 1970, in PNS.
54. Kerska to Chaffey, March 15, 1970.
55. George Kerska to Helen Kerwin, March 15, 1979, in PNS.
56. Statement of George Kerska to Board of Trustees, April 1, 1970, in PNS.
57. George Kerska to Helen Kerwin, March 21, 1970, in PNS.
58. Kerska's statement, April 1, 1970.
59. Memorandum of Marjorie Moylan and William Murray to Superintendent and Trustees, n.d., but probably late March, 1970, in Resolutions File, SUHSD.
60. SUHSD min., April 1, 1970, pp. 158-159.
61. Ibid., pp. 160-161.
62. Statement of George Kerska to the Board of Trustees, April 1, 1970, in PNS.
63. Kerska to Chaffey, May 27, 1970, in PNS.
64. SUHSD min., vol. 13, June 3, 1970, p. 210.
65. SUHSD min., vol. 13, April 28, 1970, p. 175.
66. Compare, for instance, Resolution #122 of the Menlo Park School District, May 4, 1970, Resolution #042970 of the Las Lomas School District, April 29, 1970, and Resolution of the Redwood City School District Board of Trustees, May 13, 1970--all in Resolutions File.
67. City Council of Menlo Park Resolution no. 2333, May 19, 1970 and Rex H. Turner, President of Redwood City Chamber of Commerce to Helen Kerwin, June 4, 1970, in Resolutions.
68. Resolution of Ken Forsberg, Chair, Alliance For The Integration of The Sequoia District, April 28, 1970, in Resolutions.

69. Ibid.

70. "Petitions supporting resolution of San Carlos Elementary School District Board of Trustees," May 18, 1970, in Resolutions.

71. Ibid.

72. Quote in San Carlos Student Senate, "A Resolution Pertaining to Desegregation," June 4, 1970, in Resolutions. See also the following documents in the Resolutions File: Robert Spahn, Mia Monroe, and Mary Jane Dean to Board of Trustees, March 19, 1970; Karen Nelson, recording secretary, San Carlos High School Community Council to Board of Trustees, May 27, 1970; Jerry Allen, Chair of San Carlos-Belmont Committee for Social Justice to Helen Kerwin, President of the Board of Trustees, March 17, 1970; Mrs. Julian E. Winters, President of the San Carlos Branch, American Association of University Women to Board of Trustees, March 25, 1970; Dorothy R. Swanson, member of the Social Concerns Commission of the Carlmont United Methodist Church, to George Chaffey, May 14, 1970; Douglas M. Marsden, Clerk of the Session, Trinity Presbyterian Church, to Board of Trustees, n.d.

73. Robert Paulus to George Chaffey, May 20, 1970, in Resolutions.

74. Chaffey to Paulus, May 22, 1970, in Resolutions.

75. Ravenswood City School District Resolution #22, May 25, 1970, in Resolutions.

76. SUHSD min., vol. 13, June 3, 1970, p. 209.

77. PAT, June 10, 1970.

78. Redwood City Tribune, June 23, 1970, in Resolutions.

79. A number of black community activists were listed, including Onetta M. Harris, Ron Drake, Reverend and Mrs. James Branch, Mrs. Sara E. Christopher, and Mr. and Mrs. James Conley--Ibid.

80. PAT, June 16, 1970. Results of the survey on the question of busing yielded approximately the same ratio of opponents to supporters (4-1) as did the positions on this question by the 54 speakers who testified at a hearing on the matter of desegregation a week before the board intended to make a decision--see SUHSD min., vol. 13, June 15, 1970, pp. 213-214.

81. Sequoia Union High School District, "Preliminary Report," June 12, 1970, pp. 2-3, in HEW Grant Proposal E911 File, SUHSD.
82. Ibid., p. 7.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., p. 7. In addition, 254 agreed with the Brown decision, while only 31 disagreed; 240 disagreed that integration would "lower the moral climate of the schools," as opposed to 52 who agreed; and 232 disagreed that "integration will threaten education standards," while 70 agreed--Ibid., pp. 8-10.
85. Ibid., p. 8.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid. p. 9.
88. Ibid., p. 11
89. Ibid., p. 10.
90. Ibid.
91. Asked what was most likely to happen in such an eventuality, 123 of those surveyed chose the category "protest groups," 69 picked "acceptance," and only 6 thought "enthusiastic acceptance" would occur. On the other hand, only 48 predicted violence and 17 a boycott by whites. Ibid., p. 11.
92. Floyd L. Pierce to George P. Chaffey, June 2, 1970, in District Attorney (hereafter DA) File, SUHSD.
93. George P. Chaffey to Floyd L. Pierce, June 5, 1970, in DA File.
94. Center for National Policy Review, Justice Delayed and Denied: HEW and Northern School Desegregation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University, 1974), p. 113.
95. SUHSD min., vol. 13, June 3, 1970, p. 208.
96. Lem Summey to George P. Chaffey, June 15, 1970.
97. Pierce to Chaffey, June 22, 1970, in DA File.

98. See J. Harvie Wilkinson III, From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1954-1978 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 197.
99. Justice Delayed and Denied, p. 25.
100. Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "Sequoia Union High School District Title VI Compliance Review," June 20, 1970, p. 2, DA File.
101. Ibid., p. 3.
102. For the abandonment of the Watkins site, see Chapter 1, notes 74 and 75.
103. Office for Civil Rights, "Compliance Review," p. 3.
104. See SUHSD min., vol. 7, July 24, 1957, p. 7.
105. See Office for Civil Rights, "Compliance Review," pp. 8-11 for discussion of the various partial measures the District employed to relieve segregation.
106. Ibid., p. 12.
107. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
108. Ibid., p. 4.
109. Ibid., p. 5.
110. Sequoia Union High School District, "Enrollment Projections for Attendance Areas in the Sequoia Union High School District," August 14, 1957, in Enrollment 57-58 File, SUHSD.
111. Ibid.
112. "Report by the County Master Plan Project of Sequoia Union High School District," November 7, 1957, in Enrollment 57-58 File.
113. Compliance Review, p. 14.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid., p. 15.
116. Ibid.: There were 30 black teachers in the District in 1968, as opposed to 7 in 1964. Presumably many of these new hires were just starting out.

117. PAT, June 24, 1970:

CHAPTER 6

THE ATTAINMENT OF VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION

Helen Kerwin had come a long way from the time she was one of the state's most vocal opponents of busing to achieve racial integration. In the early 1960s, she took her anti-busing advocacy before the State Board of Education. Now, aware that the forthcoming school board action would provoke conflict on an even greater scale than had existed in the preceding months, but aware as well that the Sequoia District was on the precipice of dramatic change, she "asked for the privilege of making the final motion...."¹ In a vote of 3-2, it was decided that all six schools would be desegregated and no school would have more than a 25% minority population. If voluntary transfers could not satisfy the guidelines--a strong likelihood given the unwillingness of whites to transfer into Ravenswood in the past--mandatory busing, based on a lottery system, would kick in.²

While the mandatory component of the desegregation plan ultimately would be abrogated, despite the opposition of the

Office for Civil Rights and grave concern expressed by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, the voluntary plan would effectively reduce the number of black students at Ravenswood from 95% to 51%. Previous efforts to draw white students into Ravenswood through open enrollment had brought negligible results. This chapter will argue that a major publicity effort by the district helped facilitate desegregation. But the key factor was the remaking of Ravenswood into a school attractive to counter-cultural white students. Such a transformation drew whites to Ravenswood in large numbers and at the same time encouraged blacks to leave the school by weakening their identification with it. Finally, the threat of legal action against the board maintained pressure on a new, anti-busing majority to continue strenuous support of the voluntary desegregation program.

From the beginning, Kerwin anticipated resistance to the board's decision to undertake desegregation. She tried to soften opposition by articulating and responding to residents' fears:

The Board recognizes that there are concerns in the District community over desegregation. These concerns center around fears that educational opportunities for some students may be lessened, that physical violence may increase, that some students may suffer from discrimination by teachers and other students, and that students may be inconvenienced by transportation problems on occasion.

The Board wishes to respond to these concerns in a positive manner. It is its firm intention that

educational opportunities at all schools are steadily improved. The Board further intends to provide sufficient campus supervision to provide for the safety and welfare of students. The District will integrate the staffs of all schools and continue teacher education and other programs which will promote sympathetic[,] friendly treatment of all members of the school community and which will facilitate learning by all students.³

It is not clear what effect these comments had on residents of the district, but the first problem of the board was not to face opponents of desegregation, but to meet the objections of the Office for Civil Rights which wanted the plan to be implemented immediately.

OCR Relents

Writing to regional counsel Floyd Pierce two days after the passage of the desegregation plan, Superintendent Chaffey remonstrated, "I hope you will realize that the responsibilities in any district such as ours to move with desegregation are very heavy and that they cannot and will not be done overnight. I hope you will realize after studying the (10) proposals that are enclosed, that it would be unreasonable and impractical to seek to accomplish desegregation between now and September 1970."⁴ Pierce, however, remained unmoved and as late as August pointed out once more that the district was responsible for segregated conditions. "In light of this," he stated, "we again urge you to consider a September implementation date for your intended plan to eliminate the racial identifiability of

Ravenswood High School."⁵ Less than pleased with this message Chaffey shot back: "To depart from the time lines now that have been communicated to the total community for the past 13 months would be to destroy the faith and confidence of the citizenry in the Board of Trustees itself."⁶ Finally, three months after school had begun, Pierce relented. He approved the desegregation plan for the following year with the stipulation that none of the schools in the future would be allowed to transcend the 25% ceiling on minority enrollment. Dramatically altering the tone of his previous letters Pierce wrote:

Based on the assumption that we have interpreted your plans correctly, we commend you, your school board and your staff for the leadership you are providing in eliminating the effects of past discriminatory practices and the steps you are taking to provide equal educational opportunities for all of the students of the Sequoia Union High School District.⁷

While OCR was placated, this was not the end of its scrutiny of the Sequoia District.

Blacks Protest

Several days after the decision to desegregate, the Palo Alto Times wrote an editorial approving the plan. It warned, however, that there would be continuing opposition from San Carlos, Belmont, and perhaps East Palo Alto.⁸ During the remainder of the year, much of the protest actually emanated from East Palo Altans or people closely affiliated with the East Palo Alto community. Clearly, the

burden of desegregation was going to be put on the black community. In order to bring the minority population of Ravenswood down to 25%, 550 black students would be required to transfer elsewhere.⁹ On the other hand, not only would the burden on whites be distributed throughout the district population, but mandatory transfer would only take place for whites if there were too few volunteers--a situation that would not be clarified until the spring.

Almost immediately after the plan was approved, Gertrude Wilks criticized it. For a long time one of the most militant supporters of desegregation, she had come to be skeptical of the Sneak-Out program she had created to give black students a chance to get an education in Palo Alto. Reflecting on the experience of those who had participated in the program, she said:

Every day it was a fight for the black students. They were academically prepared but emotionally, they were tied up inside. There was no respect for them--it was inhuman. It will be the same for our kids in Woodside and San Carlos--they will be wasted.¹⁰

The matter of sensitivity to minority students in overwhelmingly white institutions was an important one that could prove intractable even with an abundance of good intentions and inservice training on race relations.

While it is not clear that the majority of Ravenswood students immediately responded as negatively as Wilks to the desegregation plan, they soon followed suit. Andre Lavalay represented Ravenswood on the Student Advisory Council--an

organization designed both to disseminate information about desegregation to students in the area high schools and to provide feedback to school officials on students' mood. As of late September 1970, Lavalay believed that most Ravenswood students found the desegregation plan acceptable.¹¹ He, however, had either incorrectly felt the pulse of student opinion or it had changed in a period of weeks. In October, the Redwood City Tribune stated, "Strong resistance to the Sequoia Union High School District's desegregation plans was building today among Ravenswood High School students and in the East Palo Alto community."¹² According to the article, a Black Student Union was being formed to fight the plan. The paper also quoted Ravenswood Principal, Earl Menneweather, who explained students' hostility to the forthcoming transformation of their high school: "They are reluctant to have the school broken up. They have developed a dignity and pride--they're aware of a new unity. They like what they have done for themselves."¹³ By the time the Student Advisory Committee met with the board in late November, Lavalay had changed his assessment. According to the minutes, he "felt the reaction of students was generally very negative. It was his feeling that most students at Ravenswood did not want to leave their community and preferred to stay there to finish school."¹⁴

As students at Ravenswood planned to organize against the terms of the desegregation plan, the East Palo Alto

Municipal Council expressed its antipathy to the changes to take place at Ravenswood. By a vote of 4-0 it passed the following resolution: "This action deals unfairly with the community. This action will eliminate all vestiges of 'community control' from Ravenswood High School while retaining such 'community control' in the other schools of the district."¹⁵ Similar sentiments were expressed by speakers at a November 4 board meeting.¹⁶ In addition, Barbara Christiani, the only white teacher at Nairobi High School, wrote an article which asserted that "many Black East Palo Altans and students alike realize what they will be losing--they want to hang on to their only corner of self-determination."¹⁷ She also pointed out an irony recognized by many East Palo Altans, "A lot of district effort is going into making Ravenswood a top school next year now that it will be largely white."¹⁸

The selection of Emmett Lynch, a white man, to the position of vice principal at Ravenswood, symbolized this loss of control over a school that no longer would be identifiably black. Although Lynch met with Mothers for Equal Education to discuss plans to hire a black principal for Ravenswood, they were unimpressed. According to the Redwood City Tribune, "The mothers told Lynch they feel his appointment is an insult to the black community...."¹⁹ And with a prescient sense of whom a desegregated Ravenswood

would attract, Gertrude Wilks intoned, "And we don't want the liberals, radicals and hippies that will be coming in."²⁰

The Campaign for White Support

While the desegregation plan raised considerable concern in the black community, it was largely articulated through correspondence or speaking before the Board of Trustees. The direct action tactics of previous years had fallen into disuse. This absence of disruption by blacks as well as school leaders' experience-based prediction that a number of Ravenswood students would voluntarily leave the school--despite many East Palo Altans' misgivings about the plan--made it possible for Sequoia officials to focus on the district's white majority, whom it would energetically try to sell the merits of desegregation. In what would become an extraordinary effort on the part of school leaders, they undertook a multi-faceted campaign to sway the white population of the district. Appeals were made to idealism, to practicality, to the absence of danger, and to the attractiveness of the programs being created at Ravenswood. In an article entitled, "Voluntary Transfers--Highest Priority," Superintendent Chaffey underscored a major purpose of this effort: "What a boost it would be to our detailed planning for improving the quality of education if racial balance could be accomplished in all schools on a

voluntary basis."²¹ Such an outcome would dramatically weaken white opposition.

One significant vehicle for publicizing the unfolding desegregation effort was the Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter. The October 1970 issue reported on a study of the voluntary transfer program to date. It found that 86.5% of parents whose children had participated in the program thought it should continue. A similar sentiment was expressed by 56% of parents whose children resided in the attendance areas of the host schools. In addition, 20% of the latter allowed that they would permit their children to transfer to Ravenswood if they desired to do so and 8.3% would approve mandatory transfer to Ravenswood. The district saw in such figures "a basis of support for the district plans for desegregation...."²² Clearly, the report did not merely have factual intent, it was also an effort to encourage compliance with the desegregation plan based on the understanding that considerable support existed already. At the same time, the statistics permitted a negative reading. It must not have been lost on school officials that 80% of parents would remain unswayed by their children's desire to attend Ravenswood and that more than 90% objected to mandatory busing. Thus, it was incumbent on educators to make the school as attractive as possible.

In a letter to all eighth grade students in the district, Superintendent Chaffey pointed out that Ravenswood

would become predominantly white, that it would offer a new curriculum, and that it "should be a different, exciting place to study."²³ Chaffey made a moral appeal as well. "We live in a multicultural world," he said, "a world where different races must live and work together. That's why the Board of Trustees has provided this plan to bring students of all races and ethnic groups together in their schools."²⁴

Since some students failed to pass their letters on to their parents, Chaffey wrote to the latter several weeks later. He articulated the practical dimension of the desegregation program by pointing out it would relieve overcrowding at three of the high schools, but he also made it clear that equality was a fundamental goal. Accordingly he wrote, "The Board's decision was based on the belief that desegregation is necessary before all students can be guaranteed equality of educational opportunity and receive a quality education."²⁵ A follow-up letter to parents of students at all high schools except Ravenswood and Menlo-Atherton contained the district's new logo depicting black and white children unified by a geometric design. The message, an effort to solicit voluntary transfers, began by saying, "The late Dr. Martin Luther King stated that at the rate of speed desegregation is progressing, it will be the year 2000 A.D. before it is accomplished."²⁶ And in a similar request to parents of students at Menlo-Atherton, he invoked the authority of Charles Silberman:

Racial segregation is at least as damaging to white children as it is to black children....What makes integration crucial to this nation's future...is not so much what it does to raise academic achievement as what it contributes to the creation of a humane, decent and united society. That is what the public school's major purpose must be.²⁷

Perhaps the Superintendent's most elaborate statement appeared in an article entitled "Education: Key For Tomorrow." In it he expounded on black victimization and his personal belief in the need to remedy it:

In our society--our communities--we are concerned about the loss of individual identity. Then what hope does the Black child have who, for years, has not been viewed as an individual in his own right but rather as a part of a large group that has been rejected, discriminated against, and is still struggling for his human rights? How do we insure his freedom, his development, his opportunity?

I accept the fact that education is the answer to many things. I accept the fact that education, if it is to carry out that mission, will find itself increasingly in the political arena--in the arena of constant controversy.

I must believe in equality of educational opportunity if I believe in the goals of America. How does any community, any school district, provide equality of educational opportunity? It isn't easy!²⁸

From a statement of personal belief Chaffey went on to encourage his readers to share in his vision of the struggle by the district to create equality of opportunity:

It is a tough road, paved with bitterness, hostility, antagonism, uncertainty, threats. But if enough people really believe in the goals of America, if enough people really believe in the dignity and worth of the individual, if enough people really believe in public education, then our public schools will be integrated. They must be integrated. And America and the world will be better for it.²⁹

Chaffey was drawing from a millennial tradition that fueled school leaders' belief that they were engaged in an arduous, but worthy battle for democracy.³⁰

And though Chaffey's language was perhaps a bit overheated, a bit too grand, he was transforming a conventional rhetoric that equated democracy with the usual business of public schools to an expanded democratic vision that might require serious sacrifice: Chaffey and the pro-integrationist board members could lose their jobs, and white parents as well were being called upon to give up a bit of privilege to create a more just society.

Chaffey, however, had not reached the position of school superintendent merely through his ability to pen visionary rhetoric. He recognized that it was important to remind citizens of their idealism, but he also wanted to assuage their fears. The Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter, therefore, ran an article entitled "No Student Is Alone," which affirmed that every student would have a constellation of people "with whom he can share his important feelings, his frustrations, and his triumphs."³¹ The subsequent issue included an article by Jeanette Garrety, a white student whose message was clearly directed to whites' apprehensions of sharing an environment with blacks: "The very casual conversations that I have had with minority classmates," she related, "have shown me the folly in believing that all minority students are governed

by feelings of hatred for whites, and that they all think alike. Minority students do not all think alike, as white students do not all think alike. They are not all believers in the Black Panther creed, nor are they hesitant in their criticism of such a creed."³² Not only did minority students pose no threat to white students, but their presence at her high school (Sequoia) had improved rather than diluted the education there: "I am now educated not only in the wisdom found in books," she affirmed, "but in the intricacies of human relations."³³ She made it clear that she did not sympathize with militance: "I definitely object to the periodic list of 'demands' which arise from minority groups at Sequoia. I have been surprised, however, to discover the number of Blacks and Chicanos who also are often against these demands--or at least the manner in which they are presented."³⁴

Since Chaffey and other school officials thought it important to diminish white anxieties about desegregation, the board made modifications in the desegregation plan to make transfer less risky. In a 3-2 vote, with Trustee Robertson in a rare alliance with conservative Trustees Schneider and Chase, the board decided that students who elected to transfer could return to their home schools after one year rather than the minimum two year stint originally formulated.³⁵ Yet trustees voted in their traditional pattern, with Robertson, Kerwin, and Turner in the

majority, to allow the cancellation of transfers only when it did not increase minority percentages above 25% in any school and did not create overcrowding.³⁶ In the same 3-2 configuration it was agreed to allow Ravenswood to have 35-40% minority enrollment for 1971-72 only, a move that would increase the chances of achieving desegregation without requiring busing.³⁷

The Lure of a New Ravenswood

In addition to nurturing idealism and minimizing fear around desegregation, it was incumbent on Chaffey and his staff to make Ravenswood sufficiently attractive that white students would be willing to act on their egalitarian values. In pursuing this effort, students' ideas were solicited through the Student Advisory Committee, which generated informal discussions as well as a questionnaire.³⁸ By early February, unique aspects of the "new school" at Ravenswood were disseminated. Writing in the Redwood City Tribune, Bill Shilstone breathlessly presented an overview of teachers' plans. "Thirty of the best teachers in the Sequoia Union High School District," he exclaimed, "are working feverishly to create an educational environment that will make a student's mouth water."³⁹ He mentioned Phil Arnot, who was transferring from Carlmont High School and would bring his wilderness trips to Ravenswood. These would not merely be recreational since "biology and art lessons

will be learned on the trail."⁴⁰ Shilstone also mentioned Carla Crippen's program of recreational leadership and Joan Doyle's course in aeronautics. All three teachers were bringing unconventional activities to a school whose raison d'etre would be innovation.

Sequoia officials adopted a tone similar to Shilstone's. One catalogued the following:

Resource centers, independent study, mini-courses, partial credit, auditing--these are all part of it. There will be a lot of community involvement. The students will use their own communities and the whole Sequoia District community as a lab. We'll have a child day care center. The art teachers plan to set up a gallery in which community people can display and sell their paintings. We're going to take advantage of the location to set up environmental studies programs.⁴¹

While such plans could be dismissed as the facile employment of jargon that was "in" during the late 1960s and early 1970s, they also represented, it could be argued, a valid attempt to overcome the impersonal treatment of students and the formalized curricula that characterized traditional schools. The March issue of the Sequoia Newsletter emphasized the involvement of "students, parents, and community from the beginning, in cooperatively developing plans for the new school."⁴² In addition, students would be placed in "houses" of about 100 with four to six teachers affiliated with each. These would be central to developing intimacy and connectedness:

Our plans are to provide time in the schedule, perhaps a day a week, for houses to meet and openly discuss academic and social problems students face as

individuals or as groups; to discuss problems which the school faces; to engage in inter- and intra-house sports; to enable private counseling and programming; to plan for improvement in the school program; and to plan for positive involvement in the communities....The house plan, this one or some modified form of it, offers students more opportunity for experience in a variety of democratic behaviors than is possible in the usual "authoritative" school structure.⁴³

The newsletter further held that "Close personal relationships, positive attitudes toward school, and the development of a sense of individual worth are hardly compatible with a grading system that encourages unrealistic group competition, tensions and a feeling of failure."⁴⁴ Consequently, a method of evaluation would be sought that would reward achievement without penalizing lack of success.

While a picture of cooperative endeavor was being limned, Ravenswood would also create a supportive atmosphere for self-reliance: "Wherever possible, it will be our desire to allow for as much self-direction as student maturity and resources allow, for we believe that the development of self-motivation and responsibility for one's own learning is the most significant kind of training a student can have."⁴⁵ In harmony with this perspective, there would be an extraordinary array of courses--some individualized, some minicourses, some for partial credit, some independent study, as well as full semester courses. Language arts alone would include:

college preparation expository writing, creative writing, reading for speed and comprehension,

semantics, linguistics, speech, journalism, literature before Shakespeare to after Dylan, ethnic literature and studies, modern media and film studies, drama, communications, problem-solving courses exploring concepts of contemporary interest, and any of these as advanced-standing courses.⁴⁶

In all departments a strenuous attempt would be made to generate courses that would appeal to teenagers because they were topical or adventurous or both. In social studies, which would develop skills in "inquiry and analysis, hypothesis testing, problem-solving, communication, and organization,"⁴⁷ there would not only be classes in sociology and psychology, but also courses in environmental studies, urban problems, cultural studies, and, oddly, wilderness trips.⁴⁸ Foreign language courses would include opportunities to converse with native speakers, six-week exploratory courses, and the possibility of immersion classes in foreign countries during summer.⁴⁹ Performing arts would include "instruction in the development of electronic music utilizing a Moog synthesizer."⁵⁰ And courses in aeronautics would not only include "practical experience in jet and rotary engine mechanics"⁵¹ and guest speakers knowledgeable about sky diving and ballooning, but promised also was "practical experience in flying that will include short flights and 100-mile three-legged flights that will be planned, plotted, and navigated by the students."⁵²

In addition to the Newsletter coverage of New School programming, a brochure was put out that in a question and

answer format covered much the same material. This was a splendid document. It talked of innovation without sounding flaky. In fact, it conveyed a sense that this experimental school was a profoundly serious undertaking. The brochure convincingly answered questions about what made the New School different from the others, about how parents could get involved, about whether there would be classes (the answer was for the most part, yes), whether time would be spent on the development of skills (yes again), and whether students would be safe (yes).⁵³

By speaking intelligently to the questions parents were likely to ask, the brochure lent a sense of coherence to an effort that sounded like chaos when presented in the Newsletter. Nonetheless, looking at these offerings from the vantage point of the 1980s, the New School does seem a bit like an educational candy store filled with high-caloric, low protein confections. Certainly a course that focused on the moog synthesizer or gave Shakespeare and Dylan equal billing seems absurd today. But it is too facile to see such apparent excesses as doing integral damage to the educational enterprise.⁵⁴ Rather than simply an attempt to cater to the vulgar interests of affluent young people, the innovations at the Ravenswood New School could be seen as an attempt to transcend an inherited curriculum and methodology whose rationale had become platitudinous and whose substance failed to intersect with

the interests and values of many youth. At the same time, this effort to tailor the educational experience to whites jeopardized the educational opportunities of blacks. In their eagerness to draw whites to Ravenswood, school leaders lost sight of this.

As educators in the district went about creating a new image for Ravenswood, they choreographed an extraordinary effort to get the word out to students and their parents. In addition to the letters sent by the Superintendent, the articles in the Newsletter, and the New High School Brochure, the Student Advisory Committee publicized the New School, and most high schools established centers providing information about it. Furthermore, the Integrated Education Steering Committee, chaired by Chaffey's administrative assistant Merle Fruëhling, instituted a desegregation information hotline, organized faculty teams from the New School 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.☞☞

Once students had agreed to transfer into the New School, efforts were made to involve them in the undertaking. Clarence Cryer, who replaced Earl Menneweather as principal, invited them to the high school on March 24. He wrote, "We plan to present many of the ideas and programs

for September and want to take this opportunity to meet you and have you meet us. After a short presentation, we will break into smaller groups to seek your comments, questions, and ideas.⁵⁵ Additional meetings were held in April and early May to "help plan and refine [the] curriculum...."⁵⁷ Students were invited "to bring guitars, banjos, etc."⁵⁸ And an outing was planned for the end of May. Students and staff would hike from Mt. Tamalpais to Stinson Beach, discuss a human relations curriculum, and participate in a "clean up the beaches drive."⁵⁹

Resistance to Mandatory Busing

The campaign to encourage voluntary transfer met with success that was astounding, compared with what had taken place in past years. Hundreds of white students had agreed to come to Ravenswood and a large number of black students in the Ravenswood attendance area elected to go elsewhere. This effort brought a letter from the Office for Civil Rights, commending everyone in the district for complying with the law voluntarily.⁶⁰ The campaign, however, did not completely supplant the need to transfer additional students by mandate. Still, the number required to transfer was merely 329, of which 95 were black students to be transferred to Woodside. But the result was furor.⁶¹

Grave concern came from some quarters in East Palo Alto. Gelsomina Becks eloquently voiced the injustice of

putting so many resources into Ravenswood at the same time that some black students were being forced out of the school:

First, from a general point of view, we feel that the mandatory transfer of the 95 black students from Ravenswood to Woodside is an insult to the children, parents, and black community. East Palo Alto citizens have been fighting for many years to get the Sequoia District to integrate Ravenswood and produce an academic atmosphere at our school equal to that of other district schools. Now that we no longer feel that desegregation is necessarily the answer to meaningful education, the Sequoia District is creating a "new" school at Ravenswood, with exciting, creative, innovative programs and many excellent teachers--not for the benefit of the black students who have needed better education for so many years, but to attract white students in order to integrate.⁶²

Becks' daughter, Ava, was the only black student in eighth grade at the Peninsula School. Most of her classmates chose to attend Ravenswood, which bore marked similarities to the educational program at Peninsula, but Ava was transferred to Woodside.⁶³

While the inequity inherent in pouring such great resources into Ravenswood now that it was to be predominantly white was not lost on East Palo Alto residents, they did not initiate organized resistance to mandatory transfer. Certainly, a general community acceptance of desegregation made it difficult to organize around the unjust particulars of the plan. Furthermore, maintaining a 40% black population at Ravenswood minimized the number of students who faced mandatory transfer. Thus, most blacks had the option of staying at Ravenswood or

attending one of the historically white high schools. Finally, though it is likely that the new Ravenswood, designed as it was for affluent whites with countercultural tendencies, appealed only to a few blacks like Ava Becks, the school's location in East Palo Alto at least made some accountability to the community possible. In any case, despite a number of expressions of anger, blacks generally acquiesced to the proposed changes. An active role against desegregation fell solely to conservative whites.

The success of voluntary desegregation created a minimal burden of mandatory busing on the white community. Of approximately 10,000 white students in the district, 147 were assigned to Menlo-Atherton, a majority white school that contained many of the most affluent students in the district, and merely 87 students were sent to Ravenswood in order to make it 60% white. While resistance had begun long before it was clear that voluntary desegregation would be so successful, opposition continued and became more potent after mandatory assignments were made. As early as August of 1970, a recall campaign was organized by Jack Wilson of Redwood City. Although Trustees Kerwin, Robertson, and Turner had supported the desegregation plan, Wilson only wanted to recall the first two, since he felt "it's good to have colored people on the board."⁶⁴ Recall would have required 20,000 signatures, a number that was not attained;

however, two of the three supporters of the plan--Kerwin and Turner--would come up for reelection in the spring.

By January of 1970 George Kerska of Parents For Neighborhood Schools was maneuvering to get exemptions from mandatory transfer. Borrowing from the counterculture, he made use of the term "conscientious objector" for a purpose war resisters would not likely have recognized. He wanted a form with the following message to be distributed throughout the district:

I _____ hereby request that my name be removed from random computer selection for student assignment, on the grounds that I am a conscientious objector to assignment or transfer away from my neighborhood school for the reason that I have a strong moral conviction in favor of the concept of Neighborhood Schools.⁶⁵

Kerska held that random selection would be more fair if the pool were only "composed of those students who do not have strong feelings about neighborhood schools," thus rescuing the board from being "punitive in it's [sic] actions."⁶⁶ Even the conservative board members, however, did not go along with this plan. It was defeated unanimously on the motion of Schneider with a second from Chase.⁶⁷

Once mandatory transfer was enacted, letters flooded in seeking exemptions for students. The rationales for many were more bizarre than Kerska's scheme of conscientious objectors. One letter from parents whose son went to school at San Carlos complained that he was one of the youngest in his class and transferring to Ravenswood would not only

adversely affect his grades, but also "his competitive athletic abilities would be smothered as he tried to cope with a totally new environment. (Sports are a very important part of our family life.)"⁶⁸ Another parent of a San Carlos High School student cited as one reason for an exemption the fact that his son was born prematurely. In addition, this parent claimed that "Mitchell, undergoing mental turmoil and anguish[,] has not applied himself as well [as his siblings] due to the literature of 'Forced Busing'...."⁶⁹ Mitchell apparently was maintaining a grade average of 3.1. Many other letters sought exemptions based on the threat of busing to students' physical or mental health. In one case, it was the emotional health of a mother that apparently was at stake, and a doctor tried to intercede on her behalf. He wrote that she "is suffering from extreme anxiety as a result of the ruling that her son is to be bussed to Ravenswood High School next fall. From the standpoint of the patient's emotional health I would like to recommend that every consideration be given to allowing her son to attend their local high school."⁷⁰

Not all of the letters requesting exemptions were bizarre, of course. One, for instance, with good reason expressed fear that mandatory busing would be cancelled, that Ravenswood again would become segregated. Under such circumstances the writers of the letter would want their daughters to return to their neighborhood school.⁷¹ Yet

given the large number of odd rationales and the origin of most of them in Belmont or San Carlos, one wonders whether these were the result of independent initiative or perhaps whether their authors were coached by Parents For Neighborhood Schools.

While a number of the letters received by the district requested exemptions for students, some proposed outright defiance. A couple from Belmont maintained that "we will not allow, under any circumstances, for our daughter to be transferred from Carlmont."⁷² Another writer elevated resistance to a general principle. In a letter signed "Liberty or Death," he wrote, "The parents have the RIGHT to CHOOSE as long as this country is a FREE country."⁷³ Superintendent Chaffey's responses to most of these letters was laconic and unyielding. He typically would restate the ruling of the school board. In the case of the "Liberty or Death" missive, however, he penned a more personal rejoinder:

I do not support a police state to which you made reference in your letter. I do support law and order with justice. To seek racial justice in our schools seems to be right and fair and just. I believe we can build a stronger educational system and through education a stronger society for all people.⁷⁴

Chaffey was not one to cower in the face of criticism, nor was he liberal in granting appeals. By April 21 appeals had been granted in only 26 cases out of what originally were 189 protests.⁷⁵

More than half of those selected for mandatory transfer had appeals made in their behalf, but it is not clear to what extent these were made on individual initiative or were stimulated by an organized effort. Evidence is lacking that would shed some light on how influential was Parents For Neighborhood Schools or the degree to which it seriously reached out to its natural constituency in Belmont and San Carlos to reverse the trend toward desegregation. Organized or not, however, it is clear that opposition to the desegregation plan was significant and went far beyond a concern with mandatory busing--which affected few--to a concern with having significant numbers of minority students in high schools that previously were virtually all-white.

This opposition came to a head in the April 1971 school board elections. Trustee Thomas Turner, who had been appointed to replace Henry Organ, chose not to seek election. Helen Kerwin and her running mate, Benjamin Law, ran against Percy Roberts of Woodside and William Jordan of San Carlos. The latter two, who vowed to cancel the mandatory component of the desegregation plan, won decisively. Roberts and Jordan got greatest support from San Carlos, Belmont, and Redwood City. Kerwin, who was a distant third, drew support from Menlo Park, Portola Valley, and East Palo Alto. Kerwin had been on the board for 15 years. At one time the district's most outspoken critic of

busing, she now stated, "I am disappointed in a community that evidences as much racism as this one has."⁷⁶

Mandatory Busing is Overturned

The election results meant that a 4-1 majority opposed the desegregation plan. The matter came up at the board meeting of May 5 and Trustee Robertson spoke out against changing the plan. According to the minutes, "It was his opinion that such action would be unlawful, immoral and unsound."⁷⁷ Chase, on the other hand, argued that abolishing the mandatory provision would not discourage students who had voluntarily transferred since racial ratios would not significantly change. He also maintained that those students who had been required to attend Menlo-Atherton or Ravenswood would not go anyway.⁷⁸ Because the new trustees had not yet been seated, Schneider's motion to terminate mandatory busing was tabled by a 3-2 margin, and it was agreed that advice would be solicited from HEW and the district attorney on the propriety of termination.⁷⁹

A letter from Floyd Pierce of OCR made it clear that the agency would not treat favorably abandonment of the mandatory element of the desegregation plan. He maintained that "over-utilization of space in non-minority schools and underutilization of space in schools with a substantial number of minorities, Ravenswood and Menlo-Atherton, is significant evidence of de jure segregation by the District

under criteria set forth in the Swann decision."¹⁰ The result, believed Pierce, was "an obligation to desegregate" and to "use all available techniques to accomplish such desegregation."¹¹ In addition, Keith Sorenson, District Attorney of San Mateo County, warned Jack Robertson about rescinding mandatory busing. He believed that "such action would very likely constitute a legislative act which would result in de jure segregation by perpetuating and aggravating an existing condition of segregation in violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution."¹²

Once the new board was installed, however, the majority of trustees acted as if they were unswayed by the district attorney's opinion. According to the minutes of the July 7th meeting, "The four Board members indicated that they had a mandate from the electorate and that the threat of pending legal action would not deter them from voting in opposition to the random selection phase of the desegregation plan."¹³ First, 24 speakers, none of whom was from East Palo Alto, addressed a crowd of some 500 that, according to the Redwood City Tribune, was evenly divided on the question. Then, the board proceeded to dismember key aspects of the plan. In votes that repeatedly left Jack Robertson the only dissenter, the trustees abandoned the ceiling on overcrowding, set a 25% minority population at each school as a guideline only (with a 40% guideline for Ravenswood

during 1971-72), and abolished mandatory transfer.⁶⁴

Among those who congratulated the board for its good judgement was, predictably, George Kerska. Writing under the letterhead of Parents for Neighborhood Schools, he made the following statement:

We wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for your stand on the matter of forced transfer.

It is a great day when the people are represented by a four member majority in the board of trustees.

We deeply admire your courage in this fight for freedom and the rights of parents and children to decide their own destiny.

Had this arbitrary and ill conceived forced transfer plan been allowed to stand, what other freedom would [sic] the social planners take from us next?⁶⁵

Kerska's glowing sense of what had transpired was not shared, however, by a number of people. Jack Robertson, who had repeatedly cast the one dissenting vote, was furious. He called the decision "hypocrisy" since the board would not have had to abandon the mandatory back up plan if, as they averred, they were confident that voluntary desegregation would take place.⁶⁶ Others, including the Sequoia District Teachers Association, the League of Women Voters, and 63 parents and students, were sufficiently upset that they took the matter to the U.S. District Court, seeking suspension of the new decision through a preliminary injunction.⁶⁷ District Attorney Keith Sorensen, maintaining his position that terminating the mandatory part of the desegregation

plan was illegal, refused to represent the Sequoia District in the case.⁸⁹ And Floyd Pierce announced to Chaffey, "We have no alternative but to recommend to our Washington Office that enforcement action be initiated."⁹⁰

Some evidence suggests that there was dissatisfaction with the decision on the part of administrators in the district, including the superintendent. Chaffey, for example, responded rather negatively to a letter of someone who praised the board's decision:

In you letter dated July 16, 1971, you indicated your pleasure with the action taken by the board of trustees in suspending the mandatory transfer portion of the desegregation plan. You also expressed your full support of the voluntary program. Perhaps only time will tell whether desegregation in this district or in any other district of any size can really be accomplished on a voluntary basis.⁹¹

If Chaffey had doubts about the rescission, he nonetheless would support the decision in court.⁹² Other administrators, apparently, were willing to side with the integrationist plaintiffs. In a letter to legal counsel, Chaffey wrote, "I have been advised that several administrators at the school level have been requested and have agreed to sign affidavits in behalf of the case of the plaintiffs, said affidavits to be filed with the court."⁹³ Chaffey wanted to know the propriety of such behavior and found "it difficult to give a clear-cut answer."⁹⁴ The district files contain no response to his query.

Though the board decision left many people

dissatisfied, there was no groundswell of opposition. Only a decision granting the preliminary injunction could restore the mandatory part of the desegregation plan. On the other hand, a favorable decision for the board would not prevent plaintiffs from bringing their case to trial. With this in mind, Dennis Hession, the attorney hired by the board, warned that the voluntary program must succeed. "It has become increasingly important," he stated, "that the voluntary program and the 'new' school receive the utmost energy and attention....The indicators for success, and the actual success, of this program are a major part of our legal defense."⁹⁴

In all likelihood the concern expressed by Hession motivated the board to take up the matter of boundary changes at its meeting of July 21. It considered alterations that would put all schools at full capacity and remove overcrowding. This meant that Ravenswood's attendance area would expand to include more white students, and it prompted resistance from whites who thought they might be affected by the change. One petition from Ladera contained 11 signatures; another from Ladera included 155; and one from Linfield Oaks had 264.⁹⁵ While the trustees then dropped discussion of the matter for one year,⁹⁶ they continued to encourage voluntary transfer, permitting it until the first day of school.⁹⁷

Gomperts v. Chase

The plaintiffs in Gomperts v. Chase sought an injunction that would restore all the features of the desegregation plan promulgated in 1970. Their complaint largely mirrored the findings of the Office for Civil Rights fourteen months earlier. It noted that Ravenswood was 94% black and had 734 of the 1582 black students in the district. It pointed out that with the exception of Menlo-Atherton, which was 19.7% black, the percentages at the other schools in the district were tiny--3.8 at Carlmont, 2.4 at Woodside, 4.2 at San Carlos, and 9 at Sequoia.⁹⁹ The complaint contended it was not accidental that Ravenswood was constructed at a site "which the District knew, or should have known, would ultimately become a black, racially segregated area."⁹⁹ It further argued that minority teachers had been disproportionately assigned to Ravenswood,¹⁰⁰ and that the quality of education was inferior to that of other schools in the district. Racial isolation, it maintained, inflicts "psychological and emotional harm and cultural and social deprivation to all of the District's students, majority as well as minority."¹⁰¹ It also argued that racial isolation "assisted by the racial assignment of employees and the systematic assignment of less experienced employees to Ravenswood, causes low academic achievement of those students."¹⁰²

The litigants cited a number of cases to buttress their

arguments. For instance, they pointed to Branche v. Board of Education of the Town of Hemstead and Jackson v. Pasadena City School District, to show that some courts found the mere existence of racial separation indicative of inequality.¹⁰³ They also made reference to Swann which found the existence of racially identifiable school staffs to be a violation of the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause.¹⁰⁴ But they put greatest confidence in Keyes. In that 1969 federal case that was in part affirmed by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1971, the Denver school board was found guilty of de jure segregation based on the creation of a school with attendance boundaries that corresponded with an area of black residence¹⁰⁵ and the abandonment of a desegregation plan which would have remedied this.¹⁰⁶

Dennis Hession, attorney for the Sequoia District, emphasized Keyes as well. He pointed out that the decision had found the school district in question had created segregation; consequently the rescission of its integration plan exacerbated a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, "In the present case the question of whether Sequoia has maintained and now maintains a segregated system, and the question of whether previous racial imbalances within Sequoia results from district action are disputed issues of facts requiring a hearing on the merits."¹⁰⁸ It was further pointed out that the

desegregation plan in Denver had been completely overturned, while the Sequoia plan was merely altered and voluntary desegregation was likely to succeed.¹⁰⁹ In addition, an affidavit by school board president Charles Chase traced the various boundary changes made in the past to foster desegregation.¹¹⁰ Chase also argued that the disproportionate number of minority teachers at Ravenswood "was the result of demands from the black community for faculty capable of relating to the black student body and to the black community, and for minority employment at the school."¹¹¹

Judge Robert H. Schnacke's opinion was rendered in behalf of the defendants. He ruled that the segregation of Ravenswood resulted from change in the racial composition of the community rather than from school board action. This set Ravenswood apart from the school focused on in Keyes, since the latter, due to boundaries established by the board, opened to a student population that was nearly 90% black.¹¹² The judge also cited Keyes in his finding that the assignment of black teachers to black schools did not constitute "inappropriate state action or segregative desire...."¹¹³ Indeed, according to the judge, Keyes acknowledged "that, while questioned by some, there is a rational theory that black pupils relate more thoroughly to black teachers, that the image of the successful, well-educated black at the head of a class provides the best kind

of motivation for children, and that the black teacher has greater understanding of the black pupils' educational and social problems."¹¹⁴

The judge also accepted the school board's contention that the modified desegregation plan would reduce significantly the black-white ratio at Ravenswood.¹¹⁵ "The most that can be said for plaintiff's showing," he wrote, "is that the district has not moved as rapidly and effectively to adjust racial imbalance as plaintiffs would like. This, however, involves no constitutional deprivation."¹¹⁶ In the end, it was up to the plaintiffs not only to document the existence of segregation but also to show that it "has been planned, encouraged, fostered, desired, or in some way created by law or by administrative action under the color of law."¹¹⁷ This they were unable to do to the court's satisfaction.

At the appeals level the plaintiffs stressed segregatory intent of the Division of Highways that had built the Bayshore freeway, of bankers' lending policies, and of realtors' practice of blockbusting. Hession's response was that "These are far fetched efforts to turn the influx of black residents into the Ravenswood attendance zone into acts of de jure segregation. The plain fact is that nothing more than a population inflow occurred, which was not caused by any act of the Board."¹¹⁸ The appeal was denied because it was felt that existing factual disputes

"should not be resolved by summary procedure based on affidavits, especially since granting this motion would offer the ultimate relief sought by appellants in their action."¹¹⁹

With school to begin in only two weeks, appellants sought an injunction from the United States Supreme Court. They argued that if the Court refused to act immediately, "the harm occasioned thereby will be real and irreparable...."¹²⁰ Plaintiffs argued that the district now had what amounted to a freedom-of-choice plan. Already, they pointed out, most students randomly selected for transfer had elected to return to their home schools and thirty of the white students who had volunteered to attend Ravenswood had withdrawn by August 30.¹²¹ Emphasizing the failures of freedom-of-choice in the past, when only one white student transferred to Ravenswood for the 1969-1970 year and 20 the following year, they maintained that such a strategy had little hope of desegregating the district.¹²²

Defendants, on the other hand, argued not only that granting an injunction would create serious problems, since district schools would open in only a week, but that desegregation had been accomplished. This successful effort "included...more than eleven hundred (1100) students who have volunteered to attend a school other than their neighborhood school, thus, despite plaintiffs [sic] dire predictions, demonstrating the validity of the program

involving the operation of the former Ravenswood School in an almost one-hundred percent black neighborhood as a new and innovative high school."¹²³

Justice Douglas rendered the opinion for the Supreme Court. He believed that "this case....presents novel and unresolved issues of constitutional law."¹²⁴ Douglas saw in the case an innovative effort to define de jure segregation. It was an effort, as he saw it, not so much to blame the school district for creating segregation, but to hold accountable other state agencies:

- (1) California's Bayshore Freeway effectively isolated the Blacks and resulted in a separate and predominantly Black high school.
- (2) State planning groups fashioned and built the Black community around the school.
- (3) Realtors--licensed by the state--kept White property-White and "Black Property" Black.
- (4) Banks chartered by the state shaped the policies that handicapped Blacks in financing homes other than in Black ghettos.
- (5) Residential segregation, fostered by state enforced restrictive covenants, resulted in segregated schools.¹²⁵

While Douglas seemed impressed with this line of argument, he noted that the Court had not ruled that discrimination by non-educational agencies merited a finding of de jure segregation. On the other hand, he applied Plessy v. Ferguson, arguing that even de facto segregation is illegal if education is unequal. Citing the OCR and CTA reports of 1969, Douglas stated, "There is evidence in this case that Ravenswood High School--the one that is predominantly black--is an inferior school."¹²⁶ While he believed the

initial desegregation plan would remedy that problem, he felt that the modified plan "takes, at most, only minimal steps towards equalizing the educational opportunities of the district's high schools."¹²⁷ Justice Douglas admitted that "the remedies, if any, that are available where school segregation is de facto and not de jure are not yet clear."¹²⁸ He nonetheless felt an injunction was warranted, but school was to begin only three days later. Consequently, he said, "I have, therefore, reluctantly concluded that the lateness of the hour makes it inappropriate for me to grant the interim relief."¹²⁹ Although a trial was anticipated within six months, it never took place. In March of 1973 U.S. District Judge Robert Schnacke dismissed the case "for lack of prosecution."¹³⁰

While the District Court had read no intent to discriminate in the same record the Office For Civil Rights had found culpable, a reading by the Court that had been more sensitive to racial injustice ironically would have engendered a remedy inimical to the interests of many blacks. Widespread support for desegregation did not necessarily translate into a desire for schools where blacks would be the minority and their influence likely muted.

It is not clear why opposition to the desegregation plan expressed by Gertrude Wilks, Ravenswood students, the East Palo Alto Municipal Council, and others did not result in the organized resistance predicted by the newspapers. In

part it could be that Wilks and other community organizers were primarily putting their energies into the private, black controlled Nairobi Schools. In part the relaxation of the 25% ceiling on black students meant that few would be required to transfer out, and with the abandonment of the plan none would be forced to leave. This might also have created the impression that the influx of whites would not eclipse black influence on the school. Perhaps most importantly, there were no longer clear symbols of injustice that might have inspired organized resistance. When a desire for desegregation had commanded virtually universal support from East Palo Alto residents, the high school and school board were such symbols. When students demanded more control of the school in 1968, the principal, various teachers, and the curriculum represented injustice. By the early 1970s, in contrast, no agreed upon symbols of injustice existed.

The voluntary desegregation program succeeded in transforming what had once been a vocationalized high school and later a school that bore the impress of black academic and cultural interests into an institution that in style and content conformed to the interests of affluent white youth. Despite the broadly held belief that desegregation was meant to benefit blacks, they had little influence on the process and arguably would be disadvantaged by the outcome.

1. Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.), vol. 13, June 24, 1970, p. 226.
2. For the most elaborate articulation of the plan, though several of its features were modified, see "Amended Plan 3," attached to Jack Robertson to Dr. George Chaffey, May 4, 1970 in Segregation-Integration Plans: Final Decision File. See also Palo Alto Times (hereafter PAT) August 11, 1970.
3. SUHSD min., June 24, 1970, p. 226.
4. George P. Chaffey to Floyd L. Pierce, June 26, 1970, in District Attorney (hereafter DA) File, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Calif. (hereafter SUHSD).
5. Pierce to Chaffey, August 7, 1970, in DA File.
6. Chaffey to Pierce, August 10, 1970, DA File.
7. Pierce to Chaffey, November 20, 1970, DA File.
8. PAT, June 27, 1970.
9. PAT, June 25, 1970.
10. PAT, June 27, 1970.
11. SUHSD min., vol. 13, September 23, 1970, p. 263.
12. Redwood City Tribune, October 23, 1970.
13. Ibid.
14. SUHSD min., vol. 13, November 24, 1970, p. 298.
15. Redwood City Tribune, October 23, 1970.
16. SUHSD min., vol. 13, November 4, 1970, p. 296.
17. Barbara Christiani, "Self-determination is Issue," Community House Newsletter, 14(November 1970):4.
18. Ibid., p. 4. See also statement of Robert Jacobs, paraphrased as saying, "If it is the plan to spend more money next year to make this a desirable school, why were these funds not available to improve the education at Ravenswood now." (SUHSD min., vol. 13, November 4, 1970, p. 285)

19. Redwood City Tribune, December 21, 1970.
20. Ibid.
21. Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 15(February 1971):1.
22. SUHSD Newsletter, 15(October 1970):2
23. George P. Chaffey to eighth grade students, December 7, 1970, DA File.
24. Ibid.
25. George P. Chaffey to Parents of the Sequoia Union High School District, January 4, 1971, DA File.
26. George P. Chaffey to Parents, January 12, 1971, DA File.
27. George P. Chaffey to Menlo-Atherton Parents, January 12, 1971, DA File.
28. "Education: Key For Tomorrow," Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 15(December 1970):2.
29. Ibid.
30. David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1982), pp. 116-117.
31. Unattributed, SUHSD Newsletter 15(December 1970):3.
32. Jeanette Garrety, "The Cosmopolitan High School," SUHSD Newsletter, 15(January 1971):4.
33. Ibid., p. 5.
34. Ibid.
35. SUHSD min., vol. 13, February 3, 1971, p. 321.
36. Ibid., p. 322.
37. Ibid.
38. See, for instance, SUHSD min., vol. 13, November 24, 1970, p. 298 and January 6, 1971, p. 309. Ravenswood, according to the latter source, did not participate in the survey of the Student Advisory Council.

39. Redwood City Tribune, February 8, 1971, p. 2.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 15(March 1971):2
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 3.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 4.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
53. New High School Brochure, n.a., n.d., no pagination.
54. For such a perspective, see especially Diane Ravitch, The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
55. See SUHSD Newsletter 15(January 1971):1 and SUHSD min., vol. 13, February 3, 1971, p. 321.
56. Clarence L. Cryer to Parents of Students who will attend Ravenswood, March 17, 1971, DA File.
57. Sequoia Union High School District News, April 13, 1971.
58. Ibid.
59. SUHSD News, May 6, 1971.
60. J. Stanley Pottinger to Dr. Chaffey, April 16, 1971, DA File.

61. See Chaffey to Pierce, March 18, 1971, DA File.
62. Gelsomina Becks to Dr. Thomas Stephens, March 19, 1971, in Random Selection File, SUHSD.
63. Ibid.
64. PAT, August 11, 1970.
65. Kerska to Chaffey, January 12, 1971, in Parents For Neighborhood Schools File, SUHSD.
66. Ibid.
67. SUHSD min., vol. 13, January 20, 1971, p. 315.
68. Norma and Gerald Erickson to Dr. Thomas Stephens, March 26, 1971, in Random Selection File.
69. Herb J. Lucas to Dr. Thomas Stephen, March 28, 1971, in Random Selection.
70. Jack Posnick M.D. to Whom It May Concern, June 28, 1971, in Random Selection.
71. Mr. and Mrs. Dean Skanderup to Chaffey, May 11, 1971, in Random Selection.
72. Clifford Freeland and Ruth Freeland to Board of Trustees, February 12, 1971, Random Selection.
73. Charles S. Powell to Chaffey, n.d., Random Selection.
74. Chaffey to Powell, March 22, 1971, Random Selection.
75. Eight appeals had been withdrawn and decisions made in 164 of the remaining cases. The vast majority of the appeals came from the northern part of the District. Thirty-one came from the families of Carlmont students who did not want to transfer to Menlo-Atherton and four had been approved. One hundred five emanated from San Carlos where students were to be transferred to Ravenswood or Menlo-Atherton. And in East Palo Alto there had been only 13 appeals from the 95 chosen for transfer--See SUHSD min., vol. 13, April 4, 1971, p. 352. Ultimately, however, 105 appeals would be accepted--See PAT, August 10, 1971.
76. PAT, April 2, 1971.
77. SUHSD min., vol. 13, May 5, 1971, p. 360.

78. Ibid., 360-361.
79. Ibid., p. 360.
80. Floyd L. Pierce to Jack Robertson, June 9, 1971, in Appendix B of Complaint, Gomperts v. Chase, No. C-71-1307 (N.D. Calif.).
81. Ibid.
82. Keith C. Sorenson to Jack Robertson, June 24, 1971, p. 1, Random Selection.
83. SUHSD min., vol. 14, July 7, 1971, p. 5.
84. Redwood City Tribune, July 8, 1971 and SUHSD min., vol. 14, July 7, 1971, pp. 6-8.
85. George Kerska to Charles E. Chase, July 18, 1971, in Parents For Neighborhood Schools File.
86. Redwood City Tribune, July 8, 1971.
87. See PAT, August 10, 1971 and discussion below.
88. Keith Sorenson to Board of Trustees, July 10, 1971 in Gomperts v. Chase (hereafter Gomperts) File, SUHSD.
89. Pierce to Chaffey, July 12, 1971 in HEW E-911 File, SUHSD.
90. Chaffey to J.H. Sims, July 26, 1971, Random Selection.
91. See Deposition of George P. Chaffey, March 1972, in Gomperts File.
92. Chaffey to Superintendent's Counsel, July 13, 1971, in Gomperts File.
93. Ibid.
94. Dennis Hession to School Board, July 15, 1971, in Gomperts.
95. SUHSD min., vol. 14, August 4, 1971, p. 24.
96. Ibid., July 28, 1971, p. 21. I assume that the petitions informed the decision to suspend the matter and that, therefore, they were generated prior to July 28, but were not reported on until August 4.

97. Ibid., p. 31. On the other hand, students who already had volunteered, could transfer out until school opened. Interestingly, only 38 in the latter category would do so--see Ibid., September 15, 1971, p. 45.

98. Complaint, Gomperts v. Chase, at 4.

99. Ibid., 7.

100. Ibid., 4.

101. Ibid., 8-9.

102. The Complaint demonstrated the relatively low achievement at Ravenswood by drawing on standardized achievement test results from the spring of 1971. Ravenswood students had a 9th percentile median reading score and 17th percentile math score, as opposed to percentiles of 55 and 61 at Carlmont, 56 and 66 at Menlo-Atherton, 57 and 67 at San Carlos, 50 and 62 at Sequoia, and 66 and 78 at Woodside--Ibid., p. 9.

103. Memorandum in Support of Motion for Preliminary Injunction, Gomperts, July 8, 1971, at 7.

104. Ibid., 6.

105. Ibid., 3.

106. Ibid., 9.

107. Memorandum in Opposition to Motion for Preliminary Injunction, Gomperts, n.d., at 1,2.

108. Ibid., 1.

109. Ibid., 6.

110. Chase Affidavit, Gomperts, July 13, 1971, at 2,3.

111. Ibid., 6-7.

112. Opinion and Order, Gomperts, July 13, 1971, at 1,4.

113. Ibid., 8.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid., 5.

116. Ibid., 8.

117. Ibid., 5. See also Gomperts v. Chase, 329 F. Supp. at 1195.
118. Memorandum in Opposition to Motion for Preliminary Injunction Pending Appeal, Gomperts v. Chase, no. 71-2204, U.S. Ct. of Appeals, 9th Circuit (N.D. Cal.), August 6, 1971, at 18.
119. Opinion, Gomperts v. Chase, U.S. Ct. of Appeals, Week of August 24.
120. Application for Injunction, U.S. Supreme Ct., October Term, 1971, at 3.
121. Ibid., 7.
122. Ibid., 8.
123. Memorandum in Opposition to Injunction, Gomperts. Supreme Court, at 2.
124. Gomperts, 404 U.S. 1237 (1971)
125. Ibid., 1239.
126. Ibid., 1240.
127. Ibid.
128. Ibid.
129. Ibid., 1241.
130. San Jose Mercury, September 15, 1971, p. 69; Dennis Hession to Board of Trustees, March 5, 1973, in Gomperts File.

CHAPTER 7

THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK STUDENTS UNDER VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION, 1971-1975

If racial balance were the hallmark of equal education, then the achievement of the district during the fall of 1971 would have been signal. Certainly, the accomplishment from an administrative point of view was exceptional. A high school whose attendance area included only 84 white students of high school age, a school that was 94% black the previous year despite a voluntary desegregation program, was now, due to hundreds of white transfers on a voluntary basis, only 51% black.¹ At the same time, three high schools with a negligible number of black students in their attendance areas now had become approximately 10% minority each.² A letter from Superintendent Chaffey to program officers at HEW noted the difficulties involved in creating this successful voluntary program. He also pointed out district efforts to conduct inservice training to meet the new challenges, to create multicultural programs to better speak

to the ethnic diversity in the district, and to organize students and families into block groups to ease the transition for voluntary transfers. Exercising understandable hyperbole, Chaffey stated, "The fact that nearly 700 of these [white students] have volunteered to Ravenswood in the heart of the black community is an accomplishment without duplication across the country."³

On the other hand, if we look at school desegregation from the point of view of blacks, a far different story emerges. In fact, an equation of racial balance with racial equality would not apply to the circumstances of black students from East Palo Alto. This chapter will argue that a transformed Ravenswood High School seriously eroded black students' efforts to impress their interests on the institution, and it further will hold that blacks attending other schools in the district experienced various forms of "second generation" discrimination that rendered equality illusory for many.

An Innovative Program

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.⁴ Courses were constructed out of 15 minutes 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 the final day was devoted to house activities.⁵ 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 Pompano Beach, the Virgos go to the museum, the Cancers go to Angel Island and the Leos go skating.⁶

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

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.⁷

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...."⁸

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.⁹

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."¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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,¹² 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."¹³ 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."¹⁴

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. Shilstone himself noted in his article that there were interracial tensions despite efforts through the house system 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."¹⁵ By early 1972 Principal Clarence Cryer expressed concern with the underrepresentation of minority students in school life generally, while another staff member pointed out that the house system was actually not working out well. Only half the students were participating, and for minority students the percentage was smaller.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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 benefited equally. Trustee 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 the 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."¹⁸ When Robertson moved that funds for Ravenswood be prioritized so that disadvantaged students would be favored over transfer students, he was denied a second.¹⁹

There is no 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, electrography, shorthand theory, and general office skills. Not only is it unlikely that such vocational courses would appeal to white students,²⁰ but also some impressionistic evidence indicates the absence of black students from innovative academic courses. A photograph of the class taking Practical Politics, for instance, reveals one black student and 22 whites.²¹ An Italian class that

went to Italy was entirely white.²² And, ironically, at one point the only student to enroll in Swahili was white.²³ Observers recall that formal tracking did not exist, but academic separation was common.²⁴ According to district documents, however, there was formal tracking for ninth and tenth graders.²⁵

The white student enrolled in the Swahili class felt that Ravenswood was a superb experience for whites, but that neither the influx of white students nor the looseness of the Ravenswood environment benefited blacks.²⁶ In fact, black students were sometimes transferred because of perceived laxness. One parent, requesting the transfer of her daughter to Woodside, 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.²⁷

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 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."²⁸

Clearly 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. But 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 often happened--could take advantage of the school's casualness to absent themselves from its activities and often classes as well. 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.²⁹ Thus, it is not surprising that racial disturbances at Ravenswood were few.

Racial Conflict in Predominantly White Schools

While school life at Ravenswood was relatively peaceful and unequal, at the other schools in the district it was unequal and charged with racial conflict that ebbed periodically but never abated in the early and mid 1970s. Black students received the vast majority of suspensions and expulsions in the aftermath of these confrontations. At the end of October 1971, a racial melee resulted in what the Menlo-Atherton principal estimated as at least 22 injuries; six black students were suspended.³⁰ Also that fall a black student who displayed a knife was expelled from San Carlos. That action provoked the observation on the part of some members of the San Mateo County Human Relations Commission that Superintendent Chaffey was racist. A panel which recommended that the student be suspended and then transferred to Ravenswood had been overruled by the superintendent. It was felt that expulsion was excessive given the large number of knives on campus, and, according to the white human relations specialist for the commission, the young man was "considered an ideal student until the incident."³¹ The commission ultimately recommended that the district work harder to solve racial problems and establish better procedures for disciplinary review. It also recommended that the expelled student's mother file a federal complaint.³²

Just before Christmas break, two days of unrest at Carlmont High School resulted in the suspension of 16 black students and two whites. A number of people, including the interracial Concerned Parents and Citizens Coalition, accused Carlmont administrators of discrimination.³³ The Human Relations Commission conducted an investigation of this series of racial confrontations that finally ended with a sweep of a corridor by the tactical squad. From those interviewed came charges that white students involved in assaults were identified, but the administration failed to take action against them. It was also contended that one faculty member engaged in fighting himself and another cursed black students. The investigator, Gary Hamilton, further learned that differential procedures were employed so that in a case when two white students struck a black student, a conference was held and the matter was settled to the black student's satisfaction without the need for disciplinary action. When the tables were turned, however, no such effort at resolving the issue was made.³⁴ Hamilton concluded that staff were predisposed to assume black students were responsible for any trouble:

As one black staff member put it, if you already have in your mind that the students from East Palo Alto are the troublemakers and the white student body are the good guys, in a time of crisis, you automatically see the troublemaker instantly because you are pre-conditioned. It was a very poor double standard that was obvious to all.³⁵

Hamilton further disagreed with the decision to bring the tactical squad on campus and criticized the use of physical education staff to confront disorder. He asserted, "It appears that the present set-up is to use for the most part the muscle department."³⁶ Despite such concerns, Hamilton unaccountably found the Carlmont administration innocent of violating the civil rights of the 16 suspended black students.³⁷

Racial problems continued during the 1971-72 year and remained frequent the following year, especially at San Carlos, before declining during 1973-74.³⁸ Then in the autumn of 1974, a major racial conflict broke out at Menlo-Atherton. There were 52 injuries and 40 students suspended, seven of whom later were expelled. The fight ostensibly began over a "joint" and, according to the principal, was the worst violence on campus since 1967.³⁹ Unrest then spread to Sequoia High School where eight were injured.⁴⁰

While the Menlo-Atherton disturbance was the gravest of the 1970s, more mundane interracial problems persisted through the middle 1970s. In early 1976, for instance, the Palo Alto Times reported that "about 250 parents attended a Sequoia Union High School District Trustees meeting at Woodside to support a call for stricter discipline to control theft, assaults, and classroom disruption."⁴¹ And it was clear that this concern focused on the behavior of

black students. Present at the meeting was Frank (Omowale) Satterwhite, vice-chair of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council. "Race has not been mentioned," he said, "but I suspect a good many of the comments are directed at kids in our community."⁴²

Student unrest in the district certainly began long before the voluntary desegregation plan of the 1970s went into effect, but its character changed. In the late 1960s, students at Ravenswood, Menlo-Atherton, and Sequoia High Schools engaged in political protests to make the schools more responsive to black and Hispanic students. In the 1970s, disruption aimed at achieving specified goals was rare. It occurred over a period of a single week when students at several schools demonstrated to retain minority teachers who were going to be laid off due to budget cuts.⁴³ Other times, there may have been precipitants that were political in nature. Some observers, for instance, believed that the problems in the fall of 1974 at Menlo-Atherton and Sequoia were inspired by the violence black students met in Boston as schools there underwent desegregation.⁴⁴ But the nature of disruption had changed. Confrontation had become spontaneous and purely racial in nature. Racial hostility rather than articulated plans for creating change had become the center of campus disruptions. In part this may have stemmed from a feeling that

substantive change was impossible. Certainly in the hill schools--Woodside, San Carlos, and Belmont--the percentage of black students was relatively insignificant, perhaps creating a feeling of powerlessness. But it is also likely that decline of the black movement nationally contributed to the depoliticized behavior of black students.

Disciplinary Action Against Black Students

In any case, discrimination against black students both engendered acts of racial hostility towards whites and resulted in punitive actions that made it appear that blacks were more responsible for conflict than they were in fact. Not only did black students complain of discrimination, but more impartial observers discerned it as well. For instance, members of the Watoto Project, affiliated with the county probation office, were on campus during the conflagration at Menlo-Atherton and believed that black students were disproportionately penalized for behavior that white students engaged in also.⁴⁵ District officials themselves admitted that discrimination existed. In a grant application it was conceded that "subtle racism, and mere 'academic' commitment to desegregation became evident in some white staff, students, and community. Not knowing how else to react to tensional situations, some teachers resorted to familiar techniques such as expulsion, or

exclusion from class."⁴⁶ Potential discrimination, however, did not necessarily stop at the level of the classroom. Expulsions stemming from the disturbances at Menlo-Atherton produced a suit against the district, charging, according to the school board minutes, "failure of school authorities to accord plaintiffs and other black students due process in disciplinary proceedings."⁴⁷ The district agreed to a stipulation altering the appeals process, though it never admitted guilt in the matter.⁴⁸

While minority students did face discrimination, this does not mean that they were free of disciplinary problems. Some improper behavior doubtless issued from unjust treatment. Other times structured conditions at the host schools were likely to encourage transfers to act out. Many black students did not enter high school with the same skill levels as whites, and many were shocked by the affluence of white students.⁴⁹ Both matters caused resentment.⁵⁰ At the same time, highly skilled blacks could be treated as if they were academically deficient. In a report on the voluntary transfer program, Merle Fruehling warned, "Many transfer students do achieve at or above these levels [of affluent white students] when they arrive, and school personnel must exercise caution not to label such students because of their transfer status."⁵¹

Clearly, a number of black students felt alienated.

Harry Bremond, considered a moderate when he served on the board of trustees for the Ravenswood Elementary School District, defended Menlo-Atherton student Darren Primes in the aftermath of the racial disturbance. He had harsh words for the district. He did not contend that Primes was not involved in the melee at Menlo-Atherton, but was paraphrased as saying, "Had the administration taken some kind of positive action to demonstrate to Darren Primes and his parents that the educational process was also meant for him, he would not have been involved in the disturbance on October 1, 1974."⁵² In a similar vein, attorney Charles Lawrence, who was defending another Menlo-Atherton student, expressed disgust with what he considered to be the racist proceedings of a board meeting and connected injustices within the Sequoia District to large societal inequities:

Mr. Lawrence felt compelled to say that he finds it extremely difficult to honestly ask young Black men and women to assume responsibility for themselves when they are daily confronted with what he still takes to be a travesty of justice with respect to Black people in this country, and, particularly, this evening. He stated that, after what happened tonight and the way black young adults look at the system, the only recourse that they see is to strike out, in a racial way, when they see adults like himself see no success.⁵³

After five years of the desegregation program, school officials in their own estimation had been unable to successfully integrate black students. A 1976 ESAA application conceded that "Minority students, particularly

those transferring from another school, are likely to feel oppressed, left out, adrift in the new school."⁵⁴ In the end, the reasons for blacks being disproportionately singled out for disciplinary action were complex. Jennifer Hochschild summarized explanations for this phenomenon in desegregated schools nationally:

Disproportionate punishment may reflect white racism, administrators' fear of racial violence, a first-strike strategy resulting from students' anxiety and tension, black students' different styles of interaction, or black students' poorer self-discipline and greater propensity for violence. Presumably all of these causes come into play on occasion, but whatever the reason, longer and more frequent disciplinary action hardly benefits the students subjected to it.⁵⁵

No matter what the calculus of causes for disciplinary action in the Sequoia District, black students bore the brunt of it and paid with increased stigmatization and school days foregone.

Records of suspensions within the district show that blacks indeed received them in disproportionate numbers. Ravenswood students had the best record. During the 1972-73 year only 23 or 6% of black students at Ravenswood were suspended, as opposed to 13% at Sequoia, 32% at Menlo-Atherton, 25% at Carlmont, 35% at Woodside and 38% at San Carlos.⁵⁶ Only 2 whites were suspended at Ravenswood that year, so blacks constituted 88% of those students suspended though they made up only 54% of the student population. There were still greater disproportions at the other

schools. At Sequoia, black students composed 9% of the student body but received 38% of the suspensions. At Menlo-Atherton the figures were 17% and 44%; at Carlmont, 10% and 37%; at Woodside, 10% and 39%; and at San Carlos, 10% and 41%.⁵⁷.

During 1973-74, blacks made up 16% of the district's students, but they composed 20% of the students who were suspended more than 20 days and 37% of those suspended for a shorter duration.⁵⁸ The following year blacks made up 44% of all students suspended. The lowest percentage of black students suspended continued to be Ravenswood (18%) and the highest was Carlmont (43%).⁵⁹

Academic and Extracurricular Inequality

Not only did black students lose more class time due to suspensions, they also often faced racial imbalance within the classroom. In other words, their representation in various classes diverged dramatically from their percentage of the school population. Information on this matter is incomplete, however. It is not available for every year, and it merely distinguishes between majority and minority students. To further complicate this matter, the designation "minority" begins to include American Indians and Asian students in the fall of 1974. Also, records of all but one year look solely at the racial composition of classes for

ninth graders. Furthermore, the names of the classes are not offered. In some courses, such as ESL, racial separation was not necessarily invidious.⁶⁰ Finally, it is not clear to what extent placement was a result of student selection rather than staff directive. Evidence nonetheless points to racial isolation within the various schools of the district. In most cases this took the form of classes being entirely white.

During the fall of 1973, for instance, all schools had sections of courses with no minority students. Sequoia had five classes with 103 students; Ravenswood had 12 classes with 74 students; Menlo-Atherton had 12 with 261 students; San Carlos had 17 with 441 students; Carlmont had 21 with 402 students; and Woodside had 32 with 744 students.⁶¹

District calculations for both fall of 1973 and fall of 1974 are more finely tuned, showing breakdowns of freshman enrolled in classes with varying numbers of minority students. At Ravenswood, which was 56% minority in 1973, 13% of classes contained less than 20% minority students and 18% included 80% or more minority students. The following year, with 65% minority students at Ravenswood, 8% of the classes were less than 20% minority and 37% were 80% or more minority. Perhaps the most glaring racial imbalance occurred at San Carlos, which had a minority enrollment of 12% in 1973 and 15% in 1974. In both years, 30% of the

classes had enrollments of less than 10% minority students.⁶² District-wide, exclusively white classes for freshmen included 34 in 1973 and 53 in 1974.⁶³ As the foregoing indicates, minority students were underrepresented in a significant number of classes in the district. Even without knowing which courses were involved, we do know that students were grouped by ability, and some evidence suggests that minority students had little access to the most academically challenging classes.⁶⁴ In the spring of 1975, for example, the school board minutes noted that 11% of minority students were enrolled in the Mentally Gifted Minors Program. But only 3% of black students were included or .5% of total participants.⁶⁵ The following year, the text of an ESAA application noted that "less than 5% of minority students...are able to be a part of advanced placement classes...."⁶⁶ In contrast, black students composed 37% of the district's Educably Mentally Retarded students and 26% of its Educationally Handicapped students.⁶⁷

Just as a degree of racial isolation diminished the value of school-wide desegregation, significant disparities in achievement between black and white students call into question the quality of education black students were receiving during the 1970s. Of course, considerable caution must be exercised in levelling blame for this

situation. It is likely, as school officials contended, that most black students entered high school with substantially weaker skills than most white students.⁶⁹ Also, data on academic performance and academic growth as measured by standardized tests are sketchy. Nonetheless, for the general student body, broad gaps in achievement were evident when seniors were given the California Test of Basic Skills. White students scored at the 47th percentile in correctness of expression, the 68th percentile in mathematics, and the 58th percentile in reading. For black students, the percentiles were 18th, 19th, and 15th.⁶⁹

Other data, though non-systematic, point out consistent differences of considerable magnitude on standardized tests between black and white students. A Spring 1974 administration of the California Test of Basic Skills disclosed that ninth grade whites were reading at a grade level of 9.8 and blacks at a level of 6.4.⁷⁰ The disparity in reading was even greater for tenth graders. Whites read at a level of 11.5 and blacks at 7.4.⁷¹ Clearly much of the gap can be attributed to differences in prior educational experience between students of different races. District officials in 1975, for instance, stated that students graduating from the Ravenswood Elementary School District entered the high school district an average of 2.5 to 3 years behind their peers from other elementary

districts.⁷² Some data, however, suggest that once black students entered the Sequoia District, they fell further behind. For example, ninth graders who took the CTBS math test in September of 1973 registered a median gain of .6 of a grade level when tested the following May. Over this same period, the median improvement for whites was 1.1 grade levels. In math, tenth grade blacks who had been tested in September of 1972 showed a median improvement of 1.1 grade levels when retested in May of 1974, while whites over that period gained 1.4 grade levels.⁷³

A final area of student behavior that allows for some comparison based on race is participation in school activities. For a time, minority students apparently were greatly underrepresented in student government at at least two of the three hill schools--those schools whose attendance boundaries included only a tiny number of minority students and which, even with voluntary transfer, had the lowest percentage of minority students. Toward the end of 1973, representatives of the Student Advisory Council stated that no minority students participated in student government at Carlmont and San Carlos, while Ravenswood lacked non-minority involvement, and Sequoia had strong minority participation. Opinions on participation at Woodside and Menlo-Atherton were not reported.⁷⁴ There was also concern expressed by school officials that "minority parent participation in school affairs is extremely low."⁷⁵

Data on minority participation are available only for the 1974-75 academic year. All trustees except Robertson were pleased with the improvement recorded that year.⁷⁶ Indeed overall minority involvement, combining participation in student government, musical presentations, dramatic productions, spirit squads, athletics, and campus groups, was proportional to their population in the district as a whole.⁷⁷ Two of the hill schools had the lowest participation overall: Carlmont, with a minority enrollment of 15%, had 11% participation by minorities, and Woodside, which was 17% minority, had 14% minority participation.⁷⁸ In the category of student government, hill schools also indicated the weakest minority representation. While Carlmont was proportionally represented, San Carlos with 15% minority students had only 10% minority representation on student government, and Woodside with 17% minority students had only 5% representation. On the other hand, Ravenswood with a minority population of 65% was somewhat underrepresented by 56% minority participation in student government. Menlo-Atherton (23% minority) was overrepresented with 40% minority participation, and Sequoia (32% minority) was also overrepresented with 38% minority involvement.⁷⁹ Student government as a whole, however, drew few participants of either race. Less than 5% of all students participated.⁸⁰

In other activities minority participation at the hill schools was negligible. In drama productions, for instance, no minority students participated at either Carlmont or San Carlos. In musical presentations, four minority students and 158 majority students participated at Carlmont and 11 minority students as opposed to 119 majority students participated at Woodside. And in cheerleading groups, San Carlos had only two minority participants out of a total of 68.⁸¹

The one category in which minorities were overrepresented was campus clubs and service groups, to which they contributed 29% of the participants.⁸² It is not clear what this means. In all probability, a significant number of students belonged to race-identified organizations like black student unions. Such groupings, however, unlike in previous years, were relatively dormant if lack of press coverage and notice in the school board minutes is any indication.⁸³ In addition, the data for all these categories neither tell us how extensively students participated, nor how many different students participated, since some probably were counted in a number of different categories. Finally, the data do not provide a sense of how representative minority participation was in school-wide activities. Sequoia officials, apparently, found such participation wanting, and took under consideration reducing

activity costs that "unwittingly reduce minority participation."⁴

The 1974-75 data suggest some inequality in minority students' participation in school affairs. Where there was underrepresentation, it typically took place in those schools where minority students were transfers and composed the smallest percentages of the school populations. Absent a breakdown by different minority groups, the picture of black students' participation in all student activities remains out of focus. Other indexes of inequality are less problematic for black students. As noted above, they received a disproportionate number of suspensions, were unrepresented or underrepresented in many classrooms, scored dramatically lower on standardized tests, and there is at least some evidence to suggest that they progressed at a slower rate as measured by these tests. That schools in the district were unequal for black students, however, does not imply that school officials desired such an outcome. In fact, there were a number of good-faith efforts to make the district high schools more congenial to black and other minority students.

Policies Sensitive to Minority Interests

During the first year of the voluntary desegregation program, human relations teams were set up at each school.

Including students and community members as well as staff, these teams were activated to ease relations between students of different races, and they therefore were trained in "the dynamics of group processes, ethnic sub-cultures, multi-cultural curricula and teaching strategies, and crisis mediation and prevention."⁸⁵

Efforts also were made to integrate the experience of black students into the curriculum. From the beginning of the voluntary program in 1971, all high schools had some courses in black studies, and there was concern with adding a multicultural dimension to the various facets of the curriculum. Merle Fruehling articulated the importance of the latter:

One of the important steps that must be taken by school staffs in moving from desegregation to integration is the development of a multi-ethnic curriculum. The multi-ethnic curriculum emphasizes the contributions of minority cultures in all subject matter areas, cultural presentations, and extra-curricular activities.⁸⁶

Fruehling noted progress in this area as a result of workshops and the work of a committee charged to develop the framework for a multi-cultural curriculum.⁸⁷

The district Equal Educational Opportunity Commission also pushed for a multi-cultural curriculum. It advocated that "instruction, textbooks, instructional and audiovisual materials shall all reflect the national heritage, goals, and contributions of Native Americans, Black Americans,

Spanish Surnamed Americans, Asian Americans, and Caucasians."⁸⁸ Yet such a position, taken more than three years after the desegregation plan went into effect should have been unnecessary. It suggests that more was said about a multi-cultural curriculum than accomplished. Even when steps were taken, it is difficult to assess their impact. Certainly the titles of inservice courses were impressive. During the spring semester of 1975 these included Mexican History and Culture, The Emerging Role of La Chicana, Counseling and Communication Skills with Emphasis on Black Students, Black Woman, Black Students and Schools in Transition, and Education Expectations and the Needs of Minority Students.⁸⁹ Delivery of such inservices, however, was found wanting by some teachers. A group of instructors from Sequoia High School complained that inservice courses represented an isolated day of activity, that resources were insufficient to get speakers from outside the district, and that responsibility for inservices at the school level diminished their value when schools had no serious commitment to multicultural education.⁹⁰

While it is impossible to know the extent to which multicultural practices entered the classroom, there was certainly official commitment to it. And Superintendent Chaffey displayed a personal commitment. In fact, in a letter to the artistic director of the Oakland Ensemble, he

expressed his willingness to pay \$500 for a one-hour performance of Lorraine Hansberry's "To Be Young, Gifted and Black." He believed "that the particular dramatic presentation would bring all employees of the district an important message in the area of human relations."⁹¹

Other policies formulated at the district level were meant to respect the convictions of students and promote a free exchange of ideas. Students, for example, were not required to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance⁹² and "were granted the right to exercise free expression including, but not limited to, the use of bulletin boards, the distribution of printed materials or petitions, and the wearing of buttons, badges, and other insignia."⁹³ There were only two limitations on outside speakers: They were not to be obscene or to advocate the overthrow of the government. When a violation occurred, a speaker would be warned. Only after a second warning was violated would he or she be asked to leave.⁹⁴

While such policies on the part of the administration clearly conceded to youth culture writ large, they provided leeway to minority students to exercise interests that might otherwise have been penalized by school authorities. Furthermore, various actions by the board specifically had minority students in mind. In addition to a holiday for Martin Luther King's birthday, established nine months

before voluntary desegregation commenced, the board initiated Black History Week. It also agreed to give rehiring preference to laid off minority teachers.⁹⁵ These actions did not always sit well with whites. One Belmont realtor, for instance, expressed dissatisfaction with a holiday for King. "I wonder why we don't have a school holiday for Vasca De Gama, Magellen (sic), John the Baptist, Adolph Hitler or Jim McGovern....I consider this holiday on Monday as a mob reaction to minority pressures."⁹⁶ Yet school officials were unyielding.⁹⁷

Clearly the district gave considerable latitude to the formal cultural expression of minority students. Yet provisions for soul food dinners or performances by African dance troupes did not mean that most administrators and faculty became sensitized to more than the superficial cultural differences that distinguished minority students, nor did it mean that they held expectations that were sufficiently high.⁹⁸ The weak performance of so many minority students suggests at least an unconscious negative assessment of them by many school people. This is to be expected. When cultures of people with differential power come into contact, those of the relatively powerless tend to be denigrated.⁹⁹ What is interesting is that some school leaders recognized this tendency and verbalized a desire for change. Merle Fruehling, for instance, worried about the

large drop in grades that black students experienced when they transferred out of Ravenswood, and he worried also about how frequently such students changed their schedules. To him it was clear that "it is important not to discourage the future aspirations or lower the self-concept of transfer students."¹⁰⁰ Though he apparently recognized that white staff could learn to treat black students appropriately, he recognized also the need to increase the access of black students to black counselors and other black staff.¹⁰¹

The sensitivities of various school people notwithstanding, the black educational experience in the Sequoia District left much to be desired between 1971 and 1975. Desegregation spoke to form rather than essence. Overrepresented in disciplinary actions and classes for the educationally handicapped, black students were underrepresented in accelerated courses and student activities. Many of the more glaring disparities were located outside of Ravenswood, but the New School of Ravenswood left much to be desired for black students. The entire curricular and social architecture of the school had been transformed to meet the needs of well-to-do whites.

While the district could not reasonably be held completely responsible for the lagging performance of black students, it could have done more for them. As many black

parents suggested, a redirection of the resources lavished on white students at Ravenswood could have aided significantly the performance of black students. In fact, though it would violate standards of racial justice propounded by the courts and OCR, the black Ravenswood of the late 1960s, blessed with the resources the school received in the 1970s, might have engendered a level of equality that far transcended what blacks attained in desegregated schools. Over time, however, extra resources expended on anyone would become problematic as the district faced cutbacks. In addition, the weight of retrenchment would not be equally borne. Black students would be the principal losers.

1. For the number of white students in the Ravenswood attendance area, see George P. Chaffey to Board of Trustees, "Report on Studies Related to Desegregation," Appendix C, October 18, 1972, in Voluntary Transfer (hereafter VT) Files, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Calif. (hereafter SUHSD). In 1970-71 there were 24 white students at Ravenswood, as opposed to 504 the following year--Ibid.
2. See Sequoia Union High School District, "Desegregation/Integration Master Plan," November 1977, p. 5., in Integration Plans General File, SUHSD.
3. George Chaffey to Horace C. Anderson and Al Fair, August 3, 1971, in HEW Grant Proposal E911 File, SUHSD.
4. Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.), vol. 14, February 2, 1972, p. 111.
5. "Master Schedule: Ravenswood High School Third Cycle, 1971-72," n.d., in Shelton File, SUHSD.
6. Redwood City Tribune, November 9, 1971, p. 6.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. "Master Schedule, Ravenswood;" "Enrollment Statistics and Average Class Size Studies," October 1971, in Shelton File.
10. Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 16(February 1972):4.
11. Ibid.
12. See, for instance, SUHSD min., vol. 15, December 6, 1972, p. 320.
13. Palo Alto Times, August 21, 1974; SUHSD min., vol. 16, November 7, 1973, p. 63.
14. RWC Tribune, February 25, 1972.
15. RWC Tribune, November 9, 1971.
16. SUHSD min., vol. 14, February 2, 1972, p. 111.
17. PAT, February 3, 1973.

18. SUHSD min., vol. 16, February 6, 1974, p. 110.
19. Ibid., p. 110.
20. "Enrollment Statistics, 1971."
21. Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 16(February 1972):8.
22. Interview with Barbara Mouton, January 28, 1983, in East Palo Alto.
23. Interview with Terry Friedlund, November 2, 1982, in Palo Alto.
24. Mouton and Friedlund interviews.
25. 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.
26. Friedlund interview.
27. Mrs. Vernon Newson to Superintendent Chaffey, September 6, 1974, in VT Files.
28. George Norton to R.W. Dorst, President of Board of Trustees, February 24, 1975, in VT Files.
29. 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.
30. SUHSD min., vol. 14, December 1, 1971, p. 89.
31. San Mateo Times, November 19, 1971; Minutes of the Human Relations Commission, November 18, 1971, p. 3, in Human Relations Commission (hereafter HRC) File, SUHSD.
32. San Mateo Times, December 21, 1971.
33. See, for instance, SUHSD min., vol. 14, January 5, 1972, p. 100; Gary C. Hamilton, "Carlmont High School Investigation Report," April 11, 1972, p. 1, HRC File.
34. Hamilton, "Carlmont Investigation," pp. 4, 7-8.
35. Ibid., p. 8.

36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 10. Perhaps that conclusion was informed by his examination of the medical reports, which found "80 to 90% of the injured were white students."
38. See, for instance, William J. Walti to James E. Forrest, June 29, 1972 in HRC File; Robert C. Jacobs to Chaffey, September 5, 1973, in HRC File; Department of Human Relations, "Report to the Board of Trustees, 1973-74," p. 2, in Human Relations General (hereafter HRG) File, SUHSD; SUHSD min., vol. 16, October 3, 1973, p. 50.
39. SUHSD min., vol. 17, October 16, 1974, p. 85. See also Morris L. Schneider to Chaffey, January 30, 1975, in Intergroup Relations File, SUHSD.
40. Ibid., p. 87.
41. PAT, February 5, 1976.
42. Ibid.
43. SUHSD min., vol. 15, May 10, 1973, p. 406.
44. See SUHSD min., vol. 17, October 16, 1974, p. 87.
45. Loren A. Beckley, Chief Probation Officer to Chaffey, December 2, 1974, in Intergroup Relations File.
46. Sequoia Union High School District, "School Board Grant Program on Post-Desegregation Problems," March 1, 1972, p. 12, in HEW Grant Proposal E-911 File.
47. SUHSD min., vol. 18, January 21, 1976, p. 188.
48. Ibid.
49. Sometimes concrete issues due to differentials in wealth came to the fore. For instance, in the aftermath of the Menlo-Atherton disturbances, two black female students complained that part of the problem was discrimination in access to the drill team and pom pom squad. The cost of uniforms apparently was prohibitive for many minority students. See draft of Bureau of Intergroup Relations Report on Menlo-Atherton, October 1974, p. 6, attached to Morris L. Schneider, Consultant Bureau of Intergroup Relations, to Chaffey, January 30, 1975, in Intergroup Relations File.

50. See Sequoia Union High School District, "Application for Assistance Under the Emergency Aid School Act," October 1975, p. 6.1, in Grant Proposal 1975-76 File, SUHSD. The presence of many conservative white students did not help either. In 1976, the district had the largest state chapter of Future Business Leaders of America--SUHSD min., vol. 18, May 5, 1976, p. 289.

51. Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter 17(January 1973):4.

52. SUHSD min., vol. 17, December 10, 1974, p. 132.

53. SUHSD min., vol. 17, January 20, 1975, p. 167.

54. Sequoia Union High School District, "Application for Assistance Under the Emergency School Aid Act," February 1976, p. 7.29, in Grant Proposal 1975-76 File.

55. Jennifer Hochschild, The New American Dilemma: Liberal Democracy and School Desegregation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 166.

56. Calculations based on Sequoia Union High School District, "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey School System 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.

57. Ibid.

58. Calculations based on "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey School System Summary Report," Fall 1974, in CRA '64 File.

59. Calculations based on "ESAA Application For Assistance," 1975, p. 35 and "Civil Rights Survey," Fall 1974. Fewer suspensions at Ravenswood might be attributed to a more congenial environment. On the other hand, while better relations between students and staff as well as less hostility between students of different races doubtless occurred, general laxness might also have been responsible for less disciplinary action. One index of a loose, "do-your-own-thing" environment was the number of students who were truant for part of a day. In a survey of unexcused partial-day absences that took place over 15 days in the spring of 1975, Ravenswood far outstripped the other schools in the district in all racial categories. 62.3% of blacks had unexcused absences for part of a day at Ravenswood,

while the second highest black percentage was 31.7% at Woodside. Whites at Ravenswood posted a partial-day absence percentage of 33.9%, higher than that of blacks at all schools other than Ravenswood and more than twice as high as white students in all other District schools. And hispanics posted a rate of 51.2%, also more than twice as high as hispanics in all other schools--SUHSD, "Compelling Reasons for Closing Ravenswood High School," Exhibit 3, p. 6, September 17, 1975, in School Closure-HEW File, SUHSD.

60. I do, for instance, have information that all classes that were 100% minority at Sequoia High School in the fall of 1973 were ESL--See Sequoia Union High School District, "Application for Assistance, Emergency School Assistance Act," December 6, 1973, p. 33, in P.L. 92-318 File, SUHSD.

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

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

63. Computation based on "Civil Rights Survey," 1973, 1974. Few classes were all minority. There were only three in 1973--one at Ravenswood and two presumably ESL classes at Sequoia. The following year, Ravenswood had 17, Sequoia 10, and Woodside one. (Ibid.)

64. In every school except Ravenswood, students were tracked in all grades during both 1973 and 1974. In the former year, Ravenswood students were grouped in ninth and tenth grades only. No information is available on tracking at Ravenswood the subsequent year--see "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey," 1973, 1974.

65. SUHSD min., vol. 17, May 7, 1975, p. 279. Calculation of black percentage of all participants was mine. In addition, Hispanics and American Indians fared even a bit worse than blacks percentage wise: 2.5% of the former and 2% (one person) of the latter were included.

66. "ESAA Application," 1976, p. 7.

67. Percentage calculations based on data provided in "Application for Assistance, ESAA," December 6, 1973, pp. 34, 35.

68. In 1975, for instance, it was stated that in reading and math ninth grade graduates from the Ravenswood Elementary District averaged two and one-half to three years

below grade level. See "Compelling Reasons for Closing Ravenswood High School," Exhibit 3, September 17, 1975, p. 7.

69. "ESAA application," December 6, 1973, p. A72.

70. SUHSD Dept. of Research and Data Processing, "Median Grade Equivalent Scores CTBS Spring Testing, 1974," in "1976 Final ESAA Application," Appendix F, p. 27.11.

71. Ibid.

72. See "Compelling Reasons for Closing Ravenswood High School," Exhibit 3, September 17, 1975.

73. SUHSD Dept. of Research and Data Processing, "CTBS Test Results in Reading and Math," "1976 ESAA Application," Appendix F, p. 27.1.

74. SUHSD min., vol. 16, November 28, 1973, p. 77.

75. SUHSD, "Multi-Cultural Education: A Plan," December 28, 1973, p. 1. in HRG File.

76. SUHSD min., vol. 18, July 2, 1975, p. 4.

77. Based on figures presented in "ESAA Application for Assistance," 1975, p. 36.

78. Ibid. Minority percentages in high schools calculated on figures presented in "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey," Fall 1974.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

81. "ESAA Application," 1976, p. 36. Interestingly, minority students at Menlo-Atherton were also uninvolved in cheerleading, with only 1 of 23 participants. In accounting for the racial disturbances at Menlo-Atherton in 1974, some students had complained that the high cost of uniforms had made participation in this activity prohibitive. On the other hand, at Ravenswood only two non-minority students out of 68 participated in this activity.

82. Ibid.

83. One of very few references to such groups listed recommendations of the Black Student Union at Menlo-Atherton. These included the desire that new teachers be black, that black instructors teach black courses at Menlo-

Atherton, and that the reading laboratory at Menlo-Atherton be evaluated. Apparently, only Trustee Robertson thought their concerns merited attention and there is no record of action taken on these matters. See SUHSD min. vol. 15, March 28, 1973, pp. 380-81.

84. "ESAA Application," 1976, p. 37.

85. SUHSD Newsletter 16(February 1972):9.

86. SUHSD Newsletter 17(January 1973):5.

87. Ibid. See also Chaffey to Laura M. Taylor, October 22, 1974, in Integration Steering Committee File, SUHSD.

88. SUHSD min. vol. 17, December 4, 1974, p. 127.

89. SUHSD, "Schedule of Multicultural Education Inservice Courses," Spring 1975, in HRG.

90. The Sequoia Committee (Gerald Goff, Palmira Mendes, Santafe Moses, Malcolm Mitchell, and Trukasa Matsueda) to Gomez, May 7, 1975, in HRG. On the other hand, Chaffey received a letter of appreciation for inservice day from nineteen teachers--April 29, 1975, in HRG.

91. Chaffey to Ron Thompson, August 20, 1974, in HRG.

92. SUHSD min. vol 14, May 3, 1972, pp. 176-77.

93. SUHSD min., vol. 14, April 19, 1972, p. 168.

94. Ibid., p. 169.

95. See "Desegregation/Integration Master Plan," 1978, pp. 20.1, 20.8, 20.9 in Master Plan for District-Wide Integration File, SUHSD. For resolution on Black History Week, see SUHSD min., vol. 16, October 3, 1973, p. 48. For discussion of Black History Week and Cinco de Mayo celebrations, see "Human Relations Report 1973-74," pp. 4-5, in HRG, and for Black History Week only, see Ravenswood Post, February 13, 1974, p. 5.

96. Gilbert T. Armando to Trustees, January 16, 1974, in School Calendar General 1972-78 File, SUHSD.

97. Chaffey's response was typically blunt. He simply said the District has the right to set holidays. See Chaffey to Armando, January 21, 1974, in School Calendar General 1972-78 File.

98. For the issue of cultural differences and their educational implications, see Janice E. Hale-Benson, Black Children: Their Roots, Culture and Learning Styles (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

99. See, for instance, Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

100. SUHSD Newsletter 17(January 1973):5.

101. Ibid.

CHAPTER 8

THE AMBIGUOUS ACHIEVEMENT OF PERMANENT DESEGREGATION: THE CLOSING OF RAVENSWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

The Levinthal Report, which had called for the abolition of Ravenswood High School, met significant resistance from whites in the district during the mid 1960s. A decade later, Ravenswood closed with the blessings of most whites. This chapter will account for closure in 1976 when such an act had been impossible just ten years before. In brief, declining white transfers to Ravenswood; continuing pressure from teachers, the Office for Civil Rights, and the courts; and the weakening financial condition of the district set the preconditions for the abolition of Ravenswood. In addition, whites' experience with limited desegregation probably allayed many of their fears. At the same time, in choosing to close the high school in the black community, whites extinguished the risk of having their own neighborhood school closed and their children bused to Ravenswood.

On the other hand, many blacks who had supported the

recommendation of the Levinthal Report now adamantly opposed the closing of their neighborhood school. 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. The closing, therefore, prompted members of the black community to initiate a lawsuit aimed at keeping Ravenswood open.

This chapter will argue that closing Ravenswood was not so much an expression of commitment to equity for black students as an effective way of resolving financial and legal problems while leaving intact whites' privileges.

The Record of Voluntary Transfer

The creation of black-oriented courses and cultural programs outside of Ravenswood, like offerings of scuba diving and playing the moog synthesizer at Ravenswood, were in part enticements to encourage students to participate in the voluntary transfer program. The program was indeed successful in promoting transfers through the 1975-76 academic year. Over time, however, the percentage of minority students at Ravenswood had crept up, and the costs in both staff time and money became an increasing burden.

The district did make a sustained effort to promote the voluntary transfer program. Recruitment costs for the 1972-73 year were high. \$36,500 was spent for posters,

brochures, and slide shows designed to publicize the programs at the various high schools. As in the past, promotional committees were set up in all schools and eighth grade classes were visited. One new policy gave students the opportunity to participate in a temporary exchange program at schools they were considering transferring to. Another required white students living in the Ravenswood attendance area to stay at Ravenswood if they had not previously transferred.¹ The results of district efforts for 1972-73 included the first-time transfer of 95 white students to Ravenswood, while 314 additional black students transferred out of the Ravenswood attendance area.² On the other hand, 53 white volunteers to Ravenswood returned to their home schools and 54 black students returned to Ravenswood. Thirty-one of the latter returned from Carlmont.³

The following year the desegregation program was aided somewhat by an agreement with the Palo Alto Unified School district. Twenty white volunteers from Palo Alto were to attend Ravenswood, while 30 black students from the Sequoia District would go to a Palo Alto high school.⁴ For the 1973-74 year Ravenswood received a total of 140 new transfers and 256 first-time transfers left the Ravenswood area. At the same time, Ravenswood lost 23 white volunteers, and 48 black volunteers returned to Ravenswood. Ravenswood now had a total of 415 white transfer students,

while 801 black students were attending schools elsewhere.⁵

Recruitment for the 1974-75 year continued to be aggressive. A flyer announced a barbecue at Ravenswood with bus transportation available at each high school. In addition to food, a slide show and dance presentation were promised, as well as introductions to the mountaineering and scuba diving classes.⁶ Bill Shilstone, now of the Palo Alto Times, offered a tongue-in-cheek review of this event. In an article entitled "Hard-Selling Ravenswood High," he said the experience "was like being in an automobile agency or exclusive department store where salespersons hover about the merchandise like spiders waiting for the flies." "The fate of the captured student," he continued, "is much more pleasant than that of the fly or the department store customers, but still one wonders how many other high schools duplicate such a bizarre showroom atmosphere. Probably none."⁷ Shilstone nonetheless did seem impressed with what he saw. He pointed out, for example, that the district spent extra money on Ravenswood so that it could offer an elaborate menu of courses, including "non-Euclidean geometry, rock climbing, stellar astronomy, electronic music, atomic physics, cartooning, Shakespeare, reading, Hebrew, Russian, Swahili, Chinese, Latin, English, basic industrial arts, interior design, law of contracts and organic gardening."⁸ The hard-sell approach to white

students continued to pay off, as 106 new transfers came to Ravenswood for the 1974-75 academic year.⁹

Recruitment for 1975-76 was not as successful, however, despite a continuing campaign to induce white students to attend Ravenswood. A brochure pictured a group of long-haired white students, both male and female, lounging on a lawn. The brochure stated that the "main emphasis is upon the development of each person's self-worth and confidence."¹⁰ These qualities were to be nurtured through an experience quite different from those available elsewhere:

"The Ravenswood Experience" is one where students find that school doesn't have to be four years at the same location with the day filled with bells, periods, passing times and uniformity. The alternate offered at Ravenswood includes a curriculum that is like a large educational supermarket in which students, with guidance from the staff, are allowed to select a large portion of their personal educational diet.

This school does not confine its educational experience to the classroom or the campus. A Ravenswood class may be in the mountains, on the bay, in a museum, a business office or anywhere that students may gain a profitable experience. There are some courses at Ravenswood where the student is completely independent and others in which interaction and cooperation among students is an essential part of the course work.¹¹

This time, however, only 45 new students transferred into Ravenswood.¹² In part this may have been due to the changing racial balance of the school. Despite successes with enlisting white volunteers to enter Ravenswood and blacks to leave, the school had become 59% black during the 1974-75 year.¹³ While an increasingly black student body may

have discouraged whites from transferring, both rumors of lagging commitment to the maintenance of Ravenswood High School and declining staff interest in recruitment were likely factors as well.

The exhaustive annual effort made to keep the program alive had long been the object of some criticism, and complaints mounted as time went on. In June of 1972 Superintendent Chaffey complained that the recruitment effort took time away from the pursuit of other educational matters. The school board minutes paraphrased his comments as follows:

Promoting the desegregation plan by the teachers of the district (which is essential) tends to be disruptive of the classes. Teachers have to compete with one another to get recruits, pitting the sales ability of one school against the others. It is estimated that the district spent \$60 per recruit for each of the new voluntary transfers....The many contacts with students and their parents, the many small group and large group meetings, the volume of newspaper publicity, and the many other activities, appear to be creating a negative image for the district.¹⁴

Six months later, Merle Fruehling offered a similar response to the potential educational damage done by the program. He added that an undue burden was put on the Ravenswood Elementary District which had to host many informational programs designed to lure students to the hill schools. He also pointed out that coaches saw the program as an opportunity to recruit athletes, creating potential tensions between competing schools. Finally, he felt that some promotions exaggerated the programs they extolled.¹⁵

At the end of the 1974-75 school year trustee Jack Robertson came to the conclusion that the voluntary program had failed. Its purpose was no longer being fulfilled, he believed, because so few white students were now transferring into Ravenswood. Assuming that the whole point of the program was to get black students to attend the predominantly white schools and white students to attend Ravenswood, he estimated the total cost of bringing 45 additional white students into Ravenswood for the following year at \$6,000 to \$9,000 per student. Robertson had always wanted the trustees to act more forcefully to create desegregated schools. He had been the only advocate of mandatory busing to survive on the board, and he now supported boundary changes that would have the same effect.¹⁶ In fact, complete desegregation would be accomplished by 1976-77 through boundary changes, but not the ones Robertson had in mind. A combination of teachers' opposition, legal pressure, and financial hardship would spur the trustees to further desegregate the district schools, but they sacrificed Ravenswood High in the process.

Pressures for Greater Desegregation

Organized teachers had been plaintiffs in Gomperts v. Chase and continued to express dissatisfaction with the progress of desegregation. A resolution from the Ravenswood

faculty senate that passed by a vote of 41-4 had harsh words for the school board:

We as a faculty cannot support a sham program of "volunteers" when the Board of Education, with responsibility for the education of all students, black and white, in the district, cannot do its part by guaranteeing the enrollment and educational and racial balance at Ravenswood. We cannot accept the pretense that putting budget money into a school is any substitute for the moral and ethical commitment [sic] to integration and to support of a guaranteed [sic] balanced enrollment.¹⁷

Organizations that represented administrators and counselors, as well as teachers, supported the position of the Ravenswood instructors. According to Orrin Cross, chairperson of the Certificated Employees Council,

The legislative bodies of the Sequoia District Teachers Association, the Sequoia Guidance Association, the Sequoia District Administrators Association, and the Sequoia Federation of Teachers have clearly indicated both as organizations and through the Certificated Employees Council the educational importance of having ethnic minorities of between 10% and 30% at each of our high schools.¹⁸

While the school board's commitment to achieve desegregation only through voluntary transfer went undeterred by the complaints of staff members, it was clearly in the board's interest to mollify them by ensuring that a substantial number of white students continued to attend Ravenswood.

The board not only had to contend with the teachers, but also with the Office for Civil Rights which had objected to the rescission of the mandatory busing plan. While OCR took no legal action against the district, the

threat of such an undertaking remained. In 1973, for instance, the school board minutes reported that Peter Holmes, the director of OCR, had "indicated that on the basis of the results of the voluntary transfer plan to date, litigation would not be initiated against the Sequoia District, but he hastened to add that HEW must assure itself that the violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is corrected as required by law."¹⁹ Holmes wanted the trustees to establish a goal that freshman classes entering Ravenswood would be greater than 60% white, and failing such an effort, to adopt "a method of assignment assuring elimination of the racial identifiability of Ravenswood at the commencement of...1974-75...."²⁰ Only Trustee Robertson was willing to pursue such an agenda, but again it was in the district's interest to create maximum racial balance at Ravenswood through the voluntary program.²¹

The district faced pressure on the state level as well. The State Education Code called for racial percentages in the schools that were within 15% of a racial group's percentage in the district. To force the district to comply with the code, in 1972, Dorothy Sanders of East Palo Alto filed a suit in San Mateo County Superior Court. At that time Judge Harold Rose indicated that the district had violated Sections 5002 and 5003 of the Education Code.²² Before resolution could be brought to the suit, however, these code sections were overturned by the passage of

Proposition 21, which held that "No public school student shall, because of his race, creed, or color, be assigned to or be required to attend a particular school."²³ The Sanders case consequently rested and was only reactivated when Proposition 21 was found unconstitutional in 1975.

While teachers' dissatisfaction and legal pressure encouraged the board to pursue voluntary desegregation energetically, increasing financial problems called into question the viability of the program as it was being operated. District-wide enrollment began to drop in 1969 and with it revenues tied to Average Daily Attendance.²⁴ In addition, the passage of SB 90 in December of 1972 adversely affected district finances, according to school board minutes, "by eliminating all of the permissive override taxes," and by calculating taxes on the basis of 1972-73 taxation, a year the district had lowered them.²⁵ The district was further strapped by the failure of revenue limit elections in November of 1974 and March of 1975.²⁶ In addition, lack of racial balance at Ravenswood made it impossible for the district to get Emergency School Assistance Act funds after June 1972.²⁷ Finally, high inflation further weakened the district's finances.²⁸

In order to cope with diminished budgets, the district began to lay off teachers. A total of 76.5 employees lost their jobs due to more than a million dollar budget cut in 1973, and approximately 100 were terminated in the face of a

cut of more than two million dollars in 1975. The district further faced a shortfall of one and one-half million dollars for 1976-77.²⁹

The District Closes Ravenswood High School

Given the severity of the financial situation, officials decided to close a school in June of 1976. The School Closure Task Force was created in February of 1975. Convened by Marion McDowell, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent, the Task Force undertook a ten month study to determine which school would be closed. Over that time questionnaires were widely disseminated and meetings proliferated--eleven general public, five invitational, one at each high school, and three on the task force recommendations.³⁰ The task force took on an air of impartiality not only through the exhaustiveness of its effort, but through appointing two minorities--John Gomez, Director of Human Relations for the District and James Van, Principal of Ravenswood High School since the autumn of 1974.³¹ Furthermore, an effort was made to include blacks in the invitational meetings by including representatives of the Ravenswood Elementary School District, the NAACP, the East Palo Alto Ministerial Alliance, the Bay Area Urban League, the East Palo Alto Municipal Council, Nairobi College, and the Ravenswood High School PTA.³²

No crystal ball was required, however, to predict

which school would be slated for closing. As early as 1972, school officials had pointed out that continuing decline in enrollment at Ravenswood would lead to its closing.³³ And some people doubted whether the school board had a long-term commitment to Ravenswood. One board candidate in 1973, for example, believed that uncertainty about the school's future was limiting student volunteers. In response to this doubt, the board unanimously approved the statement, "It has been and is the policy of the Board to continue to operate Ravenswood High School indefinitely."³⁴ School official would not long heed this proclamation, however. Even before the task force was created, McDowell argued that it would be appropriate to close a small school because overcrowding would result from closing a large one.³⁵ Ravenswood was dramatically smaller than the other five schools. In addition, statements at hearings and survey results would confirm that Ravenswood was the most expedient school to close.

As the task force held public hearings at the various high schools, it became clear that there was strong resistance on the part of residents to seeing their home schools closed. Sometimes their rationales for preserving their schools were mystifying. One individual, for instance, was reported as saying "that she loves Sequoia because it has a beautiful site and good weather."³⁶ Covering more than 100 square miles, the district was indeed

large, but she was not likely to find significantly less placid weather several miles away at other schools. Whatever the peculiarities of individuals' reasons, survey results confirmed people's aversion to seeing their own schools abolished. While Ravenswood had the second lowest percentage of parents who approved or accepted closure (31% as opposed to 30% at Menlo-Atherton) and also had the second lowest percentage of students who approved or accepted closure (23% as opposed to 15% at Sequoia), at no school did a majority of either group support closure.³⁷

Other survey responses were useful to the district. When people outside of East Palo Alto did say what school they would support for closure, Ravenswood typically was selected.³⁸ Also, 69% of Ravenswood parents saw maintaining desegregation as a priority as opposed to 19% of the rest of the district parents. Finally, while 67% of those who responded to the survey would rather address the financial crisis by other means than school closure, only 19% supported a tax election to do so.³⁹

Although it is not clear how district officials interpreted information collected by the task force, it would stand to reason that the closing of Ravenswood--where there was greatest support for desegregation--would cause less of an uproar than shutting down any of the other schools. In addition, while those outside of East Palo Alto might not support desegregation very heartily, they

certainly were more likely to tolerate it if the burden did not fall upon them. Further, it was likely that district residents were more willing to accept desegregation than to pay higher taxes. In any case, school leaders should have felt confident that they could comply with the law and simultaneously avoid creating the furor previous attempts at racial balance had stirred.

On August 19, 1975, the task force and Superintendent Chaffey recommended the closure of Ravenswood High School in 1976 and Carlmont in 1980. As of the 1976-77 academic year, each school would be 18%-28% black and Hispanic.⁴⁰ While greater racial balance would be a by-product of closing Ravenswood, the stated reason for the choice was that greater savings would accompany the shutting down of the East Palo Alto school. Closure of Ravenswood reportedly would yield approximately \$946,000 a year, while the least savings realized from closing another school would be about \$752,000.⁴¹

Prior to making a final decision, the board held hearings at Carlmont, Ravenswood, and Sequoia High Schools. At Carlmont some 750 people turned out to oppose closure of their school. Three of the five board members agreed and rejected Chaffey's recommendation that Carlmont be the second school closed.⁴²

Before the Ravenswood hearing took place, the East Palo Alto Municipal Council tendered a resolution against

closing Ravenswood. Students at the school also protested possible closure by students at the school. Several task force members then went to a meeting of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council to discuss the issue. The school board minutes reported that for the 150 people present, "the dominant theme was that the community needs a high school and opposition was voiced to the closing of Ravenswood."⁴³ There were also complaints that the community had no representation on the task force and, according to the minutes, "there was an indication that a plan to develop an active campaign to keep Ravenswood open is under way."⁴⁴

The day after the hearing at Ravenswood, the front page headline of the Palo Alto Times read "All-out fight vowed to keep school."⁴⁵ The paper reported that 256 of 260 people present signed a petition to keep Ravenswood open, and at one point 60 staged a walkout. "Speakers," declared the Times, "repeatedly called the recommendation unjust. They said Ravenswood parents were the predominant backers of the district's volunteer desegregation plan since its implementation four years ago and that their support was given uncomplainingly despite hardships."⁴⁶ Many speakers vowed that the people of East Palo Alto would prevent closure.⁴⁷ Intoned Ravenswood Elementary School Superintendent Warren Hayman, "When an all-white school board closes the only high school in an all-black community[,] that's tantamount to genocide. It's

criminal."⁴⁸ And a statement presented by the Ravenswood Elementary School Board captured the anger of many East Palo Alto residents:

The entire situation generated by the school closure proposal is a spectacle of the tyranny of majority rule in the hands of unconscionable community leaders. Constituting only a small portion of the voters [sic] taxable wealth of the District, this community continually has been subject to arbitrary and capricious actions of the Sequoia District. The closing of Ravenswood is yet another example.

We hope that the Sequoia Board realizes that it cannot continue to frustrate the participation of this community in decisions which affect them lest such continual aggravation have disastrous effects on us all.⁴⁹

The anger and frustration of East Palo Alto residents and Ravenswood High School students spilled over into the final hearing at Sequoia. They expressed concern about the hostile environments black students leaving Ravenswood would encounter, while the president of the senior class complained that black students would bear the burden of busing: "Only East Palo Alto kids would have one-way, forced busing. Only East Palo Alto would be divided up. Why not divide up the white community and send those students to Ravenswood?"⁵⁰

Despite the outcry at the hearings at Ravenswood and Sequoia, the board did not capitulate as it had done in the face of protests at white, middle class Carlmont. Instead, Superintendent Chaffey expanded his rationale for closing Ravenswood. In part this was a response to the development

of an alternative way of calculating savings suggested by Trustee Robertson. This method revealed that there was little comparable fiscal advantage to closing Ravenswood.⁵¹ In part it stemmed from concerns East Palo Alto residents raised at hearings about quality of education. The Ravenswood Elementary School Board, for instance, wanted to know why, if the predominantly white high schools were educationally advantageous to black students, there had been no comment about that subject.⁵² Also Joyce Reeves, a prominent educational activist, asked what percentage of black graduates from the "hill" schools went on to four year colleges and how this percentage compared to that of white graduates. No answer to her question was recorded.⁵³ Finally, there was the matter of disproportionate burden of closing Ravenswood on black students.

Chaffey began to respond to the above concerns during the final hearing on closure, and he more fully elaborated them in a memorandum written to the trustees. Regarding quality of education, he pointed out that only 4% of Ravenswood area students who had participated in the transfer program the previous year chose to return to Ravenswood, and overall some 70% of students in the area were participating in the transfer plan--apparent testimony to the superiority of education outside Ravenswood.⁵⁴ He noted also the high truancy rate of black students at Ravenswood in comparison to other schools and the lower

percentage of black seniors that graduated from Ravenswood than the other schools.⁵⁵ In addition, he felt that guarantees of equality of educational opportunity had been institutionalized in the hill schools:

A number of programs, courses, and activities are provided for minority students in the schools of the district--Title I programs in reading and mathematics (reading and math labs) with special financing by ESEA funds, special summer school programs in basic skills for incoming ninth graders, work experience and job placement services, at least one minority counselor at each school, lower counseling ratios for minority students, a minority school liaison worker at each school (with two at Sequoia High School), special materials in career guidance center for minority students, special staffing ratios for minority students in all schools, special counseling days when Black students are taken to college campuses, special minority curriculum in English and social studies, special programs and observances (Black History Week, Cinco de Mayo Celebration), staff workshops in human relations.⁵⁶

Chaffey argued not only that educational opportunities in the predominantly white schools were superior and equality of opportunity was ensured, but that the abolition of Ravenswood might consequently attract people to East Palo Alto given the assurance their children would attend a quality school.⁵⁷ Furthermore, as far as the burden of busing was concerned, Chaffey noted that while 400 additional black students would be transferred, this was less than half the number of white students who would be required to change schools.⁵⁸

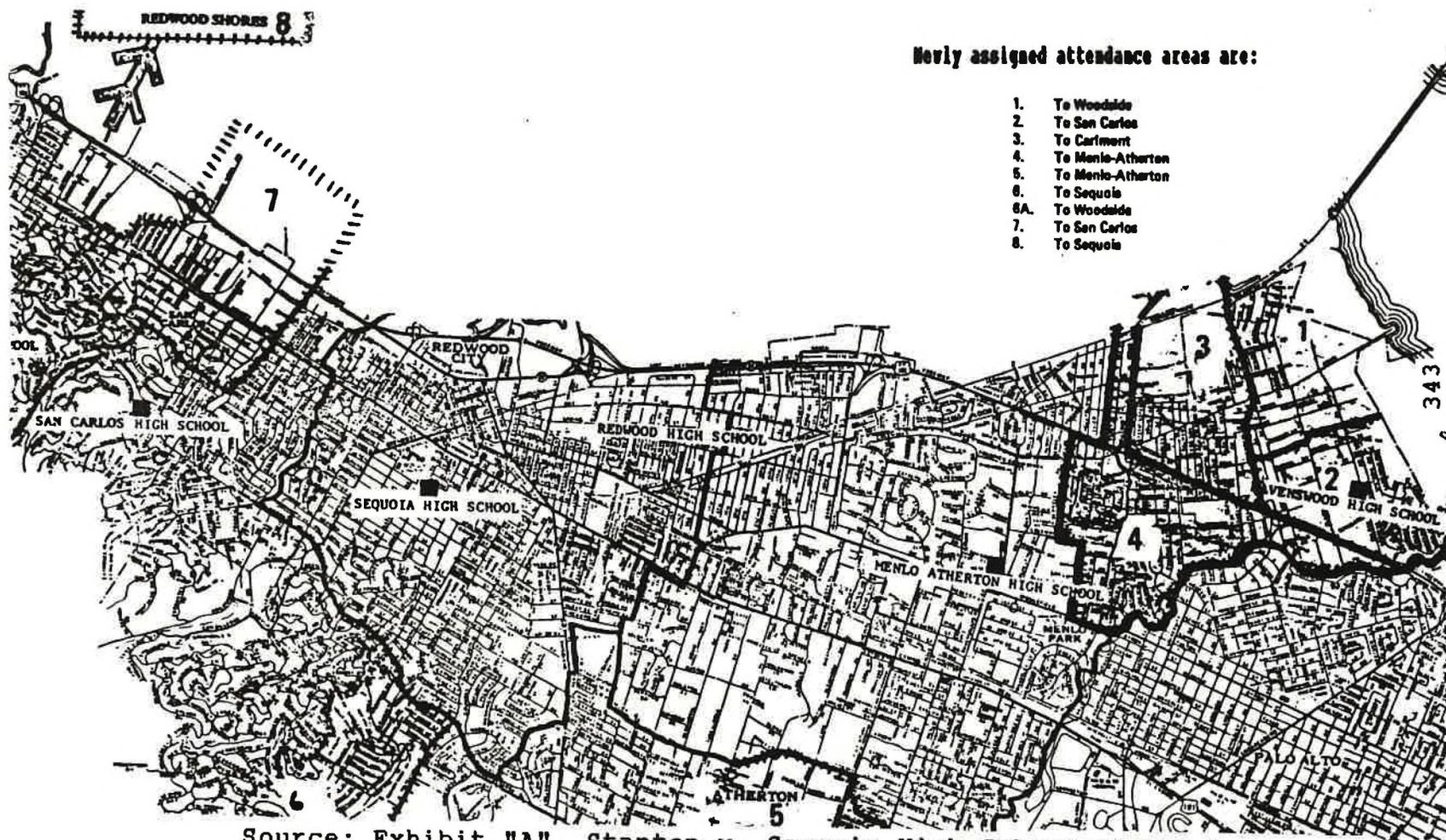
The superintendent selectively employed data to support his case. As the forthcoming discussion of Stanton v.

Sequoia will point out, he overlooked important matters that called into question his position that closing Ravenswood enhanced educational opportunities for minority students. At any rate, on October 15, with only Jack Robertson dissenting, the trustees voted to close Ravenswood at the end of the 1975-76 academic year (see map 10).

Despite many East Palo Altans' anger at proceedings that isolated Ravenswood for closure, resistance did not take the form of demonstrations or boycotts. Perhaps this was due to a political climate different from the 1960s, when activity in the street was a major vehicle for pressing demands for justice. Perhaps it was due to the difficulty of achieving unity around the maintenance of a school the majority of families in East Palo Alto had forsaken. Perhaps also traditional tactics were rendered impotent by circumstances. Boycotts at Ravenswood and Menlo-Atherton had been the most effective tactics of getting concessions from the district in the late 1960s. Now that the issue was to preserve a school rather than to transform one, there was nothing left to boycott in East Palo Alto and a district-wide effort would be logistically infeasible. Whatever the calculus of these factors, opponents to closure, even those like Mothers For Equal Education which had so long employed non-violent direct action, went to the courts to keep the school open.⁵⁹ A group of East Palo Alto parents hired a black attorney, W. James Ware of Palo Alto, to seek a

Map 10

Sequoia Union High School District Attendance Boundaries
Showing Newly Assigned Attendance Areas, 1976



Source: Exhibit "A", Stanton v. Sequoia High School District, 1975.

permanent injunction that would ban the closing of Ravenswood. While the suit supported desegregation, it sought a plan "which will not impose the entire burden of desegregating the school District on black citizens of said District."⁶⁰

Legal Exoneration

Most of the arguments of Stanton v. Sequoia Union High School District previously had been laid out in the hearings or in written documents that addressed the issue of closure prior to the board's decision to terminate Ravenswood. Plaintiffs noted that black students would be farmed out to "the three most distant predominantly white high schools in the District."⁶¹ And they argued:

The impact of the closure and one-way busing will be harmful to the achievement, aspirations, self-esteem, race relations, and opportunities for higher education for Plaintiffs. The black students will be cast as second-class citizens, unable to attend their own neighborhood school, while all of their white contemporaries are permitted to attend their own neighborhood schools as usual.⁶²

The case, however, was not built upon direct evidence that busing blacks to the hill schools would harm the quality of the education they received; rather, it relied on previous court rulings that had found fault with state actions that put unequal burdens on minorities. Plaintiffs cited Norwalk CORE v. Norwalk Redevelopment Agency and other cases to support the following claim: "Where the effect of

governmental action is to impose unequal burdens or discriminate on the basis of race, there is no requirement that there be evidence of bad faith, ill will, evil motive, or actual intent to discriminate."⁶³ And citing Bell v. West Point Municipal Separate School District, they contended: "A plan which places the entire burden of desegregation on the black community because of unwillingness to compel whites to attend a predominantly black school is patently discriminatory."⁶⁴ The plaintiffs also noted that closing any of four schools would generate approximately the same savings, but they pointed out that even if that were not the case, "the fact that a one-way busing plan will save more money is not a justification for an otherwise invidious classification."⁶⁵ In a permutation of the Brown decision, it was argued that one-way busing for black students would harm them psychologically:

The burden created by this plan is far greater than simply having to get up earlier in the morning, inability to participate in after-school activities, increased cost of transportation, and distance from home in case of emergency. The more significant burden is the psychological effects on the East Palo Alto children.⁶⁶

Defendants countered the arguments of the plaintiffs by honing in on the legal right of the district to close a black school. Relying on the Gomperts decision that had found the District innocent of de jure segregation in 1971, they claimed that there was no reason to presume that closing a black school would be "constitutionally

suspect."⁶⁷ They further recounted the history of school policy since Gomperts that had significantly lessened racial isolation, and they referred to the exhaustive efforts of the School Closure Task Force which allegedly chose Ravenswood through an impartial analysis.⁶⁸ Indeed, they argued "that the closure was based on educational rather than racial reasons."⁶⁹ Supporting documents included an affidavit from George Chaffey and a district report, "Compelling Reasons for Closing Ravenswood." As in his prior statement, Chaffey indicated that black students at Ravenswood experienced the highest truancy rates and that the percentage of black seniors graduating from Ravenswood in 1974-75 was lower than that of black students at the other schools in the district.⁷⁰ "Compelling Reasons for Closing Ravenswood" underscored the fact that around 70% of students in East Palo Alto were not going to Ravenswood, and that few who transferred out returned. Accounting for the exodus from Ravenswood, the report surmised:

Parents want to break the cycle of under-achieving, want to break the cycle of low motivation, want to provide an opportunity for their sons and daughters to have an educational experience in a completely new setting, want them to get in the mainstream of a large, comprehensive high school, want them to get new experiences that will help them cope with life beyond high school.⁷¹

The report also invoked the Coleman study, to both exonerate the district from the shortcomings in academic performance of students of lower socio-economic background

and justify sending such students into environments where they would mix with higher achieving students.⁷² The defendants' supporting documents referred also to the greater savings of closing Ravenswood, to fewer disruptions it would cause, and to the improvement of East Palo Alto's image that would result from closure.⁷³

Given what they saw as the educational, fiscal, and logistical advantages to closing Ravenswood, the defendants not only contended that terminating Ravenswood was the optimal way of meeting financial exigencies while preserving quality education, but they also held that exempting Ravenswood from closure "because it is located in the black community...represents the kind of reverse invidious discrimination soundly condemned in Defunis v. Odegaard...."⁷⁴ "In sum," defendants argued, "plaintiffs have placed undue emphasis on what they perceive is an unfair burden upon the black students in the District, while ignoring the sound educational reasons supporting the closure of Ravenswood and the concomitant steps toward integration taken by the District."⁷⁵

The court found for the defendants, stating that the "record contained more than ample evidence to show that the board acted in utmost good faith in a deliberate manner without improper racial motivation or arbitrary disregard of rights of a minority group."⁷⁶ It repeated contentions of defendants that closing Ravenswood would require the fewest

transfers and save the most money.⁷⁷ It looked favorably upon the historical efforts of the District to promote desegregation.⁷⁸ It acknowledged that the vast majority of the 1281 East Palo Alto students would be assigned to schools ranging from eight to 10.6 miles from home, but noted that the burden did not solely fall on black students, since almost 900 students--most of them white--also would be required to leave their home attendance areas.⁷⁹ It noted further that of those students in the Ravenswood attendance area "only about 300 students are to be reassigned who are not already voluntarily attending elsewhere."⁸⁰

Not only was the court unimpressed by the extent of disproportionate burden on black students, it also could locate no evidence "that the Board's action was the product of its repugnance to busing white students into the black neighborhood school."⁸¹ In perfect harmony with the contention of defendants, then, the court was satisfied "that a school closure was necessary, that objective, nonracial indicia pointed strongly to Ravenswood, and that the integration plan attendant upon the closure necessitating student reassignments was adopted with the sole-minded purpose of providing quality education to all high school students in the district."⁸² The decision was tendered on February 18, 1976.

A notice of appeal was filed but never pursued. In his announcement that the case would be dropped, attorney Ware

spoke to what he considered to be abiding failures of understanding on the part of the district: "Until the district realizes that blackness is not limited to skin color, but embraces language, cultural tradition, literature, creed, and group ways, it will not meet the educational needs of black children."³³ While such a statement may have carried considerable truth, it referred to intangibles that could not be addressed or redressed through the courts. Racial balance, on the other hand, could be addressed.

The decision to close Ravenswood went a long way toward solving the district's financial problems and mollifying teachers who objected to the school's majority black enrollment. It furthermore preempted white resistance to mandatory busing by terminating the only school most were reluctant to attend. While the court failed to acknowledge this reality, it was not lost on former trustee Hugh Taylor. He was paraphrased as saying, "If any other school is closed, Ravenswood will not be the type of school it is now. It would be the only school in the district with three-fourths of its students there against their wishes."³⁴ Finally, closure took all legal monkeys off the board's back. The federal court was satisfied and so too were the state court and the Office for Civil Rights.

Long delayed by Proposition 21, Sanders v. Sequoia Union High School District was settled in December of 1975.

Essentially, the court approved the desegregation plan built around the closing of Ravenswood, and the district admitted no culpability.⁸⁵ It was stipulated that the remaining high schools would have minority percentages that did not deviate more than 5% from the percentage of minorities in the district, and that each school would remain within 5% of capacity enrollment.⁸⁶ It was also agreed that a human relations program would be set up to accomplish the following:

- a. To continue to develop staff capacity to meet the needs of minority students.
- b. To continue to encourage minority students to participate in all aspects of school life.
- c. To continue to maintain an educational climate in which students who are achieving below grade level are encouraged and assisted in improving their performance.
- d. To continue to create opportunities among minority students for successful experiences in district schools and for building positive self-images.
- e. To continue working to prevent practices, procedures and staff attitudes which result in discrimination against any student because of their race, ethnic background, religion, or sex.
- f. To continue to create a favorable climate for integration among students, staff, and the community.⁸⁷

Finally, the decision called for continued court jurisdiction for six years and required the district to create a commission to evaluate regularly the human relations program. The commission would comprise eight members, four of whom would be minorities and four would not be district employees.⁸⁸

The Office for Civil Rights was now satisfied as well. Floyd Pierce considered compliance with Sanders tantamount to complying with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. More than five years of often acrimonious exchanges with Chaffey ended with Pierce saying, "I genuinely appreciate your commitment to an equal educational opportunity for all of the students in the Sequoia Union High School District."⁸⁹

Blind Justice

On the face of it, the Stanton case appears almost frivolous. The Federal District Court, the State Superior Court, and the Office for Civil Rights, all entrusted with protecting minority rights, without the slightest hesitation approved the closing of Ravenswood and the accompanying desegregation plan. In addition, while defendants in Stanton had exaggerated somewhat in claiming that 70% of students in the Ravenswood attendance area were voluntarily transferring to other schools, still during the 1975-76 year 60% were doing so--an apparent statement that the majority felt their educational interests could be served better by leaving their neighborhood high school.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the total enrollment at Ravenswood had dropped to a mere 659, more than 1,000 students fewer than the second smallest school in the district.⁹¹ Finally, with the possible exception of the community of Ladera, desegregationist

sentiment was stronger in the East Palo area than anywhere else in the district.⁹²

A desire for desegregation, however, did not necessarily imply support for the scheme that the courts found just--one in which minority students were very much the minority in each high school. For instance, in a survey of students enrolled in social psychology classes at Ravenswood in 1972, 26% of the black students favored an all-black school, 19% a school that was three-quarters black, 14% one that was three-fifths black, 37% one that was half and half, and only 1% that was one-quarter black.⁹³ Of course, it is likely that students remaining at Ravenswood were most apt to support a black majority school. Unfortunately, of the students who transferred out, only a few left records of their feelings. These, however, reveal ambiguity about their decision. Their sentiments were documented in the first year of voluntary desegregation by the Sequoia Union High School District Newsletter, hardly a publication eager to raise doubts about the undertaking. One student wished she could combine the academic rigor of Woodside with the ambience of Ravenswood: "I found my identity at Ravenswood...but remember, that was Ravenswood a year ago."⁹⁴ Another transfer student asserted, "I still have faith in my Black sisters and brothers. I can't relate to Whites. How can a White girl relate to my problems? How can I talk to a White student? The sister is more in touch

with my problems than a white student is!"⁹⁵

Why did so many black students participate in the voluntary transfer program? One explanation points to the hard sell black students were given in eighth grade. Among new transfers for the 1972-73 academic year, for instance, it is no accident that 85% were coming directly from the junior high schools.⁹⁶ While Sequoia officials gave students a push, Ravenswood exercised little pull. As one of the above quoted students indicated, Ravenswood was not the same school it had been. That Ravenswood had been made congenial to the interests and inclinations of its white guests was a reality lost on few. Thus, while the majority of students in the Ravenswood attendance area "chose" to transfer elsewhere, the choice was based on constrained options.

The district, of course, presented evidence that Ravenswood provided an inferior education--a higher truancy rate, a lower rate of graduation. Such figures, though, were impressionistic and obviously selected to make Ravenswood look worse than the other high schools. We learn nothing about graduation rates over time or how many students at the respective schools dropped out before they were seniors. We learn about truancy based on only 15 days of record keeping, and we hear nothing about suspensions and serious racial confrontations, which were more prevalent at the predominantly white schools. Trustee Robertson looked

upon school officials' educational argument as hypocrisy. He said that the educational rationale for closing Ravenswood is "contrary to statements made by Board members regarding our success at Ravenswood, and contrary to statements that staff and teachers have made during voluntary recruitment."⁹⁷ Robertson also seems to have assumed that the predominantly white schools attracted the more academically able black students. He argued that a lower percentage of black Ravenswood seniors who graduated in 1975 indicated "the high percentage of underachieving students at Ravenswood."⁹⁸ Certainly there is no evidence that black students at Ravenswood prospered academically. But there is no compelling evidence that black students encountered better educational environments in the predominantly white schools.

The Stanton decision overlooked such nuances, however. It minimized or ignored other issues as well. It pointed out that the burden of busing did not rest solely on black students. But it did not indicate how unequal the burden was. Black students had to travel much farther, and 100% from East Palo Alto had to transfer, whether they wanted to or not. On the other hand, only about 10% of white students faced transfer, and they were sent to predominantly white schools--hardly an experience equivalent to black students' encounter with mostly white institutions. In addition, students in the predominantly white west side of

East Palo Alto were sent to neighboring Menlo-Atherton, while students in the overwhelmingly black east side repaired to the three most distant high schools.⁹⁹ This disproportionate burden did not by itself make the district legally culpable, but the ease with which the federal court glossed over the matter was indicative of the shallow scrutiny it exercised.

While understating the unequal burden of busing, the court recognized its existence. Stanton, though, held that a "naked statistical argument" was not sufficient to show intent to discriminate.¹⁰⁰ What could show intent, however, was "analyzing alternative courses which could have been chosen and which would not have created the infelicitous impact complained of...."¹⁰¹ Interestingly there is no indication that the court imagined possible alternative options, even when supplied with information that closing Ravenswood would not save substantially more money than several other schools and that the low property value of Ravenswood would have made it less advantageous to sell than other schools.¹⁰² In addition, declining enrollment in the district would have minimized overcrowding, regardless of the school closed.¹⁰³

Had the attorney for the defendants put forward the above arguments, perhaps the judge would have taken a closer look at the case. But in all likelihood no marshalling of evidence would have broken the link between racial balance

and equal education that the courts since Brown had forged. It was clear to Jack Robertson and clear to other school officials, to say nothing of East Palo Alto residents, that the trustees had followed the most politically expedient course--one that coincided with the courts' conception of just schools.¹⁰⁴ If it is ironic that many blacks were displeased with a policy they had once sought so vigorously, it was a further irony that a victory in Stanton for the plaintiffs, at least in the short run, would have been inconsequential. Given the legal emphasis on racial balance in which minorities participated in the schools in the same ratios as their population in the district, the majority of students in the Ravenswood attendance area would still have to bus elsewhere and Ravenswood would have become an overwhelmingly white school.¹⁰⁵

The decision to close Ravenswood, like earlier efforts to attract white students to the school, created a semblance of justice by furthering desegregation. Certainly Chaffey and others believed that blacks would benefit from closing Ravenswood. But it is not clear that equity for black students was their primary motivation. In fact, school leaders ignored black concerns as they went about creating racial balance in such a way as to resolve financial and legal problems without inconveniencing whites. As the final chapter will note, the consequences for black students were serious.

1. Memorandum of Fruehling to Principals, February 10, 1972 in Grant Proposal File E9111, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Calif. (hereafter SUHSD), and SUHSD Newsletter 16(March 1972):1. For a protest of the mayor of Menlo Park on the issue of white students being able to leave Ravenswood, see Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.) vol. 14, June 7, 1972, p. 215.
2. "Voluntary Transfer Totals," June 16, 1972, in Voluntary Transfer (hereafter VT) Files, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Cal. (hereafter SUHSD).
3. Ibid.
4. SUHSD min. vol. 16, September 5, 1973, p. 26.
5. "Voluntary Transfer Totals," June 15, 1973 in Voluntary Transfer Statistics 72-73, SUHSD.
6. "Flyer," March 19, 1974, in Voluntary Transfer Communications File, SUHSD. Also see Ravenswood Post, March 27, 1974, p. 8.
7. PAT, April 9, 1974.
8. Ibid.
9. In addition, 349 minority students left the Ravenswood attendance area. See "Voluntary Transfer Totals," September 11, 1974, in VT Files.
10. SUHSD, "Voluntary Transfer Opportunities," n.p., n.d., but stamped March 1975, in Voluntary Transfer Communications File.
11. Ibid.
12. 239 black students transferred for the first time. SUHSD min., vol. 17, June 4, 1975, p. 311.
13. SUHSD min. vol. 17, September 18, 1974, p. 58. In addition, few transfer students chose to return to their home schools. For 1974-75, 36 students returned to Ravenswood, and 35 did so the following year. For those leaving Ravenswood, the numbers were 18 for 1974-75 and 20 the following year. See "Summary of Transfers and Unvolunteers 1972-75," in VT Files.

14. SUHSD min., vol. 14, June 21, 1972, p. 226.
15. SUHSD Newsletter, 17(January 1973):2-3. Fed up with the program, the Ravenswood Elementary District refused to aid recruitment for voluntary transfer during 1974. See SUHSD min., March 6, 1974, p. 128.
16. SUHSD min., vol. 17, June 4, 1975, pp. 311-312.
17. Resolution attached to memorandum from Orrin Cross to Sequoia Union High School District, March 11, 1972 in Segregation-Integration Plans: Final Decision (hereafter S-I:FD) File, SUHSD.
18. Memorandum from Orrin Cross, Certificated Employees Council Chairman, to All Certificated Staff Members in the Sequoia Union High School District, n.d (but March 1972), attached to Cross to SUHSD, March 11, 1972, in S-I:FD File.
19. SUHSD min., vol. 16, September 5, 1973, p. 33.
20. Ibid.
21. SUHSD min., vol. 16, September 19, 1973, p. 39.
22. San Mateo Times, November 18, 1975, p. 1. Also see, SUHSD min., vol. 15, July 19, 1972, between pp. 250 and 251 and July 26, 1972, p. 263.
23. SUHSD min., vol. 15, September 6, 1972, p. 271. The Proposition, otherwise known as the Wakefield Amendment, was supported by a board resolution, with only Robertson dissenting.
24. Chaffey Affidavit in Stanton v. Sequoia Union High School District, no. C-75-2687 SC (N.D. Cal.), January 19, 1971, at 1.
25. SUHSD min., vol. 15, February 5, 1973 p. 342 and February 21, 1973, p. 355.
26. Chaffey Affidavit, 2.
27. Robert L. Wheeler, Deputy Commissioner for School Systems, Office of Education, to George P. Chaffey, June 8, 1976, in ESAA Grant Proposal 1976 File, SUHSD.
28. Trustee Dorst, for instance, noted that inflation for 1974 was 12%. See SUHSD min., vol 17, January 22, 1975, p. 168.
29. SUHSD min., vol. 18, October 2, 1975, p. 99.

30. SUHSD min. vol. 17, May 7, 1975, p. 278; SUHSD Newsletter vol.? (November 1975):1.
31. SUHSD min. vol. 17, February 3, 1975, p. 176. Cryer left Ravenswood to pursue doctoral studies. Van was the last of Ravenswood's six principals: Donald Bogie, 1958-1961; Roderic Moore, 1961-1963; Malcolm Taylor, 1963-1968; Earl Menneweather, 1968-1971; Clarence Cryer, 1971-1974; James Van, 1974-1976.
32. "School Closure Study Sessions Invitation List," Exhibit 2 to Affidavit of Marion McDowell, Stanton v. Sequoia Union High School District, January 20, 1976.
33. SUHSD min., vol. 14, May 17, 1972.
34. SUHSD min., vol. 17, April 4, 1973, pp. 387, 388.
35. SUHSD min., vol. 17, November 20, 1974, p. 110.
36. Minutes of Public Meeting of School Closure Task Force, June 17, 1975, n.p.
37. Sequoia Union High School District on School Closure: Summary of School Closure Questionnaire, p. 3B, n.d. (survey conducted, May 1975), in School Closure-HEW File, SUHSD. It is not clear, however, whether the Ravenswood category refers to parents and students in the Ravenswood attendance area or those who attend or whose children attend. Another survey item, which includes parents from East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, received the highest parental percentage in the District: 79% expressed their highest preference for finding an alternative to closing a high school (p. 3). In addition, consistent with their historic concern for racial balance, Ravenswood had the highest percentage of staff (57) in the District who approved or supported closure of their own school (p. 3B).
38. See, for example, School Closure Task Force, Minutes of Public Meeting, June 9, 1975, p. 3; June 10, 1975, p. 4.
39. "Summary of School Closure Questionnaire," pp. 2B, 3.
40. SUHSD min., vol. 18, August 19, 1975, p. 56.
41. Ibid., p. 45.
42. PAT, September 30, 1975. Conservative trustees were much more likely to rely on Carlmont voters than voters from East Palo Alto. In addition, Mayor Bob Jones of Carlmont had warned that city control over zoning would make it

impossible for the trustees to make the land available to apartment buildings, a threat leaders of unincorporated East Palo Alto could not make.

43. SUHSD min., vol. 18, September 17, 1975, p. 75. For resolution of the Municipal Council, see September 3, 1975, p. 49; and for Ravenswood protest, see PAT, September 16, 1975.

44. Ibid.

45. PAT, September 26, 1975.

46. Ibid.

47. SUHSD min., vol. 18, September 25, 1975, p. 83

48. PAT, September 26, 1975.

49. SUHSD min., September 25, 1975, inserted between pp. 82 and 83.

50. PAT, October 3, 1975.

51. SUHSD min., vol. 18, October 1, 1975, p. 97.

52. SUHSD min., vol. 18, September 25, 1975, between pp. 82 and 83. According to its statement, "If there is evidence on the benefits of our community's participation in other schools, where is it? It would seem that the District would reveal it as the primary reason for closing Ravenswood. Obviously such evidence, if it does exist, is of minor importance to Sequoia."

53. Ibid., p. 83.

54. SUHSD min., vol. 18, October 2, 1975, p. 100; Chaffey to Board, "Answers to Questions Raised During Public Hearings on the Recommendations for School Closure," October 13, 1975, p. 4, in Materials Submitted to HEW File, SUHSD.

55. Chaffey to Board, "Answers to Questions," October 13, 1975, p. 6.

56. Ibid., p. 6.

57. Ibid., p. 4.

58. Ibid., p. 2; SUHSD min., October 2, 1975, p. 100.

59. Mothers For Equal Education, for instance began a "dollar-a-day drive" to pay for legal costs. See PAT, January 19, 1976.
60. Complaint, Stanton v. Sequoia Union High School District, December 17, 1975, at 2.
61. Ibid., 7.
62. Ibid.
63. "Memorandum of Law in Support of Motion for a Temporary Restraining Order and Preliminary Injunction," Stanton, December 17, 1975, at 5.
64. Ibid., 7.
65. Ibid., 11.
66. Ibid., 10.
67. "Memorandum in Opposition to Injunction," Stanton, January 20, 1976 at 16.
68. Ibid., 10, 18.
69. Ibid., 18.
70. Chaffey Affidavit, Stanton, point 9. Though not noted here, exact percentages of twelfth graders who graduated during 1974-75 show large disparities. 51% of black seniors as opposed to 91% of white seniors at Ravenswood graduated. Black seniors who graduated at Woodside, Menlo-Atherton, Carlmont, and San Carlos, were, respectively 71%, 73%, 84%, 86%--See George P. Chaffey to Floyd L. Pierce, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Region 9, November 21, 1975, p. 7, in Materials Submitted to HEW File, SUHSD.
71. Sequoia Union High School District, "Compelling Reasons for Closing Ravenswood High School," Exhibit 3, Stanton, September 17, 1975, at 9.
72. "Compelling Reasons," 8.
73. "Compelling Reasons," 1 and Chaffey Affidavit, 4.
74. "Memorandum in Opposition to Injunction," 22.
75. Ibid., 23-24.
76. 408 Fed. Supp. 502(1976) at 503.

77. Ibid., 507-508.
78. Ibid, 509.
79. Ibid., 511-512.
80. Ibid, 513.
81. Ibid., 515.
82. Ibid., 515, note 40.
83. PAT, April 13, 1976.
84. SUHSD min., vol. 18, October 2, 1975, p. 102. The Palo Alto Times uses the word "will" instead of "wishes." [PAT, October 3, 1975.]
85. "Stipulation and Order," Sanders v. Sequoia Union High School District, no. 166522, December 8, 1975, at 2.
86. Ibid., 2.
87. Ibid., 3.
88. Ibid., 4.
89. Floyd L. Pierce, Director, Office For Civil Rights Region IX to George P. Chaffey, January 16, 1976, in ESAA Grant Proposal 1976 File.
90. The 60% figure is calculated from tables presented in "Racial and Ethnic Distribution of Students Residing in the Ravenswood High School Attendance Area," in Department of Research and Data Processing, "Application for Assistance Under the Emergency School Aid Act," October 1975, p. 41 and "1975-1976 Minority Total Enrollment," in "Application for Assistance Under the Emergency School Aid Act," February 1976, p. 12, in Grant Proposal 1975-76 File, SUHSD.
91. "1975-76 Minority Enrollment," p. 12 of "ESAA Application," 1976.
92. One index of this was the vote on Proposition 21, the anti-busing amendment. In East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, 1401 opposed it, while 1093 approved, and in Ladera 542 opposed and 382 supported it. On the other hand, Menlo Park voters were almost equally divided with 6136 against and 6133 for, while Woodside and Atherton voters favored it, the former by 1400 to 1024 and the latter by 2511 to 1612-- See Menlo-Atherton Recorder, November 15, 1972.

93. PAT, January 27, 1972.
94. SUHSD Newsletter, 16(February 1972):7.
95. Ibid.
96. Clarence L. Cryer, Principal of Ravenswood High School to Parents and Students, May 16, 1972, in 72-73 Voluntary Transfer Statistics File.
97. SUHSD min., vol. 18, October 15, 1975, p. 111.
98. Ibid., p. 113.
99. For the exact numbers of students being transferred and their destinations, see Stanton, 408 Fed. Supp. 502(1976) at 511-512.
100. Ibid., 516.
101. Ibid.
102. Based on a method of calculating savings suggested by Robertson, over 10 years, closing Ravenswood would save \$8,653,417. Closing Carlmont would save \$8,582,718. Closing Menlo-Atherton would save \$8,314,331. And closing Sequoia would save \$8,314,331--"Compelling Reasons for Closing Ravenswood," September 11, 1975, p. 13. For the low property value of Ravenswood, see "Sequoia Union High School District On School Closure," p. 6., Exhibit 1 of Marion McDowell Affidavit, Stanton.
103. A total enrollment of 12,379 in 1969 had declined to 10,987 in the fall of 1975--Redwood City Tribune, October 16, 1975, p. 1.
104. For statement of Robertson, see Redwood City Tribune, October 16, 1975, p. 1. This was also the understanding of current superintendent, Merle Fruehling--interview, September 8, 1983, in Redwood City.
105. Trustee Timothy Wellings noted this situation: "Ravenswood is not a neighborhood school now and never can be under the present legal demand for desegregation."--Redwood City Tribune, October 16, 1975, p. 1. On the other hand, the racial guidelines stipulated in Sanders would expire after five years. See Min., vol. 21, January 30, 1980, p. 81.

CHAPTER 9

THE IRONY OF RECENT SCHOOL REFORM

In the fall of 1976, black students for the first time were attending Sequoia high schools in ratios equivalent to their district-wide population. The leader of the district was now Harry Reynolds, a black man who in May had replaced retired superintendent George Chaffey.¹ The achievement of racial balance and the elevation of a black to the superintendency would have exceeded the loftiest aspirations of blacks a decade earlier. Many, however, now viewed the situation with skepticism if not alarm, given the decreasing leverage black parents would possess in educational matters, given lack of confidence in school authorities' motives, and given the problems blacks faced in predominantly white district schools. If the identification of racially balanced schools with just schools encouraged liberal whites to be reassured by the closing of Ravenswood, a number of black students as well as black adults justifiably seemed less certain at the benefits of the decision.

The first part of this chapter will look briefly at the circumstances black students faced the first few years after Ravenswood was closed. A decline of minority faculty, serious academic problems, and diminished involvement in education on the part of the East Palo Alto community all point to damaging effects of district-wide desegregation.

The second part of the chapter will attempt to capture the evolving meanings given to racial justice during the life of Ravenswood High School. It will point out that over time whites' conception of racial justice implied greater support for desegregation. For most citizens of the district this merely meant greater acceptance, but for school district officials it meant an active role in promoting and sustaining desegregation. For blacks, on the other hand, an equation of desegregation with racial justice declined by the late 1960s, and began to be replaced by a results-based standard of justice. Through such a lens, great inequities remained despite the efforts made in the district to advance the cause of educational equality.

The Aftermath of Desegregation

The very opening weeks of school in 1976 augured ill. Racial fighting broke out, particularly at Carlmont and San Carlos, prompting the latter to close early at least one day.² Trustee Robertson traced the racial problems to the lack of success of minority students, for which he

implicitly blamed the district. According to the school board minutes, "Trustee Robertson stated that he believes that one reason students misbehave in school is because they are not succeeding at school. If the district is able to give every student a chance to succeed, many disciplinary problems will be eliminated."³ Community Activist Ed Becks, executive director of the San Mateo County Economic Opportunity Commission, was more blunt: "There is no support for black education in the Sequoia district. The System does not understand or care about our needs."⁴

Superintendent Reynolds acknowledged that problems in the district reflected staff limitations in addressing racial issues. Recognizing how far the district was from "meaningful integration," he stated that "the teachers and administrators at the school sites do not have sufficient time nor important human relations skills to bring the students together and to focus the community concerns around resolution of social problems and other school problems."⁵ Reynolds indicated, however, that school leadership had not been passive about racial unrest; he pointed out that student retreats and parent meetings had been held to address the problems.⁶

Despite the sensitivity of Reynolds and other district staff to the difficulties minority students faced in predominantly white and affluent schools, their problems were likely exacerbated by a decline in minority faculty.

In a minor irony, the only black member of the School Closure Task Force, Ravenswood Principal James Van, was laid off at the end of the 1975-76 year.⁷ This was symptomatic of a larger problem: a budget-strapped district was now less able to mitigate the alienation of black students in white environments by affording them contact with minority professionals.

Since minority teachers tended to be the most recently hired, they disproportionately lost their jobs when layoffs became necessary. During the 1973-74 academic year there were 52 black teachers, representing 8% of the district's total teaching staff.⁸ By 1976-77, the number of black teachers had decreased to 26 or slightly less than 6% of the teaching force, and there were no black principals.⁹ Despite the efforts of the district to give preference to minority teaching candidates, continuing budgetary problems and shrinking enrollments thwarted such a goal.¹⁰

At any rate, black students did not fare well in the first year after Ravenswood closed. The Human Relations Evaluation Commission, established by the Sanders decision, issued a critical report of minority students' progress during the 1976-77 year. It found that the most important clubs had memberships that were 99% white. It scored the tendency of minority students to go into non-academic tracks, particularly the disproportionate enrollment in food and clothing classes. Yet it seemed to suggest that

this was the result of self-selection, so "forcing them out of non-academic courses" perhaps was necessary.¹¹ The report noted also that black students tended to be in remedial programs and rarely participated in the program for the gifted.¹²

The concerns of the commission regarding black students particularly were born out by the numbers recorded in the Civil Rights Survey for 1976-77. Of 1482 Black students, 410 or 28% were enrolled in vocational programs. For whites, however, only 1904 of 7512 [21%] were in these programs.¹³ More dramatic were the percentages of students in gifted and talented classes. For whites it was 12% and for blacks .7%.¹⁴

Given the absence of systematic, longitudinal data, it is impossible to chart precisely the fortunes of minority students in the district. Despite data limitations, however, it seems clear that the problems of minority students in the first year of total desegregation did not dissipate with time.

In 1978-79 the district began giving proficiency tests. Mandated by the Hart Bill, as of June 1980, seniors had to pass these in order to graduate.¹⁵ For black students, this would pose severe problems. During 1978-79, for instance, 48% of black tenth graders passed the reading proficiency exam, 11% passed writing, and 14% passed mathematics. For Hispanics, the figures were slightly better--48%, 23%, and

20%, while for all others they were 85%, 59%, and 54%.¹⁶

Minority students were also disproportionately referred to alternative schools due to excessive absences. Of 300 referred in 1978-79, 34% were black and 14% Hispanic.¹⁷ Suspensions too remained disproportionately black, for which the district was cited by the Office for Civil Rights.¹⁸

Court oversight of the school district expired on December 11, 1981. A month earlier the Human Relations Evaluation Committee issued its final report. Unlike the first report whose sharp criticism drew protests from the trustees, this one tried to paint matters of race positively.¹⁹ But the data it reported gave little cause for optimism. Total suspensions for 1980-81 were 6% of all students. The rate for Hispanics was only 5%, but for blacks it was 17%--up from 14% the previous year. Blacks fared worst in this regard at Woodside, where 22% received suspensions.²⁰ In addition, the Report documented alarming drop-out rates for black students. During 1978-79 14% of black students dropped out. In 1979-80, 18% of blacks dropped out. And in 1980-81, 21% of black students dropped out. For whites, the drop-out rate was 5% in 1980-81.²¹ As often in the past, the worst situation was at Carlmont, where 25% of black students dropped out during the 1980-81 year.²² In a June 1979 report, Superintendent Reynolds had pointed out that more than 50% of former Ravenswood Elementary School District students were failing their first

year classes at Carlmont.²³ Clearly, the experience of black students there--always problematic--had become an unmitigated disaster.

Lack of minority participation in extracurricular activities was another finding of the report, though it said it lacked comparative data to uncover trends.²⁴ It noted further the disparities in passing the proficiency tests, and offered that black students were passing at a lower rate than students from other minority groups. Although it had no comprehensive data on seniors, an appendix provided data on juniors who took the test during 1980-81. For Hispanics, 63.35% of eleventh graders passed reading, 53.41% passed writing, and 57.76% passed math. For blacks these percentages were 49.53, 34.67, and 33.12. For all others, they were 80.35, 78.66. and 73.84.²⁵

While it is difficult to judge the effect of proficiency testing on drop-outs, the issue of school leaving by minority students was of grave concern to Superintendent Reynolds. To him, the core issue was that minority students simply were not passing their courses.²⁶ Whatever the constellation of reasons--and a complete analysis would have to look at both problems in the Ravenswood Elementary School District and changes in the labor market--a significant percentage of minority students were not completing high school in the district by the late 1970s. The Civil Rights Survey covering 1979-80 found that

of the 1281 black students in the district 176 or 13.6% were receiving diplomas. The respective figures for Hispanics and whites were 12.1% and 22.3%.²⁷ A subsequent article in the Peninsula Times Tribune stated in early 1981 that only half of Ravenswood Elementary School students were graduating from high school.²⁸ And a 1983 article reported that of the Ravenswood Elementary graduates who enrolled in Woodside High School, 73% dropped out before graduation.²⁹

The Black Response

Along with the disturbing drop-out rate there appeared to be an alteration in the mood of the black community toward the district. There seemed to be much greater acquiescence about educational matters. While this clearly reflected the decline of militance on a national scale, the failure to keep a high school in the community took away the only physical site of leverage in a 125 square mile district whose more than 200,000 people were overwhelmingly white and well-to-do. Though the evidence is far from overwhelming, apathy among minority students and parents apparently had become a more typical response to educational issues in the district than the high level of interaction and vocalized hostilities of years past. For instance, contact with the schools and its programs appeared to be limited. According to the 1980-81 survey of the Human Relations Education Committee, 87% of black parents and 90% of Hispanic parents

knew "nothing" or "almost nothing" about the district's program in racial and human relations.³⁰ Perhaps the reason for this lay in the quality of these programs or in ineffective outreach, but some East Palo Alto residents lay the blame with the community's lack of engagement with the schools. One long time observer of educational affairs in the district related that two of his daughters were Ravenswood graduates, and both had become physicians. A third was doing poorly in one of the hill schools. Despite the high minority suspension and drop-out rates typical in these schools, he felt that the community had become inactive around such issues.³¹

The silence in written records lends support to such a perspective. While in the late 1960s the school board minutes were replete with the concerns and protests of black parents and students, this became rarer after voluntary desegregation in 1971 and nearly lapsed after the closing of Ravenswood. Although the minutes might have become more selective over time--beginning in 1977 they certainly became more laconic--the Peninsula Times Tribune had little to report as well.

By the early 1980s only two matters inspired protest. Projected cuts in staff for 1982-83 that would reduce the black faculty by 36% did create a stir.³² Other than that, only a festering resentment against the district for closing Ravenswood first occasionally broke to the surface and then

was persistently verbalized in the early 1980s. When the high school had been closed, the trustees agreed to make the school available for community activities. Nonetheless, in August 1982 it was shut down completely in order to save money. Plans were made to sell the facility.³³ These moves met determined opposition from East Palo Alto leaders. The Peninsula Times Tribune pointed out in 1981 that the closing of Ravenswood had remained a "sore spot" and the schools "has been seen as a symbol of the community's lack of power in land use decisions."³⁴ When the school went up for sale, the paper rightly stated that "The 30-acre school site had come to symbolize the hopes of the community for decent parkland--and even a dream that some day a high school might be reopened."³⁵ Mayor Barbara Mouton who had never been partial to the quality of education at Ravenswood nonetheless expressed the sentiments of many when she said, "Look at the failure rate of our children at Woodside and Carlmont. When Ravenswood was operating, at least we had a better proportion of children going to college and staying there."³⁶

While the plight of black students in the Sequoia District engendered varying responses--fatigued acquiescence, victim-blaming, and a desire to save the Ravenswood school site---direct efforts to change what went on in schools by both students and the community had ceased. Especially before 1971 Ravenswood had been a handle to grasp

the educational problems black youth faced. With the dispersal of students throughout the vast district, such a handle dissolved.²⁷

Residents of East Palo Alto always had believed in the importance of education and demonstrated that belief by generally supporting tax increases for public schools--even when more affluent communities rejected these.²⁸ By the middle 1970s, however, it had become clear to a number of community leaders--some of whom were educators--that opportunities to pursue quality education depended on creating more fundamental change in the community. People like Omowale Satterwhite, who had been Assistant Superintendent of the Ravenswood Elementary District, and Barbara Mouton, who had taught at Ravenswood High School, launched a movement to incorporate East Palo Alto. Despite the determined resistance of realty interests who with good reason feared the prospect of rent control and community-controlled zoning decisions, despite real dissension in the community over whether a city would have the financial wherewithal to remain solvent, and despite the adamant resistance to the idea by most whites in East Palo Alto, who did not want to be identified with a black city, the incorporation election was narrowly won by cityhood advocates, and it survived a series of financially draining legal appeals.²⁹ One by-product of the control over zoning the new city gained was to make it impossible for the

Sequoia District to sell the Ravenswood site. A civic center is now planned for the old high school facility.⁴⁰

Conclusion: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice

Between the years 1958 and 1976, the Sequoia Union High School District employed a variety of policies to further racial justice. Boundary changes, open enrollment, a prototypical magnet school, and district-wide racial balance represented most of the tactics districts elsewhere employed as good faith efforts to pursue just schools. Few districts free of court orders, however, pursued so many of these policies. In the Sequoia District, school officials were certainly influenced at various times by pressure from the state board of education, the courts, and the Office for Civil Rights; they were spurred by black protest; and they were enabled by an absence of overt racial hostility on the part of whites. Changing racial practices in the district also reflected changing conceptions of racial justice. Despite the evolution of more strenuous definitions, school leaders, the white public, and blacks remained divided in their conceptions and consequently viewed school practices differently.

Perspectives on Racial Justice

Until the middle 1960s the school board majority upheld an ideology of color-blindness. Their business was not

social engineering but providing an education to everyone regardless of color. If Ravenswood had more vocational courses than other schools in the district, this was not a racial policy but a recognition that working class youth required courses that would prepare them for the future. A color-blind perspective, however, could mask color-conscious policies. This is certainly how blacks and liberal whites perceived the decision to approve initial boundaries for Ravenswood that included nearly all the black students in the district and reduced the black population at Menlo-Atherton to zero. On the other hand, a color-blind ideology was no mere ruse. Ravenswood was only 21% black when it opened, and even without the boundary compromise exacted by black and white pressure from East Palo Alto, it would have been a white majority school. In addition, the board did not choose to relieve overcrowding by building relocatable classrooms, choices made by many districts to preserve segregation. Instead, it twice changed attendance boundaries that slowed, though failed to reverse, the trend toward segregation at Ravenswood. Furthermore, the trustees, by a 4-1 majority, took a stand against racial discrimination by opposing an initiative to abolish the Rumford Fair Housing Act, even though the majority of district voters favored abolition.⁴¹ Thus, the board majority could rail against civil rights activists as school wreckers who chose "discriminatory practices to combat

discrimination"⁴² and at the same time feel confident in their commitment to equality. They merely condemned interference in matters the public entrusted to them, and they objected to using schools as an instrument of social policy.⁴³

The color-blind posture of the board and superintendent began to change in the late 1960s. In 1966 Superintendent George Chaffey proposed sending 100 black students from Ravenswood to other high schools in the district. He had the support of Ferris Miles and Ernest Nelson, board members who a year earlier had opposed the phase out of Ravenswood. Trustees Kerwin, Watkins, and Cost, on the other hand, condemned this plan because they believed it discriminated against white students. For this same reason the board opposed demands that administrative positions be reserved for blacks. By 1968, however, much had changed. Helen Kerwin supported the MERI plan which would have guaranteed desegregation by reducing the number of high schools in the district to two or three. While the MERI plan did not win board approval, the trustees did allow 100 black students from Ravenswood to attend high school in other districts. Soon thereafter the board permitted open enrollment in the Sequoia District. It furthermore recruited black teachers and reserved the principalship at Ravenswood for a black educator.

Bold efforts of the board to further integration

followed. A mandatory busing component to the 1970 desegregation plan would have required white students to attend the high school located within the black community. With the failure of Helen Kerwin's bid for reelection, however, mandatory busing was dropped. Still the creation of a magnet school at Ravenswood attracted hundreds of white students, and five years later the closing of Ravenswood created racial balance in the remaining five schools.

The color-blind orientation of school leaders, then, was transformed dramatically. Changes in policy, of course, did not merely reflect changing values. Pressure from the black community, from the Office for Civil Rights, and from the courts clearly shaped the behavior of the superintendent and board. Yet it is likely that a number of school leaders had been educated by the protests of the 1960s--especially Chaffey and Kerwin whose writings and comments came to express a deep commitment to an integrated society and to schools as an agent of this transformation. If other school leaders were less sanguine, there is no reason to doubt that by the middle 1970s trustee Richard Dorst, considered a conservative by the Palo Alto Times, sincerely spoke for the board when he held that "racial balance coincides with educational equality."⁴⁴

The board's ability to create racial balance in the district also reflected a changed view of racial justice on the part of white citizens. Clearly, whites were never of

one mind on this matter. Some were militantly integrationist as early as 1958; others supported proposals that could be construed as segregationist. Generalizations can be made, however. On one hand, even in the 1950s and 1960s resistance to desegregation never included racial violence and rarely involved the direct invocation of race. For instance, when residents of the Willows expressed their dismay with the board's plan to transfer them to Ravenswood, their critique focused on the inadequate curriculum there rather than the presence of black students. On the other hand, through the middle 1960s most whites were more loath than the board to support desegregation initiatives. Thus, the two most liberal board members lost reelection bids to candidates who ran on a platform to oppose the phase out of Ravenswood. From most whites' perspective, increasing segregation at Ravenswood was not their responsibility; it was simply the result of demographic change.

By the early 1970s resistance to blacks attending the formerly all-white schools in the district had diminished, and the success of Ravenswood as a magnet school demonstrated that voluntary white attendance at Ravenswood had become acceptable. Yet opposition to mandatory busing remained strong, as indicated by the election of two vocal busing opponents to the board in 1970. Furthermore, the results of a 1975 survey conducted by school officials showed that desegregation was a priority for few whites in

the district.⁴⁵ By the latter date, however, most whites acquiesced in sharing their schools with black students when the alternatives would have been either tax increases or the loss of their own schools.⁴⁶

Based on their behavior, then, whites' conception of racial justice did change. At first it seems to have generally meant a commitment to civility combined with opposition to any action that would disturb de facto segregation. By the time Ravenswood closed, in contrast, whites' sense of racial justice had come to mean a willingness to accept, if not celebrate, policies that would result in shared public spaces with blacks. Unlike many school leaders who developed a fairly strong integrationist ideology, however, whites typically accepted rather than advocated desegregation. Racial balance became acceptable as long as it did not impinge on their privileges.

For blacks too notions of racial justice generally changed during the life of Ravenswood High. Until the middle 1960s, there appears to have been virtual consensus that racial balance would signify just schools. Support for boundary changes in the Ravenswood attendance area, for open enrollment, and for phasing out Ravenswood all expressed this belief. In fact, the goal of desegregation was so important that blacks were willing to bear the full burden of busing in order to achieve it.

The failure of school officials to take action that

would reverse the rapid segregation of Ravenswood ultimately inspired a variety of tactics to achieve just schools--including the creation of black controlled private schools and efforts to reshape Ravenswood High. An interest in desegregation did not lapse, but blacks increasingly rejected responsibility for the full burden of busing and sought to influence curricula, staffing, and disciplinary decisions. Clearly by the late 1960s a consensus that desegregation was the paramount means of achieving equal education had dissolved. At the same time, efforts to achieve desegregation on one hand and community control on the other were not necessarily the expression of contrasting ideological dispositions. The integrationist NAACP, frustrated by a lack of movement toward desegregation in the 1960s, came out in support of community control. On the other hand, people like Gertrude Wilks and Henry Organ who were identified as nationalists simultaneously advocated community control and access to integrated education in the Palo Alto schools. Another nationalist, Superintendent Warren Hayman of the Ravenswood Elementary School District, sent his own children to the integrated primary education center.⁴⁷ Efforts to attain community control and desegregation, then, might best be seen as alternative tactics to achieve equity in education.

If most blacks at one time had seen desegregation as congruent with educational equity, the decline of

desegregation as the exclusive tactic to achieve just schools indicated a critique of mere equal educational opportunity as defined by access to schools whites attended. For Gertrude Wilks, Barbara Mouton, and others, for instance, the infusion of educational resources that followed white students into Ravenswood meant little if blacks students were not achieving. Similarly, the dissolution of Ravenswood and transit of all black students to schools rich in curricula but far from the purview of the community met serious opposition because of the problems black volunteers were already having there. A standard of justice grounded in equality of educational opportunity was being replaced by one that emphasized results.

By a results-based standard just schools did not come closest to being achieved with the creation of racial balance, but rather in the late 1960s when Ravenswood was overwhelmingly black and significantly influenced by the community. Higher levels of attendance, a greater number of graduates going on to college, fewer disciplinary infractions, and a vibrant student newspaper all indicated advances by many black students. Ravenswood had scarcely become a model school, however. Its curriculum offerings remained scantier than other schools; the learning environment could be disorderly; and many of its teachers felt alienated. Paradoxically, the subsequent achievement of greater equality of educational opportunity through

desegregation was not accompanied by greater equality of results. On the contrary, the performance of black students by the late 1970s had become nothing short of disastrous.

From the perspective of many blacks just schools were never achieved. This hardly means that educational policy was designed to oppress black people or to exercise social control. The actions of school leaders to promote justice were constrained by the power relations in the district and the legal system, as well as by their own conception of justice. In fact, it is not clear to what extent the board and superintendent could have acted more affirmatively regardless of their view of justice.

Roads Not Taken

Certain measures might have created more just schools in the eyes of blacks. In the late 1950s or early 1960s boundary changes might have been made to bring Ravenswood up to its originally planned capacity of 2000 students, potentially creating permanent desegregation in the southern part of the district. Subsequently, in the middle 1960s, the trustees might have closed Ravenswood, creating desegregation throughout the district. The first policy was never proposed by the board, but in all likelihood such a plan would have revived a secessionist effort in Atherton and Menlo Park. The second policy was defeated by the

public. Inaction around these matters did not make the district liable to federal intervention. The Supreme Court had not yet demanded compliance in ending separate schooling in the South where legal segregation was practiced, let alone in the North where segregation was still considered de facto. Even the more aggressive decisions of the Court in the late 1960s and early 1970s failed to address issues relevant to the Sequoia situation where Ravenswood opened as a predominantly white school. The Sequoia District, for instance, set boundaries at Ravenswood that created segregation by class rather than race; this was not a violation of Brown. In addition, the Court has never ruled that segregated housing requires a remedy of school desegregation.⁴⁸

By the time the Sequoia District acted forcefully to create desegregated schools, mere racial balance no longer satisfied many of East Palo Alto's blacks. The plans mentioned above, like the magnet school at Ravenswood and its ultimate phase out, addressed the opportunity to go to school with whites rather than educational outcomes for blacks. Nonetheless, the district might have enacted certain measures that potentially could narrow the performance gap between black and white students. For example, the State Board of Education in the 1960s encouraged the dissolution of all elementary school districts. A unified Sequoia District would have equalized

expenditures at the elementary school level, benefiting the schools in East Palo Alto and predominantly black East Menlo Park (Belle Haven). It also would have dissolved elementary school boundaries that precluded desegregation at the elementary school level. Unification would have opened up the possibility of desegregated education from the time children entered school, thus increasing chances for the growth of tolerance and understanding necessary to the achievement of true integration. While the Sequoia Trustees supported unification, it never received public approval.⁴⁹

By the late 1960s a contrasting possibility emerged. The board might have endowed the nearly all-black school with the abundance of resources it later bestowed on the New School at Ravenswood in order to draw whites. It attracted white students to Ravenswood in part by recruiting many of the best teachers in the district and by running courses without regard to the number of students enrolled. Yet had the board made such efforts to create a quality black school, it clearly would have run afoul of the Office for Civil Rights, and its actions would have been extremely vulnerable to court challenge as well.

Inadvertently OCR and the more activist courts of the late 1960s and early 1970s sanitized enduring inequalities between black and white students in desegregated schools by affirming an equation between racial balance and justice. Despite the achievement of racial balance in the Sequoia

District, black students experienced separation through tracking, through less than equal representation in extracurricular activities, and through more than equal opportunity to face disciplinary action. In addition, the relatively low percentage of minority students in each school made it much more difficult for them to exercise the degree of control commanded by students at Ravenswood in the late 1960s. And because East Palo Alto's black students were dispersed into schools miles from home, the community itself had lost a focal point for protest. Given blacks' limited clout in conventional school politics, their gains in the district had sprung overwhelmingly from confrontational tactics meant to disrupt business as usual at Ravenswood. The abolition of Ravenswood dissolved the object of disruption, the tangible embodiment of injustice as well as an entity that could be transformed. In the absence of protest and the presence of schools legally deemed just, the institutional source of persisting inequality had been rendered invisible.

Sobering Prospects

In the Sequoia District the limits blacks faced in both an overwhelmingly black high school and in desegregated schools shed light on current efforts to further racial justice through community control and desegregation. The Ravenswood experience in the late 1960s

suggests that community control is difficult to sustain when it is neither institutionalized nor in command of policy issues decided above the level of the school. Furthermore, community control over schools with limited resources makes it difficult to provide quality education. Based on these observations, even the highly touted experiment in Chicago to create Local School Councils warrants skepticism. Community representatives will have real decision-making power at the level of the school only, and they will be hard pressed to substantially improve education in impoverished institutions.⁵⁰

In contrast to the scarcity of money that typically plagues community control efforts, desegregation often gives black students access to schools with more resources, but blacks frequently are denied influence. Moreover, as the history of the New School at Ravenswood suggests, school officials must create incentives, such as magnet schools, to attract white volunteers to schools in black neighborhoods. In an unforeseen consequence of the Brown decision, the interests of blacks--especially poor blacks--often are ignored in the effort to make schools congenial to whites.⁵¹

More than fifty years ago W.E.B. DuBois stated that "the Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is Education."⁵² Enacting that Education in a society that remains unequal is no easy

matter. In part what is required, as the protagonist of Derrick Bell's And We Are Not Saved asserts, is the desegregation of "the money and the control."⁵³ To date, blacks have sometimes gone to well-endowed schools and other times have exercised a modicum of control, but they have rarely gotten both.

The story of Ravenswood High School is especially sobering because it takes place in an environment that was relatively benign in racial matters. Virtually without villains, the Sequoia District was graced with a number of heroes of both races who struggled and made sacrifices to achieve just schools. Yet with the abolition of legal discrimination in the Post-Brown Era there developed no unitary vision of racial justice that could shape policy and inspire broader self-sacrifice. In contrast to many other school districts, Sequoia enacted serious policies to change the racial demographics of the district; however, these conformed to patterns of power and privilege, and they failed to diminish the gap in performance between blacks and whites.

Even if it is too much to ask that schools equalize the achievement of the rich and poor, a standard of justice limited to equality of opportunity is likely to trace the problem of unequal performance to the shortcomings of poorly achieving students. The value of a results oriented standard, on the other hand, is that it focuses attention on

the ways schools and other institutions continue to disadvantage those who have been historically misserved. As widespread hostility to affirmative action plans and declining Supreme Court support for such plans suggest, this is a standard the violates many people' sense of fair play. Greater acceptance of this rigorous standard perhaps awaits a resurgence of black struggle, just as such struggle had previously helped educate many whites to the justness of desegregation and inspired some to make personal sacrifices to realize that vision.

1. Minutes, Trustees of the Sequoia Union High School District (hereafter SUHSD min.), vol. 18, March 29, 1976, p. 246.
2. Palo Alto Times (hereafter PAT), October 14, 1976, p. 23; San Mateo Times, November 18, 1976.
3. SUHSD min., vol. 19, October 20, 1976, p. 67.
4. PAT, October 14, 1976.
5. Harry J. Reynolds to Board of Trustees, November 10, 1976, in MP 76-77 File, Sequoia Union High School District Central Office, Redwood City, Calif. (hereafter SUHSD).
6. Ibid.
7. SUHSD min., vol. 18, May 12, 1976, p. 298.
8. Calculations based on SUHSD, "Certificated Employees," November 21, 1973 in "ESAA Application," December 6, 1973, in PL: 92-318 File, SUHSD.
9. See EEOC, "Elementary-Secondary Staff Information," December 8, 1976, in EEO-5 File, SUHSD.
10. In early 1977, the Trustees by a 4-1 vote established an affirmative action goal "to achieve approximately the same racial, ethnic, and gender distribution of staff as of students in the district." For 1976-77 this would have meant a black staff that composed 15.5% of the District's teachers rather than the less than 6% that existed--See SUHSD min., vol. 19, February 2, 1977, p. 120. For 1977-78, there were 31 black teachers of a total of 507. The number of black faculty remained near this figure until 1982 when another round of District layoffs disproportionately hit minority staff--See EEOC, "Elementary-Secondary Staff Information," March 27, 1978 in File EEO-5; SUHSD min., vol. 22, March 3, 1982, p. 71.
11. Human Relations Evaluation Commission, "Commission Comments on Specific Reports or Policies of District," pp. 19, 20, n.d., in Master Plan HREC Board Report (hereafter HREC) File, SUHSD.
12. Ibid., p. 20.
13. Also, this was the case for 229 out of 712 [30%] hispanic students: "Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey: 1976-77," February 1, 1977, in Civil Rights Act of 1964 (hereafter CRA '64) File, SUHSD.

14. For Hispanics the percentage was 2.5: Ibid.; percentage calculations are mine, as they are in above note.
15. SUHSD min., vol. 20, October 19, 1977, p. 59.
16. Human Relations Evaluation Committee Report, 1978-79," October 16, 1979, p. 16, in HREC File.
17. SUHSD min., vol. 20, May 2, 1979, pp. 395-96.
18. SUHSD min., vol. 21, January 16, 1980, p. 74.
19. For complaints about the first report, see SUHSD min., vol. 20, October 19, 1977, p. 58. The Chair, Jose Bernal, retired soon thereafter and the tone of subsequent reports was decidedly more positive.
20. "Human Relations Evaluation Committee Report, 1980-81," November 1981, p. 42, in HREC File.
21. Ibid., p. 46.
22. Ibid.
23. Peninsula Times Tribune (hereafter PTT), April 11, 1980.
24. "HREC Report, 1980-81," p. 28.
25. Ibid., p. 53 and k-3.
26. SUHSD min., vol. 21, December 10, 1980, 202.
27. Calculations based on Sequoia Union High School District, Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey," Fall 1980, in CRA '64 File.
28. PTT, February 23, 1981.
29. PTT, October 24, 1983.
30. Ibid., p. 37.
31. Comments of Albert Mitchell at Meeting for the Ravenswood Elementary Board candidacy of Brad Davis, October 6, 1983, in East Palo Alto.
32. SUHSD min., vol. 22, May 10, 1982, p. 99.
33. Redwood City Tribune, October 16, 1975, p. 1; SUHSD min., vol 22, June 2, 1982, p. 111.

34. PTT, October 20, 1981.

35. PTT, July 28, 1982.

36. PTT, July 28, 1982. An absence of data make it impossible to confirm Mouton's impression. The district did collect information on the number of students who went to college from the class of 1977, but this was the first such effort in more than a decade, and the percentages were not very revealing even for the year in question. Project Trace found that seven months after graduation, 76% of white graduates were enrolled in post-secondary school either full or part time. For Hispanics and blacks, the percentages were 50 and 62. But no breakdown between full and part time is offered, nor is there a breakdown between four year and two year institutions. Finally, we do not learn anything about high school graduation rates across racial groups for this year. We do know, however, that by the early 1980s, the black drop-out rate had reached crisis proportions (see pp. 5-7 this chapter). Sequoia Union High School District, Project Trace, n.d. (but 1978), pp. A, 1.

37. At the same time, it would be a mistake to see the demographic patterns of school attendance as the sole reason for the community's lack of involvement in educational affairs. That particular demography was created by a lack of power, and it was a lack of power that diminished community involvement in "community controlled" schools as well. A case in point was the Ravenswood Elementary School District. While it faced a variety of problems, community control in part was limited by the straitened economic conditions of residents. On the one hand, the hardness of existence limited people's opportunities to participate in public life once they were no longer galvanized by a broad social movement. On the other hand, the lack of economic opportunity for blacks and the absence of black control over jobs, save those in the Ravenswood District meant that all patronage was school related. Reflecting on the past, one Ravenswood trustee said, "If you needed a job, you came to the school district. In many ways, it became more of an employment agency than a school district..." [San Francisco Chronicle, March 9, 1987, p. 4] As part of this chaos, there were nine superintendents in a period of ten years, [San Jose Mercury, May 26, 1985, p. 21A] and systematic efforts to address student achievement were lacking. By the early 1980s achievement levels had reached nearly rock bottom, as the scores of third and sixth graders tested by the California Assessment Program indicate for 1981-82. Third graders scored at the 8th percentile in reading, 11th percentile in written expression, and 17th percentile in

mathematics. For sixth graders the scores were 2nd percentile, 3d percentile, and 5th percentile. [PTT, November 18, 1983]

If the Ravenswood Elementary District, despite its black superintendents and majority-black boards was not well serving the majority of black students, black controlled private schools could not maintain the resources to provide serious alternatives. By the beginning of the 1980s Nairobi College had gone out of existence, and the Nairobi Schools had lost their high school. As of 1982 the latter--now called Gertrude Wilks Academy--served a mere 14 students and went no higher than sixth grade. [PTT, June 17, 1982]

38. For support in East Palo Alto for tax initiatives that were defeated in Sequoia District elections, see, for instance, PAT, February 1, 1961 and SUHSD min., vol. 17, November 6, 1974, p. 91. For categorical support for tax increases in the Ravenswood Elementary School District, see Chapter 1, note 73.

39. For a brief legal history of the incorporation drive, see City Connection, 4 (March 1987):2.

40. Ibid., p. 7.

41. SUHSD min., vol. 9, June 3, 1964, p. 194.

42. Comment of Helen Kerwin, quoted in PAT, May 12, 1964.

43. Larry Cuban finds a similar perspective among three big city school superintendents during the same period. See Urban School Chiefs Under Fire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 102.

44. Redwood City Tribune, October 16, 1975.

45. See "Sequoia Union High School District on Closure, Summary of School Closure Questionnaire," n.d. (survey conducted in May 1975), p. 2B, in School Closure-HEW File.

46. The survey on school closure revealed that a mere 19% of respondents supported an election for an augmented revenue limit--Ibid., p. 9. There was a brief effort in Belmont to create a unified school district in order to keep it virtually all white, but there was also resistance among Belmont residents to such a proposal. See SUHSD min., vol. 19, October 6 1976, p. 58; October 17, 1976, pp. 83-84.

47. For Hayman, see Information For Action, May 1975, p. 1, in Integration Steering Committee File, SUHSD.

48. See J. Harvie Wilkinson III, From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1954-1978 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 145.

49. In 1963 the Palo Alto Times estimated that unification would decrease the taxes of those within the Ravenswood Elementary District by \$.46 and raise those in Menlo Park and Woodside by \$.71 and \$.27--December 10, 1963. Leading the opposition to unification were elementary school trustees who had a vested interest in the status quo. They continually submitted proposals to break the Sequoia District into three separate unified districts, proposals opposed by the Sequoia Trustees and rejected by the State Board. See, for instance, Rex Turner to Sequoia Union High School District Staff, September 28, 1964, in 1956-57 Attendance File, SUHSD.

50. Decentralization of the Chicago schools is the result of the passage in the State Legislature of S.B. 1840. For a good discussion of the plan, see William Ayers, "Reforming Schools/Rethinking Classrooms: A Chicago Chronicle," forthcoming in Rethinking Schools.

51. In urban areas one of the gravest problems with magnet schools is that they draw resources away from predominantly black schools. See Jennifer Hochschild, The New American Dilemma: Liberal Democracy and School Desegregation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 76-77.

52. W.E.B. DuBois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" Journal of Negro Education 4(July 1935):335.

53. Derrick Bell, And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice (New York: Basic Books, 1987), p. 113.