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**How Massachusetts Representative Ray Flynn Left the  
Shadow of Busing:  
Boston Politics in the Fall of 1974**

**By**

**Patrick Kennedy**

In the fall of 1974, Boston was the site of violent conflict over the issue of public school desegregation and its implementation. It was during these months that State Representative Raymond L. Flynn (D. -- South Boston) entered the limelight and accelerated his political career, a career which before very long found him in the mayor's office. His opposition to busing spoke to many parents in his constituency and his constant emphasis on important but arguably secondary issues such as police presence and brutality and the slant of the press shifted the focus away from the less solid points in anti-busers' arguments; away from the race issue. By the time of the 1974 election, Flynn had already made himself popular and well-known by opposing busing on the grounds it violated parents' rights. His reelection in 1974 was if anything anticlimactic, but his activity in the September and October preceding the election was significant because of *how* Flynn opposed busing. His rhetoric and his politics differed slightly -- beginning most noticeably in this period, September through November of 1974 -- from that of his anti-busing allies. The effect of these events on Boston was that, in time, the city elected as mayor a one-time busing opponent who went on to reach out to the black community and to shift the focus as much as possible back to the neighborhoods.

Beginning after the Civil War, accelerating when Reconstruction ended and turning into a flood after World War II, African-Americans fled

the oppressive atmosphere of the South and made their way to the comparatively tolerant northern cities like Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. A significant number migrated to Boston and, along with immigrants from other parts of the world, like Latin America and southeast Asia, changed the character of many of Boston's neighborhoods. Predominantly Irish and Jewish in 1955, Roxbury in 1970 was mostly black; seemingly overnight, Mattapan, once almost all Jewish, transformed into an African-American community; blacks moved into pockets of once solidly Irish Dorchester. These changes were facilitated in part by the G.I. Bill which allowed many young World War II veterans, including the many "white ethnics" of Boston, the opportunity to buy houses in the suburbs and move themselves and their families out of the city. From "1950 to 1960, when Boston was losing about 100,000 whites to the suburbs, almost 25,000 blacks were born or moved into the city."<sup>1</sup>

Once settled in their new homes, Boston blacks found the quality of their children's education sorely lacking. The books were older and there were no arrangements for students with special needs. Parents "were angry at the number of inexperienced and substitute teachers at the black schools."<sup>2</sup> At the time, children were assigned to schools in their neighborhoods. The problem was that the city didn't spend enough on schools in black areas to meet their educational needs.

A similar problem existed in the South, where the schools were segregated by law. The *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896 made legal the "separate but equal" doctrine, meaning it was lawful to segregate blacks to separate facilities as long as these were of equal quality. In the 1950s, a black father in Topeka, Kansas, decided the all-black school where he was supposed to send his daughter was not equal to the all-white school closer by. This led to the United States Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. The court agreed with Mr. Brown and concluded "that in the field of public education, the doctrine of

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: the Politics of Violence in Boston* (Boston, 1977), p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

separate-but-equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”<sup>3</sup>

Many in northern cities believed school segregation was exclusively a Southern problem. After all, in the South segregation was the rule because of laws passed specifically for that purpose. In places like Boston, on the other hand, black students attended different schools from whites -- and indeed as Irish students attended different schools than Italians -- because, it seemed, things had just happened that way. Blacks simply lived in different sections of the city, that was all. Many in Boston believed “segregation was not allowed; therefore, there was no segregation.”<sup>4</sup> This notion was dealt a blow in 1965 when the state of Massachusetts passed the Racial Imbalance Act, often referred to as the RIA, which sought to “eliminate racial imbalance in public school systems, *whatever its cause* [emphasis added]. School boards must act when a school’s enrollment exceeds 50 percent non-white.”<sup>5</sup> The RIA was “the most stringent law of its kind in the nation.”<sup>6</sup>

Agitation against this law soon began. Imbalance law opponent Louise Day Hicks was elected to the Boston School Committee and later to the Boston City Council on this issue, although voters declined to use the mayoral election of 1967 to express their opposition to this one law and Hicks lost to Kevin White. One of the key players in the fight against the RIA was State Representative Raymond Flynn.

Ray Flynn was born and raised in South Boston, the peninsula just across the water from Boston Proper. In the 1840s, “many Irish -- hard pressed for living space and desperate for work -- began to notice the potential advantages of a good-sized peninsula just across the channel. Fast becoming a prime site for heavy industry and manufacturing, South Boston was especially attractive to unemployed immigrant workers.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Summary in the *Boston Globe's* “Busing Clippings” microfilm at the Boston Public Library

<sup>4</sup> Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home*, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> Summary in *Boston Globe's* “Busing Clippings” microfilm at the Boston Public Library.

<sup>6</sup> D. Garth Taylor, *Public Opinion & Collective Action: the Boston School Desegregation Conflict* (Chicago, 1986), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas H. O'Connor, *South Boston: My Home Town* (Boston, 1988), p. 36.

“Southie” was, and is, most noticeably Irish, although it also contains a large and active Polish community, as well as some upscale whites moving in from the suburbs through the process of gentrification (and even, today at least, a number of minorities in some of its housing projects). But Irish predominate, and that is the identity residents of South Boston, as well as the rest of the city, associate with it. Another part of South Boston’s identity and its reality was its working-class nature. Despite the peninsula’s newer (as well as native), affluent inhabitants living in City Point, South Boston also contains four public housing projects -- all of which in the early ‘70s were mostly white. In 1970, “Southie’s population of 38,500 (98 percent white) had a higher average percentage of families on public assistance than the city average, a higher high school dropout rate, more young unemployed males, and a median family income well below the city’s. A psychologist who worked in the high school observed a different Southie from the one of which its politicians boasted, in which alcoholism was common as were families in the projects headed by single mothers.”<sup>8</sup>

It was in the working-class environment of South Boston that Ray Flynn was raised. “I didn’t read about the problems of poverty and the struggles of hard-working families from some textbook,” he later said, “I experienced them.”<sup>9</sup> Both of Flynn’s parents were Irish immigrants who worked long hours, his father as a longshoreman on the docks of South Boston, and his mother as an office cleaning woman downtown. Flynn grew up in a strongly Irish Catholic household, one “filled with the songs and stories of Old Ireland with the radio tuned either to ‘The Irish Hour’ or the nightly recitation of the rosary.”<sup>10</sup> Flynn was a basketball star at South Boston High, graduated in ‘58, and went to Providence College on a hoops scholarship. He later married a neighborhood girl, Catherine Coyne. In South Boston, “for a husky kid who played a little ball and

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), pp. 111-112.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst, 1992), p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston, 1995), p. 268.

didn't care much for the books, for those kids the priests got to before the rackets did, there were always jobs in politics."<sup>11</sup> This held true for Raymond L. Flynn, who had a lot of smarts, but no marketable skills. As a young man, he ran for, and was elected, State Representative in 1968.

As a State Rep. in South Boston, many of whose residents were apprehensive about changes -- especially of this nature -- Flynn naturally opposed the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act. Flynn entered into an important alliance with City Councilor Louise Day Hicks and other like-minded South Boston politicians such as State Senator William Bulger and fellow State Rep. Michael Flaherty. As time went on, Flynn was to become the most prominent of these, next to Hicks, although it was -- in the beginning and for a long time -- as a sort of tag-along. Flynn appeared to be a background character -- a Ditto Boland, if you like, to Hick's Skeffington -- who'd hitched his wagon to the Hicks-dominated anti-busing movement. But as a member of the Massachusetts State Legislature, Flynn had some important advantages and was to become very much involved in the practical workings of this movement.

Beginning almost immediately after the signing of the Racial Imbalance Act in 1965, the Boston School Committee, along with Hicks and her supporting cast of politicians, worked to "dismantle" the act.<sup>12</sup> After the State Supreme Court ruled against the School Committee's claim that the act was unconstitutional in 1967, the Committee tried to bring an appeal to the United States Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case in 1968. Finally, in 1971, "after nearly six years of defeats of its attempts to enforce the law," the State Board of Education decided to withhold millions of dollars of state money "as punishment for the latest in a long series of refusals by the school committee to come up with plans to reduce, much less eliminate, racial imbalance."<sup>13</sup> At this point, Rep. Flynn began to file legislation to block the act, something he did year after year throughout the early 1970s. Although there was an anti-busing rally at Faneuil Hall and a motorcade from South Boston to Governor Sargent's Dover home, the most high-profile anti-busing community

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<sup>11</sup> Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home*, p. 145.

<sup>12</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> *Boston Globe*, "The First Year," May 10, 1975.

activity was busing opponents' attendance every year at State House hearings on bills filed by Flynn to repeal the Act.<sup>14</sup>

The Suffolk Superior Court, in September of 1972 "ordered that the committee prepare a racial balance plan at once" and, in February of 1973, directed the State Board of Education to devise "a new plan complying with the Racial Imbalance Act."<sup>15</sup> On June 21, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court backed the Massachusetts law with its decision that "any northern city school with a substantial pocket of demonstrable segregation will be regarded as an entirely dual system with an unconstitutional level of discrimination."<sup>16</sup> Faced with an increasingly real threat of the act's implementation, Rep. Flynn, in September of 1973 "sponsored a bill which would have required local residents' approval before school district changes, mandated by the State Board of Education, could be enacted."<sup>17</sup> The bill was endorsed by the city council and signed by Mayor Kevin White. Six days later, Flynn and Hicks announced their co-sponsorship of a bill that would repeal the Racial Imbalance Act. These bills passed both houses of the state legislature, but Governor Sargent vetoed them.<sup>18</sup> His vetoes "continued to save the imbalance act," angering forced busing opponents.<sup>19</sup> Flynn said he was disappointed "the governor is giving us rhetoric on one side and he's giving us a veto on the other."<sup>20</sup>

Without the opposition of the Governor, it seemed the State Board's plan might go into effect, and anti-busing leaders began to pick up the pace of activity in the first few months of 1974. Flynn now augmented his

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<sup>14</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Summary in the *Boston Globe's* "Busing clippings" microfilm at the Boston Public Library.

<sup>17</sup> Michael J. Ross and William M. Berg, *"I Respectfully Disagree with the Judge's Order": The Boston School Desegregation Controversy* (Washington, D.C. 1981), p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

relentless legislative activity with extensive community involvement and stronger rhetoric. On February 5, Hicks and Flynn announced the formation of Massachusetts Citizens Against Forced Busing (MCAFB). Flynn said the new group “is prepared to go as far as is absolutely necessary in protecting those rights of parents in having a say in those matters affecting the education of their children,” and that “as the day gets close, I think this organization will take any and all steps in protecting the rights of parents.” A television news reporter wondered if this meant lying in front of buses. Flynn explained “I think that the point right now is that we will take every step necessary in the legislature in order to bring this about in an orderly way. I think that also the appeal should be taken to the United States Supreme Court and that after we’ve exhausted our legal means then I think that we will consider other means. But I think that one thing is for certain, that in September, the parents of the city of Boston are not going to be surrendered to the State Board of Education”.<sup>21</sup>

On March 3, 1974, Flynn and Hicks introduced a measure into the Boston City Council asking that body to hold a special referendum which would put the following question to Boston voters: “Shall Boston Public School children be assigned to a particular Boston Public School on the basis of race, sex, or creed without the consent of their parents or legal guardians?”<sup>22</sup> The petition was unanimously approved by the City Council, signed by Kevin White, and sent to the State Legislature.<sup>23</sup> The idea had the support of Governor Sargent until he realized Flynn intended the referendum not to be, as he had supposed, a “non-binding expression of opinion,” but a “binding” bill that, if passed, would prohibit busing without parental consent.<sup>24</sup> During the early 1970s, the NAACP and fifty black parents, frustrated with all the stalling, had decided to bring the issue to federal court by filing a class-action suit against the School Committee. Federal Circuit Court Judge W. Arthur Garrity of Worcester considered the case. With the help of experts, especially Charles Glynn

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<sup>21</sup> Ross and Berg, *I Respectfully Disagree*, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> *Boston Globe*, March 4, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, March 13, 1974.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, March 28 and 29, 1974.



who later called his own plan a "flop,"<sup>25</sup> Garrity devised a racial balance plan that even many moderates agreed "dealt in numbers and geography" and ignored many of the realities of the City.<sup>26</sup> It included plans to bus students from Roxbury into South Boston and vice versa. A total of 18,000 students would be moved. When Garrity's now-infamous ruling came down on May 10, 1974, "the reaction now was universally negative."<sup>27</sup> In fact, by all accounts, the ruling had the effect of "reviving the militant anti-busing movement."<sup>28</sup>

As virulent as opposition to busing was in the early 1970s, the school desegregation issue was overshadowed in the news by other events - most notably the gas crisis and President Gerald Ford's pardon of his predecessor Richard Nixon. But when September of 1974 arrived, busing became the story in Boston; and Ray Flynn, who despite his passionate legislative activity had remained relatively little known outside of his district, now entered the limelight. And it was during this period in time that Flynn first began to operate independently of the Hicks crowd.

On September 9, three days away from the start of school, the anti-busing group ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights) organized a rally at Government Center. ROAR had no "official officers," the *Boston Globe* reported, but its two "prime movers are City Council member Louise Day Hicks and Rep. Raymond Flynn, both of South Boston."<sup>29</sup> ROAR had evolved from MCAFB and its members claimed its purpose was to prevent busing "in an orderly and legislative way."<sup>30</sup> At the rally on City Hall Plaza, the crowd of protesters turned hostile when U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy, who supported forced busing to achieve racial desegregation, showed up to speak. Many people turned their backs on him, some threw tomatoes, eggs, and even a rock; one man aimed a kick at

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<sup>25</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> *Boston Globe*, "The First Year," May 10, 1975.

<sup>27</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 101.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>29</sup> *Boston Globe*, September 9, 1974.

<sup>30</sup> O'Connor, *South Boston*, p. 216.

Kennedy and a woman punched him on the arm as he was rushed to the safety of the John F. Kennedy Federal Building. Protesters shouted comments like "you're a disgrace to the Irish." It was Raymond Flynn reporters questioned after the incident for the antibusers' interpretation. If Flynn was disappointed at the incident, it was because he'd wanted to hear Kennedy "explain why he voted against the parents of the city of Boston." He in no way condemned the crowd's actions but explained, "it was certainly the worst reception a Kennedy ever received. Basically, these people are very responsible and nonviolent. They are just outraged and their emotions got the better of them. Violence never really solves anything, but these people feel shut off from their government."<sup>31</sup>

Flynn passed out flyers urging parents, even if as yet unaffected by the plan, to all support the boycott of Garrity's plan "as a symbol of unity" and, if affected by the plan, to take their children to the nearest neighborhood school, regardless, and demand they be enrolled. He argued pro-busing forces would "divide the city, confuse the parent, black-out anti-busing opinion in the media, change the grade structure in the neighborhood schools and expend millions of tax dollars in public relations gimmickry."<sup>32</sup>

School started on Thursday, September 12, 1974. Although -- at least on this first day -- many of the city's students returned to school in peace in South Boston, as Flynn and others had urged them to do, over ninety percent of white students failed to attend classes. Many, along with their parents, gathered in front of South Boston High School to boo and jeer as buses brought in black students. At the end of the school day a bus leaving a Southie High annex took a wrong turn onto a street where many whites had gathered without much police presence; and into a shower of rocks.

Asked about extending the so-far successful boycott, Flynn said ROAR would "try to get exemptions from the busing court order for younger children and also would test the compulsory school attendance laws in court. 'If these (measures) don't work we may vote to extend the boycott,' Flynn said."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Boston Globe*, September 9, 1974.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Boston Globe*, September 13, 1974.

Very early on, Kevin White made a decision which indirectly facilitated Ray Flynn's rise in the city's consciousness and, ultimately, to the office White himself then occupied. The policy White and his advisors decided upon was one of containment: of the trouble to South Boston. "I don't want Southie's actions to become contagious and spread across the city," he said privately to his advisers.<sup>34</sup> Part of this plan included public relations. "Our job is to put South Boston in context and give [the press] a picture of the rest of the city," White's press secretary said in another office meeting.<sup>35</sup> The mayor wanted those both in the neighborhood and in the national news audience to believe all the problems were being caused by a few crackpots in South Boston. The other aspect of White's containment policy was to "put Southie under the closest thing to martial law I can do" by sending hundreds of policemen into the area.<sup>36</sup>

Rep. Flynn was able to exploit both aspects of this containment policy, especially the police issue. White made sure there were at least 400 policemen on the streets each of the first two days of busing; imposed a curfew; and enforced a law prohibiting more than three people from gathering near schools or more than ten people anywhere else. At the end of the very first day of busing, Flynn held a meeting at the Tynan School in South Boston where parents vented about the large police presence. Interviewed afterward, Flynn said "these people believe the mayor overreacted. Mayor White and the police commissioner used the term 'low profile' in implementing Judge Garrity's order. Then today, the kids in South Boston saw police officers with riot gear, the Tactical Patrol Force and the Anti-Crime Unit and streets blocked off by policemen on horseback. It looked like something out of the Vietnam conflict."<sup>37</sup>

Flynn and other South Boston anti-busing leaders planned to meet with the mayor to present a list of grievances stating, "we will go right into his office anyway if he won't meet with us."<sup>38</sup> The State Rep. likened

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<sup>34</sup> Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home*, p. 253.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>38</sup> *Boston Globe*, September 13, 1974.

the situation to the Soviet takeover of Budapest. "They take our schools, now they take our streets," Flynn said, and added that the highly visible police force was "the most degrading thing to South Boston" and an "outrage."<sup>39</sup> He argued that "when the police show up here with riot gear, horses and dogs, word gets around South Boston that something big is happening at South Boston High School. That's when all the trouble starts." The Mayor refused to meet with Flynn and the South Boston delegation, however, saying "I was not needed in South Boston, but I was needed in Roxbury" to meet with angry parents at the Freedom House. Flynn responded that "without responsible action on the Mayor's part, the situation will get worse, not better."<sup>40</sup> In spite of South Boston anti-busing leaders' list of grievances, White and Police Commissioner Robert J. DiGrazia maintained that "because South Boston presents more school desegregation problems than other Boston neighborhoods, it should be dealt with differently. Police will continue to be highly visible and in force at South Boston High School, scene of anti-busing disturbances Thursday and Friday, until a peaceful desegregation is achieved."<sup>41</sup>

On the Saturday before the third day of school, Rep. Flynn walked the streets of the peninsula urging students to continue the boycott for two weeks, at least, and also to stay off the streets, away from the high school. "The answer is not throwing rocks," Flynn said, "that is a mistake and all we can do is apologize. But we have to get the word to the proper authorities that the people of South Boston are outraged at forced busing and at sending 400 policemen in here to enforce it," creating a situation like "Belfast." Flynn said "peace cannot be kept by force but by understanding," and declared "relations with the police in South Boston are at an all-time low. It's jumped from an anti-busing problem to an anti-police situation."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., September 13, 1974.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., September 14, 1974.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., September 15, 1974.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., September 15, 1974.

This last statement is vitally important to understanding why Flynn's political career didn't end in the 1970s. Of course, his colleagues did not crow with delight at the deployment of 400 cops in Southie, but it was Ray Flynn who truly saw the potential for advancement in this issue. City-wide, in the fall of 1974, a Boston survey showed that eighty-nine percent of the people favored the repeal of the RIA, but only thirty-seven percent actually supported the boycott.<sup>43</sup> Flynn had no such hard numbers in front of him, but he demonstrated an uncanny ability to accurately gauge the general public's opinion. He knew that many in the city opposed busing moderately or had been somewhat on the fence until Garrity's decision came down and they saw how poorly desegregation was being achieved; he saw that the majority -- not only in his district, but in the city as a whole -- were not rock-throwing racists, regardless of how often they had cookouts with members of other races. By constantly shifting the focus from busing to the police problem, Flynn was speaking to the many moderates who might have been a little unsure on the race issue; to those who might have been for desegregation, but were certainly not in favor of having a whole section of their city fall under martial law.

A "Boston mother" wrote to Judge Garrity in 1974 that her children had gone to a voluntarily integrated school that was 49% minority and 51% white for years only to be assigned to a school that was 25% white and 75% nonwhite - "not a balanced school" - and where "her third-grader was not accepted and called names. Meanwhile, their neighborhood school became predominantly black and she hoped her children could at least return there, a five-minute walk from their home," but they were instead assigned to a different school farther away. "We have been brought up to respect the law," the woman said, "this is something we can no longer do."<sup>44</sup> Here was a woman who had no aversion to sending her children to school with blacks; her point of contention was not race, but the surrounding issues of desegregation's lousy implementation. It was to this type of voter that Flynn began to reach out, by emphasizing issues other than race and even other than busing while remaining an anti-busing politician. Indeed, his underlying philosophy in opposing the

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<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Public Opinion and Collective Action*, pp. 165, 178.

<sup>44</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 103.

desegregation program was that "it was an unconstitutional form of judicial activism that had usurped the powers of the legislative branch of government."<sup>45</sup> Of course, in opposing busing, however he did it and whatever his reasons, he was bound to get the support of the less rational, like the eleventh-grader -- and, likely, his parents -- who told a reporter, while "his friends nodded in approval," that "I'm not going to school. I don't like niggers and my Mom and Dad don't like niggers so I'm not going."<sup>46</sup> The "eleventh graders" and "Boston mothers" of the city together constituted a sizeable part of the population, and Flynn held appeal for both groups.

Another part of this reaching out to a wider group of potential voters was that Flynn was able to get across his points by somehow being everywhere at once and hence appearing all over the papers. He did a great amount of footwork, and as a news source, displayed much sophistication about how the media operates. Flynn worked so hard, in fact, that in the middle of the second full week of school, he was hospitalized for "physical exhaustion," after becoming dizzy at the State House, having been "working too hard, with long hours and little food" since busing began.<sup>47</sup>

In any case, the weekend before the first full week of the 1974-75 school year saw Flynn again reaching out to the rest of the city; this time not by something he did, but by something he didn't do. On Saturday, September 15, three South Boston anti-busing political leaders -- City Councilwoman Louise Day Hicks, State Senator William M. Bulger, and State Rep. Michael F. Flaherty -- issued what they termed a "Declaration of Clarification" on their position. Raymond Flynn's name was conspicuously absent from the list of leaders who signed the Declaration. This absence is startling considering that since 1970, seemingly every time Ray Flynn's name appeared in a news story it was in connection with Louise Hicks. Also, Flynn was at least as important as Bulger in the MCAFB/ROAR hierarchy and certainly more important than fellow state Rep. Flaherty, so the fact that both were included while Flynn was not

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<sup>45</sup> O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, p. 268.

<sup>46</sup> *Boston Globe*, September 9, 1974.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, September 25, 1974.

indicated a major split in the ranks. Considering that Flynn later became mayor of the entire city, it becomes obvious when one reads the Declaration that Flynn was, in a sense, getting out while he could. Hicks, Bulger, and Flaherty clarified that the real reason they opposed busing was because it forced children to enter "crime-infested Roxbury." The statement, which Police Commissioner DiGrazia termed "inflammatory," claimed

there are at least one hundred black people walking around in the black community who have killed white people in the last two years. They have gone unapprehended. This is very much on the minds of our people and should be a matter of concern to black leaders. Any well-informed white suburban woman does not pass through that community alone even by automobile. Repairmen, utilities workers, taxi-drivers, doctors, firemen all have refused at one time or another to do what Judge Garrity demands of our children on an everyday basis.<sup>48</sup>

This statement, at best, alienated Roxbury and, at worst, angered the entire black community. Clearly, if Flynn was ever to be elected Mayor some day, he could not afford to have his name on such a statement, even for the sake of his alliance with Hicks - especially not now that the alliance had already served its purpose for Flynn by bringing him onto the city-wide stage. It was at this time that Ray Flynn began to definitely distance himself from the South Boston anti-busing establishment and to accelerate his political rise.

It was obvious that "a barely concealed rivalry had been present between Grand Dame Hicks and rising Raymond Flynn."<sup>49</sup> Flynn may not have known that "six days after Judge Garrity's decision, Hicks went to City Hall for a secret meeting with White and agreed to keep ROAR neutral in electoral politics" but he may have had his suspicions when

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., September 16, 1974.

<sup>49</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 160.

some of Hicks' people began to get good City Hall jobs.<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Hicks settled for patronage, because it was the most she could get out of the busing issue; she had no chance of beating White in the 1975 mayoral election. Perhaps Flynn believed he did. And in fact, in March of 1975, he did announce his candidacy for Mayor, although he was unable to raise sufficient funds for a real campaign at that time. In any case, Flynn saw now, in September of 1974, that sticking with Hicks was a dead end.

Meanwhile, the Boston Police Department announced it would not issue a parade permit for an anti-busing protest march in South Boston, saying that "an irresponsible element planned this march" and that there was "too much potential for violence to allow a parade."<sup>51</sup> Strangely enough, no one seemed to know who had planned the march. Although no official parade took place on Sunday, a large crowd of protesters holding signs did attempt to march up Broadway before being dispersed by police, and some violence and destruction of property did occur, most notably at the Andrew "T" station, where a black youth was attacked. As many as nine hundred police were sent in to prevent serious disturbances in the neighborhood.

That day, an angry Kevin White called Billy Bulger to set up a meeting. The State Senator, Hicks, and Michael Flaherty -- but not Ray Flynn -- met with the Mayor at Bulger's home in South Boston. In the hour-long closed-door meeting, White demanded to know who had organized the march. "The three of us assured the Mayor that we had nothing to do with the formation of the march," Hicks said later. She continued that the march "was Flynn's idea and he didn't even show up for it."<sup>52</sup> Evidently, the split was mutual. Flynn later said of the march that he "had nothing to do with it."<sup>53</sup> Very likely they had all planned the march well in advance and only abandoned it at the last minute when they realized the potential for violence; but Hicks tried to blame Flynn for the disturbances, demonstrating her break with him.

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>51</sup> *Boston Globe*, September 16, 1974.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, September 16, 1974.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, September 17, 1974



Now that Flynn had left the Hicks camp, he had his own political tricks and projects up his sleeve. Later on the same day that Hicks, Bulger and Flaherty met with the Mayor to point fingers for the march, Rep. Flynn, along with several South Boston mothers, went to Beacon Hill and sought a meeting with Governor Sargent to ask his intervention to cut the number of police in their neighborhood. They got no further than Sargent's Chief Secretary, but the Governor later said "I'm not stepping in unless I'm asked" by the Mayor.<sup>54</sup> At the State House, Flynn said "the presence of large numbers of police quartered in South Boston and the aggressive enforcement of an extralegal curfew and a twenty-four-hour continuing ban on public assembly has deeply offended the residents of this hard-pressed section of the city," -- the sort of thing Flynn's constituents would agree with. But he also said that he'd come to meet the Governor because of "Mayor White's refusal to meet with *responsible* community leaders in South Boston [emphasis added]."<sup>55</sup> Mayor White had met with Hicks, Bulger and Flaherty in South Boston that day. Without knowing if Flynn was aware of this fact, it is difficult to say whether or not this was an intentional dig. One thing that is for certain is that the next day, Flynn, although invited, did not attend a meeting Hicks, Bulger, and Flaherty held with NAACP leaders. It is doubtful he decided not to go because he didn't like the NAACP.

Of course, he might have been unable to attend because he was busy working on his next two projects. The first was the sort of legal activity familiar to Rep. Flynn: he filed a resolution in the Massachusetts legislature asking Congress to seek an amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America banning forced school busing.<sup>56</sup> The second was his public stance against the Ku Klux Klan. This is not to say Flynn in any way fabricated a Klan problem in Curleyesque fashion, but that he somehow got the inside information that members of the Klan were coming to South Boston and decided to be the man to bring this fact to the attention of the press.

What happened was that officials of the Ku Klux Klan in Baton Rouge arrived in Boston drawling about their plan to "solidify and

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., September, 1974.

organize” whites in Boston to “carry on the fight against race mixing.” Flynn immediately announced “we will have no part of their activity.” He said, “we, the people of South Boston, want to make it abundantly clear to any extremist group such as the Ku Klux Klan or De Mau Mau that they are not welcome here.”<sup>57</sup> Soon, Flynn led a group of protesters in a demonstration outside the storefront operation the Klan set up in South Boston. This episode was significant. In the morning *Globe* of September 18, where Flynn’s proposed constitutional amendment was reported, the headline read “S. Boston Legislator Seeks US Busing Ban.” That very day the evening *Globe* carried a story about the KKK members’ arrival, and the headline was “Ku Klux Klan Members Not Welcome in South Boston, says Rep. Flynn”. It was the first time Flynn’s name appeared in a headline in the *Globe*. Throughout the story Flynn was the major source. “Flynn said police intelligence reports indicated” 150 more Klan members would arrive; “Flynn said he had learned from police intelligence reports” that the black extremist group De Mau Mau was making counter-preparations.<sup>58</sup> The next day, when the story was carried in the morning *Globe* on the 19th, Flynn’s picture appeared in the *Globe* for the first time. If moderates across the city worried that the graffiti in Southie reading “KKK” was anything more than ignorant insults, Flynn rushed to dispel the notion; and people all over the city now knew where Flynn stood, to borrow a phrase. None of the other “Big Three” political leaders ever bothered to follow up on the Klan situation and similarly rebuff the organization. It was too late; Flynn had already done it.

To further demonstrate the increasing distance between Flynn and the Big Three, Reverend Thomas F. Oates spoke out against politicians for the boycott. He specifically mentioned Hicks, Bulger and Flaherty -- but not Flynn, who had supported the boycott as loudly and as vociferously as anyone.<sup>59</sup>

At about this same time, Flynn was instrumental in the creation of the South Boston Information Center, a hotline set up to dispel rumors because “the City Hall Information Center has consistently downplayed

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., September, 18, 1974.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., September 19, 1974.

all reports of violence in the schools.” As the days ground on, “the extent to which violent incidents spread throughout the city dispelled Mayor White’s claim that a few radical extremists in South Boston caused all the trouble.”<sup>60</sup> There was a racial brawl in the inadequately tabled cafeteria of overcrowded Hyde Park High, causing that school to close for the remainder of the week; students and parents began marching in East Boston in support of the boycott; School buildings in Jamaica Plain were hit by drive-by shootings; there were bomb scares at other schools in the city; and even students from West Roxbury got into fights at English High. Clearly, the perspective that Kevin White emphasized, and the one that the press eagerly accepted, was that South Boston was the exclusive home of racial violence. Yet this was not the whole story. Flynn led the charge against this media/city government bias. He claimed the School Department issued inflated school attendance numbers “in order to undermine our boycott.”<sup>61</sup> Here, again, was an issue that both anti-busers in South Boston and moderates across the city could agree on. Just as few people like the idea of a highly visible police force enforcing martial law, few people like the idea of anyone controlling the media to put forth one point of view.

The day the South Boston Information Center opened, Judge Garrity proposed a “biracial parents advisory council in every school to ‘promote an environment of understanding’ between blacks and whites.” Rep. Flaherty and City Councilwoman Hicks denigrated the idea while Flynn said the concept was “long overdue.”<sup>62</sup> Flynn obviously distanced himself from those who had been his allies for years. Yet, he stayed true to his roots, one might say, by continuing his basic opposition to busing. Flynn still spoke at a rally with Hicks and the rest on October 4, praising the turnout of an estimated 7,000 as well as the lowest point of school attendance yet, and stating that “opposition to forced busing is never going to cease.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ross and Berg, *I Respectfully Disagree*, p. 253.

<sup>61</sup> *Boston Globe*, September 24, 1974.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, September 25, 1974.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, October 4 and 5, 1974.

A few days later, Flynn got his greatest opportunity yet, and adroitly answered the call. In one of those Boston Massacre-like events where there are two conflicting stories, a brawl occurred at the Rabbit Inn between the bar's patrons and members of the Tactical Patrol Force (TPF), who, it was whispered, came to get revenge for an injury sustained near the Rabbit Inn by one of their superior officers. Twelve people were hospitalized and the bar was extensively damaged. Not for the first time, Ray Flynn was the main source of information for the *Globe* story. He had apparently conducted his own investigation, running around and checking times with witnesses and such. Flynn, along with Rep. Flaherty, organized a peaceful demonstration of 1000 persons in front of Police Headquarters downtown, protesting police brutality. Significantly, when some demonstrators spoke from the steps about the renewed boycott, they were shouted down by cries of "Stop talking about busing! This is about police brutality!"<sup>64</sup> If few people are in favor of martial law, even fewer are in favor of police brutality. Flynn spoke to the many people who would sympathize with the woman who said, "I was all for making desegregation work until last Wednesday, when I was chased down the street by a horse."<sup>65</sup>

This fight, which some saw as a "brutal and deliberate raid" by the TPF,<sup>66</sup> brought police brutality to the forefront in October. Flynn warned Judge Garrity in a letter, "force will only beget force. The people of South Boston have a proud tradition. They don't like to be pushed around."<sup>67</sup> But his activities continued to be in the legislative and legal vein that moderates outside of his tough district could understand. In mid-October, Flynn asked the City Council to order Mayor White to hire "nationally recognized legal counsel to appeal Garrity's decision" He said the order would force the Mayor "to expend just a small part of the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., October 7, 1974.

<sup>65</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, p. 114.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., October 7, 1974.

<sup>67</sup> O'Connor, *South Boston*, p. 223.

millions presently being squandered on monitors, buses, and police to secure the best possible legal talent for the citizens of Boston.”<sup>68</sup>

Flynn easily won reelection in November, in no way hindered by his disagreements with once supremely popular Hicks and still-popular Bulger. A few months later, he announced his candidacy for Mayor, although that didn't pan out in 1975. The break was complete. Flynn no longer had use for the Hicks connection and had challenged her authority and won.

At the time, Flynn might not have appeared so rebellious in the whole context of anti-busing activity. Like the other South Boston politicians, he called for a boycott of the schools and even for parents and students to go to the schools closer by and demand entry, something that could, and did, create volatile situations. Like the rest, he simplified the situation for his audience by blaming just about everything on Garrity. He even, like Kerrigan, O'Neil, et al., “preached unity,” saying “we must stick together. No one will beat us,” the sort of rhetoric that could be seen as having contributed to the environment that inhibited any dissent, leading one youth to say “People can't speak out in South Boston. Not if you want to live.”<sup>69</sup>

However, even as he appeared in some ways to articulate the party line, he was making changes such that, in the future, hostile extremist attitudes would dissipate somewhat. By hammering away at issues like police brutality, by leaving himself out of the inflammatory “Declaration of Clarification,” by speaking out in favor of the biracial council, by bucking the South Boston political power system once he had used it to get where he wanted to be, Flynn raised himself up politically at the same time as he broadened the awareness and mindset of some of the voters.

The effect Flynn's activity during this period had on his own career are pretty obvious. It didn't happen immediately afterward, but he did become Mayor. In 1975, he continued the fight against busing, but by 1977, he had won a seat in the City Council identifying himself “with anti-abortion and as a hard worker” who had “projected a ‘more reasoned opposition’ to the court orders”<sup>70</sup>; and in doing so, he finished ahead of

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<sup>68</sup> *Boston Globe*, October 15, 1974.

<sup>69</sup> Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, pp. 112-114.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Hicks in Wards Six and Seven by 2,000 votes. In 1981, City Councilman Flynn “traveled throughout the city, meeting voters of every color and class, attending every neighborhood meeting, putting thousands of miles on a beat-up Plymouth wagon.”<sup>71</sup> That year he topped the ticket, finishing 12,000 votes ahead of “Dapper” O’Neil. The populism that Flynn had exuded all along served him well in the mayoral election year of 1983, when the downtown building boom had “called forth criticism” from the many who believed “that most Bostonians failed to share in the wealth created by the boom.”<sup>72</sup> Flynn defeated respected black activist Mel King in a race “conducted with a surprising degree of civility, tolerance, and restraint on all sides”<sup>73</sup> and ushered in a new era for Boston.

Flynn worked with downtown developers and businessmen, yet shifted the focus back to the neighborhoods. He set up programs intended to “institutionalize the link between downtown growth and neighborhood revitalization.”<sup>74</sup> He “worked strenuously to earn the trust of the neighborhoods and to use government power to advance neighborhood and community interests.”<sup>75</sup> Flynn’s linkage programs, which made sure new downtown developments included a cut for minorities in areas like Roxbury and the South End, helped “city planning” cease to be dirty words, and his inclusion of minorities in the city planning process gave many a new sense of empowerment.

Also, “by diminishing the racial divisions that dominated the city in the 1970s, Flynn has banished the creative uses of hate that had so often animated city politics” in the past, and rendered the term “Irish conservative” meaningless.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Martin F. Nolan, in *The Boston Globe*, “Ray Flynn: Revolutionary,” March 21, 1993.

<sup>72</sup> Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill*, p. 217.

<sup>73</sup> O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*, p. 270.

<sup>74</sup> Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill*, p. 228.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>76</sup> Nolan, in *The Boston Globe*, March 21, 1993.

Without sacrificing the downtown which is so vital to Boston's well being, Flynn, as he put it himself, "never forgot where I came from,"<sup>77</sup> a neighborhood whose residents were not the wealthiest people in the world. In the 1970s, Flynn wanted to protect the rights of the ordinary people in his district. His motivation never changed; instead his constituency broadened to include the entire city.

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<sup>77</sup> Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill*, p. 218.