Desegregating New York: The Case of the Harlem Nine

Conditions

        Promise of quality education a pull factor to NYC

        But school assignments linked to "neighborhood schools" - segregated by race and class

        school budgets linked to property taxes- poorer neighborhood=poor schools- inferior

        $65 dollars per white student   $21 per black

        Kenneth and Mamie Clark - *Children Apart*  segregation of classes

        Schools hyper segregated- 95% of one race

        Black students test 2 years below grade level

Parents Take Action

        Nine Harlem mothers Form Parents' Committee for Better Education (1956)

        Led by Mae Mallory

        Dubbed Harlem Nine- due to Little Rock events at the time (1957)

        Ella Baker lived in NYC at time and worked with group as rep from NAACP

        Demanded

                open transfer policy from overcrowded to under used schools

                community control through parent representation

        Lack of action

                Militancy and numbers rise

                Baker and parents negotiate with Mayor Wagner and board officials on 9/19/57

        BOYCOTT

                protest inferior conditions

                2/3s of students participate

                Lawyer Paul Zuber files lawsuit

Consequences and Legacy

        Parents charged with violating Compulsory Education Law in fall of 1958

        Children’s Court threatens to take away their children if they did not send them to school

        Skipwith v. New York City Schools -10 days later

                Justice Justine Wise Polier issued landmark decision

                        upheld parents constitutionally guaranteed right to remove students from

                                inferior education- low quality  and number of experienced teachers

                        school board had to combat effects of segregation

                Blow against de facto segregation

        Open  transfer policy  adopted but undermined by unequal enforcement and refusal to

                provide transportation

        Another boycott in Feb. 1964- demanded full integration and end to de facto seg.

                450,000 withdrew- attended "freedom schools" set up by churches

                More demonstrations- no action

        1954-1964- number of segregated schools increased by 400%

Arizona

        Lawsuit filed by Hayzel B. Daniels- first AA to pass AZ bar exam. and one of first 2 elected to

                AZ legislature and prominent Phoenix attorney Herbert B. Finn

        Philips vs., Phoenix Union High Schools and Junior College District

        Superior Ct. Judge Fred C. Struckmeyer- WWII veteran,  scholar, strict constructionist

                Decided the cased on February 9, 1953

                "a half century of intolerance is enough"

                ruled state law permitting school boards to segregate students was unconstitutional.

                        delegation of powers by the legislature to subordinate bodies

                Phoenix Union's segregation of AA students illegal

                decision a year before *Brown.*

                Arizona case taken into consideration by Supreme Court

        Daniels and Finn also file suit against Wilson district.  Judge Charles Bernstein ruled segregation in elementary schools unconstitutional - 1953

        BUT because residential patterns determined school attendance integration not achieved

        Minority students end up in minority neighborhood schools.

       NOTE:  Movie Spare Parts starring George Lopez opens Jan. 16- Carl Hayden robotics team

        4 undocumented students from one of the poorest and under-performing schools in the

        state beat college teams including MIT.