

## **Culture of Jim Crow**

### **Long before the busing crisis: Boston school desegregation in 1854**

Kathleen Murphy  
Danvers High School

This plan is appropriate for a high school U.S. history class.

Expect this lesson plan to take two class periods.

**Massachusetts History and Social Study Frameworks:**  
USI.30, USI.31, US11.25

#### **Essential Objectives:**

Students will know that Boston was at the struggling with questions of segregation and schools long before *Brown* and Little Rock. Especially because students tend to have a bias that the North was not racist, students should see that even “liberal” Boston had to come to terms with this divisive issue. Students will compare the arguments regarding whether or not to continue with segregated schools in order to better understand the attitudes and beliefs that Bostonians possessed about race in the mid-1800s.

#### **Essential Questions:**

How were citizens of Boston able to justify the segregation of school children in schools? How was desegregation in Boston schools a foreshadowing of what the rest of the nation would experience 100 years later with the *Brown* decision? How can we reconcile the desegregation of Boston’s schools long before most other communities considered the issue with the racism expressed during the Boston Busing Crisis in 1974?

#### **Procedure:**

Introductory activities – I envision using this lesson as part of a thematic unit on Civil Rights. I will provide background information on segregation in the South and North (compare/contrast) and the *Plessy* case that legitimized segregation. Students will be required to examine the *Brown v. Board of Education* opinion and explain the legal reasoning behind the decision. Students will be asked to compare it with *Plessy* and explain how the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy* in the *Brown* decision.

Developmental Activities – Students will then be asked to read the following three primary sources: “Report of the Colored People of the City of Boston on the Subject of Exclusive Schools”, “An Address Delivered before the Colored Citizens of Boston in Opposition to the Abolition of Colored Schools”, and “Boston’s Jim Crow School” from the *Boston Daily Globe*. Students should answer the following questions:

According to the “Boston’s Jim Crow School” article:

Who originally wanted black-only schools? Why do you think that group believed them to be necessary?

How did the black-only schools get funding?

Who wanted to eliminate the “Jim Crow” schools during the 1850s and why?

Questions for “Report of Colored People:”

What is Roberts (the author) reasoning for closing black only schools and integrating the population into the white schools?

What does the Massachusetts Constitution suggest regarding this issue?

How did the white children view the African-American students as they passed by the white kids outside their neighborhood schools?

How will black students benefit from being around white kids in schools?

How is the reasoning in this report similar to the reasoning in the *Brown* decision offered about 100 years later?

What race do you think the author belongs to? Why do you think this?

Questions for “An Address in Opposition to the Abolition of Colored Schools:”

What are Smith’s main arguments for keeping black only schools?

What arguments does Smith make about the benefits of black schools?

How would integrating schools be “injurious” to African-American students?

What is Smith over-all opinion of African-Americans and their proper position in society?

Once the students have had time to read through and answer the questions, the class is probably out of time for day one.

The next day students should form groups of 3-4 to discuss their answers to the questions. After a few minutes, each group should be ready for a general class discussion. A speaker from each group should be ready to answer teacher-imposed questions which may or may not come directly from the questions they were asked to answer. Once the general questions have been asked, students should be asked to discuss the beliefs and values behind each of the three primary sources. What beliefs and values are evident in each of the reading that help to reveal the points of view of three different authors?

Closing -- Finally, class discussion should come back around to the essential questions. Why did some people oppose integration while other supported it? What common elements exist between the integrationist arguments in Boston and the *Brown* decision 100 years later?

Should we be surprised to see the racism associated with busing in Boston in 1974? Was there anything in these readings that foreshadowed the bigotry that was evident in the busing struggle?

#### **Links to UEH Seminar:**

The primary source documents used for this lesson were shared at the “Culture of Jim Crow” seminar organized by UEH and held in October 2008.

#### **Assessment:**

A successful student will be able to write a journal entry as a 16 year old black student in Boston prior to 1854 (end of segregated schools) articulating a point of view regarding whether or not Boston schools should be integrated. Students will be asked to provide solid reasons from the reading expressing why integrating schools will or will not be a

good idea from their point of view. In addition students will be asked on a unit test to compare and contrast the decision to desegregate Boston schools with the *Brown* decision. Students will be asked why they think it took so long for the nation to desegregate its schools and whether or not Boston was truly progressive considering the events in 1974.

**Primary Documents Used**

“Boston’s Jim Crow School,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 10 January 1904, p. 40.

Robert, Benjamin F. “Report of the Colored People of the City of Boston, on the Subject of Exclusive School. Submitted by Benjamin F. Roberts to the Boston Equal School Rights Committee.” Boston: (no publisher listed), 1860.

Smith, Thomas P. “An Address Delivered Before the Colored Citizens of Boston in Opposition to the Abolition of Colored School, on Monday Evening, Dec. 24, 1849.” Boston: Bela Marsh, 1850. Call #:LC2803.B7 S2 1850x c.1.

**Local Resources Used**

This lesson includes primary sources from Boston, MA.