# Oral History Interview of Anthony Voto

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**Interviewed by:** Jared Cain, Suffolk University Student enrolled in History 364: Oral History

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## Interview Summary

Mr. Anthony Voto reflects on his experiences growing up in East Boston, Massachusetts, following the 1974 Garrity decision, which required students to be bused between Boston neighborhoods with the intention of creating racial balance in the public schools. Mr. Voto discusses his childhood in East Boston; his experiences attending a magnet school; the appreciation for different cultures and people that he gained from attending a school with a diverse student body; and the positive impact that he feels the results of the Garrity decision had on the Boston Public Schools.

## Subject Headings

Busing for school integration
East Boston (Boston, Mass.)
Magnet schools
*Morgan v. Hennigan* (379 F. Supp. 410)
Voto, Anthony, 1966-

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This interview took place on February 15, 2005, at Suffolk University Law School's John Joseph Moakley Law Library.

**Interview Transcript**

**CAIN:** This interview was taped on February 15, 2004 [sic-2005], at Suffolk University Law School. I'm Jared Cain interviewing Mr. Anthony Voto. So, tell me a little bit about yourself Anthony.

**VOTO:** I'm going to be thirty-nine years old in April. I was born in the city of Boston. I was raised in East Boston. Since then I have moved several times to different communities. I live over in Porter Square now and I've been employed by Suffolk University for twenty years as of last week.

**CAIN:** Now, have you—what do you consider your home town itself? Is there—

**VOTO:** My hometown is always going to be where I'm from, it's—I say with pride and distinction, as it was back in the days of when Peter Faneuil was walking the streets in Boston, they'd ask a Bostonian a certain question, and when the person answered they knew right away if you were a Bostonian. They'd ask, "Well, what's on top of Faneuil Hall?", and you had to know that there was a grasshopper on top of Faneuil Hall, and I'm very proud to say that I am a real Bostonian. I've been questioned by people all over the world because of the way I talk and it's—I'm very proud I always say where I'm from. I'm from East Boston. I've lived in Winchester; I've lived in a bunch of different communities.

I live—like I said, I live in Porter Square now. And when someone asks me where I'm from I say I'm from East Boston and that's where I'm from—and people say it now. They all want to be from Boston. You meet someone, they'll say "I'm from Boston" and you say, "Oh yeah? Well what neighborhood are you from?" They'll say, "Well, actually I live in Milton" and I'll say, "Well that's not really Boston, huh?" (laughter) I'm a real Bostonian.

**CAIN:** (laughs) Good for you. So you grew up in East Boston and that was, let's see, you were born in East Boston, or—?

**VOTO:** I was born in the city of Boston, and the hospital is no longer there—it's a part of Brigham and Women's Hospital now.

**CAIN:** Okay. And ah—

**VOTO:** I was born in 1966.

**CAIN:** Yep.

**VOTO:** That's the interesting demographic set—not a lot of people were born in 1966.

**CAIN:** Yeah, that's true. So, you lived in Boston until—

**VOTO:** I lived there, oh—

**CAIN:** (inaudible)

**VOTO:** Until I was in my middle to late twenties—

**CAIN:** Yeah.

**VOTO:** Until I got married, I moved to different places. I was first living with my wife in Nahant and before that she was living in Winchester. I lived in Winthrop for a while. I live with my second wife now; I live in Porter Square—live in the Somerville side of Porter Square.

**CAIN:** Okay, so we're here today to talk about the busing of Boston students in the seventies and during the time of the busing you lived in East Boston, right?

**VOTO:** Correct.

**CAIN:** Okay. And, how old were you at the time, you must have been—

**VOTO:** From your records it says ’75?

**CAIN:** Right, so—

**VOTO:** I thought it was a little bit sooner than that. I was nine years old. I was in the—I want to say I was in the third grade—second or third grade. And there’d been a buzz about that they were going to start busing, and my parents weren’t, you know—we definitely weren’t an affluent family, and I noticed a flight, like kids start to leave—families leaving, going to different communities.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** Going to private schools, parochial schools. That wasn’t happening in my family; there was just—none of that was happening. There was no money. And I remember the first time that students came into my school—I was lucky, I was going to the school in my neighborhood and I wasn’t bused out, but they bused in—

**CAIN:** Right, right.

**VOTO:** —into the school, and at the time we had one teacher who was the best teacher in the school. She was the best and she was also the disciplinarian. She was an African American woman, so I had seen one woman and maybe a few other families, you know, like—my neighborhood was Italian and Irish. That’s pretty much all I knew.

**CAIN:** Right. So what was your neighborhood like that you lived in?

**VOTO:** It was Italian. It was Irish. It was poor; it was—it was a poor neighborhood. That's city life.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** It's a ghetto, and that's the bottom line.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm, yeah.

**VOTO:** People were poor there, you know?

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** People are poor there now.

**CAIN:** Were you yourself isolated in your neighborhood? I mean, I know that some people never went to other areas of Boston; did you—

**VOTO:** I went to certain places. My mother and father, they would try to enrich me. They'd take me to different parts of town. My father was adventurous. He was the type of guy that when he was growing up in the city, he'd go to different parts of the city, like for—we'd go to Franklin Park [Zoo]—perfect example, there's a place we'd go.

We'd go out by the Arboretum,[1] I'd—yeah I've been everywhere. At nine, ten years old, pretty much I was on my own. Wherever the T[2] was—we were on the T as kids—no supervision. I mean, I could end up in Newton on the Green Line. (laughter) This would be at ten years old, when I'd tell my mother I'm going out for the day, and I'd come back hours later. She would have no idea that I was in Newton, I was in—on the Red Line heading into Quincy or something like that. That's what it was like. (laughter)

[1] The Arnold Arboretum is operated by Harvard University and is located in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood.
[2] "The T" is short for MBTA, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, which operates the Boston area's subway system.

**CAIN:** So—

**VOTO:** I see kids today, ten years old, on the train—

**CAIN:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**VOTO:** I see them.

**CAIN:** Did you find that other kids in your neighborhood really hadn't been out of the area, or—?

**VOTO:** No, a lot of kids in the neighborhood were the same way; wherever the T was, we were on the T.

**CAIN:** Same way, huh? Yeah.

**VOTO:** To the extent we were traveling—no, like, I had been to Florida. You know, a family trip, but nothing extensive. I mean, I've been through New England, New Hampshire. But the city—I've been around the city.

**CAIN:** Yeah, yeah. So, what was the name of the school that you—

**VOTO:** Samuel Adams. Samuel Adams Elementary.

**CAIN:** And prior to them starting to bus the students in, what were the demographics like at your school?

**VOTO:** It was Italian, Irish, maybe we had one student of color, but it would be like Cape Verdean, Portuguese.

**CAIN:** Yeah.

**VOTO:** That was it. It was predominantly Irish and Italian, mostly Italian.

**CAIN:** Now, do you remember when you—you mentioned earlier but—do you remember when you first heard that there were going to be students bused to your school?

**VOTO:** Yeah, you hear from the adults, people were talking at the table—

**CAIN:** Right, right.

**VOTO:** Not knowing what's going on, but—and then you noticed—you started to notice families leaving, not knowing why they're leaving.

**CAIN:** So you didn't understand at the time—

**VOTO:** Didn't understand, right. I was too young, I didn't know (inaudible).

**CAIN:** Yeah, yeah.

**VOTO:** I wasn't a teenager, I was very young.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm. So what was the first day like when they came into your school?

**VOTO:** It was—it was a shocking experiment. I say it was an experiment because I think they wanted to see how people reacted. The schoolyard was definitely a better place because after you had beat everybody in a—you know, a specific sport, and we played games that only—unique to, like, the city—that most people had never even heard of, but we play them there, and then—and now you have new kids on the school lot there. That made a big difference, and you know when you look at someone and—we're different; we look at each other, but you notice we're different right away, but there was no hostility—there was no hostility at a young age.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** You don't know—even though, you know, some of adults around you—you hear certain things, but when you're still that young, you have to really be twisted to be thinking—like you saw—you would see, that as time went on it was the older students that had issues because once someone puts something in your head, it's tough to get rid of right?

**CAIN:** Right, yeah.

**VOTO:** To be against something—I think they were just against it just to be against busing.

**CAIN:** So do you think that if you were older, you might have had a different—

**VOTO:** I might have, I might have.

**CAIN:** Right, because you really don't know.

**VOTO:** And then I was—as I got older—when I was in the seventh grade I went to a school, also in East Boston, but it was what they called a magnet school[3]—and this is once again where they bus in students—I don't know what they call them now but it was a magnet school. And (pauses) I was in the seventh grade. It was—once again, I was into athletics so I got to meet a lot of different people because, you know, people play sports; that's the bottom line. So I really didn't have an issue—but there were people that had issues.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** And the school that I went to was from seventh grade to twelfth grade, so here I am a seventh grader, not—I mean, in a school—like, if you think you're in the ninth grade—whatever

[3] Magnet schools are schools offering special courses not available in the regular school curriculum and designed, often as an aid to school desegregation, to attract students on a voluntary basis from all parts of a school district without reference to the usual attendance zone rules. (Definition from the Library of Congress.)

high school you went to—and you look at the seniors, they're big—now you're a seventh grader in a high school of kids being bused in. Now this is—say I'm only in the third grade—this is only four years after busing—it's still a lot of issues, but we really didn't have—in my school, for some reason, there wasn't the issues like they had—like up at East Boston High School, which was only three or four blocks away. There were issues there. A lot of protests or violence towards different individuals in a way.

**CAIN:** You were talking about the older people having issues with it. Do you remember how your own parents felt about the situation, or—?

**VOTO:** They couldn't do anything anyway.

**CAIN:** Yeah.

**VOTO:** What opinion could they have? It's not like they could send me to private school if they wanted to.

**CAIN:** Right.

**VOTO:** And elementary school—I went to the same elementary school that my father went to, his father went to. And there's really nothing that could have been—

**CAIN:** But other elders did have—

**VOTO:** Oh, people—well, you heard about the white flight—

**CAIN:** Right.

**VOTO:** That's what it was all about—people left 'cause they didn't want to—

**CAIN:** (inaudible)

**VOTO:** And I got an education. I received a good education—Boston Public Schools. The bottom line is if you want to learn, you can learn. And I say—I say this, that it's not the teachers, it's not the building, it's the students. If you put the worse students in the city in Newton Public Schools, the teachers are going to have the same results. Students don't—they're not going to learn anything if you put the City of Boston—their public school teachers, you put them in Newton, these teachers are going to look great. Maybe there are some good teachers and some good things but it's the students—if you want to learn. Perfect example: one of the best schools in the state is Boston Latin School, and that's a Boston Public School.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** That by far—it is the best school. One of the best.

**CAIN:** Did you have any siblings?

**VOTO:** I had a sister.

**CAIN:** Okay, and was she affected by this or was she—

**VOTO:** Umm, yeah. She was to an extent, but not—like, she didn't go to a magnet school—I was in a magnet school—she went to a middle school. It was strange how they set it up because they kind of knew that there were certain schools in the neighborhood that they weren't busing into.

But in East Boston, they had a middle school, then they had the school that I went to that was a middle school, also, and a high school—that was the magnet school. Then there was East Boston High School which they bused in, but the way the City of Boston does it is like, if you—I'm not sure of what the exact way it is but I believe, like, if you wanted to do woodworking, like a trade, you went to East Boston High School. If you wanted to be an electrician, you went to

Charlestown High School, so they were busing people into those schools so they had specific trades.

I remember seeing the trouble. I remember seeing on the news, because I always watched the news, and a lot of it happened over in South Boston. East Boston had its issues, but a lot of it was over in South Boston.

**CAIN:** Did you have friends that were—because you said to me before that it was basically a lottery, right, that—

**VOTO:** Yeah, you would pick your school. There was no guarantee, that's why people were leaving. You couldn't necessarily go to the neighborhood school. Yes, I had friends that were bused from that time—I remember more in high school, they'd be bused out to Madison Park.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** They'd be bused to different places in the city. There were issues, you had to worry. You walked to a certain neighborhood—may not even be the kids in school; it may just be someone in the neighborhood. But yes, I had friends that were bused.

**CAIN:** They were, huh?

**VOTO:** Yeah, I was lucky. I don't know, I must have hit it right but students were certainly bused into the school that I went to.

**CAIN:** How did—now how did your friends feel about the change?

**VOTO:** They couldn't do anything (inaudible).

**CAIN:** Were they upset by it, or—?

**VOTO:** They didn't like it. Most of the kids I know that were bused, I'd say—and a lot of times you'd have to worry about being robbed or something like that. It was the same way back in the other way, coming back into East Boston—and there would be neighborhood people, and you hear—it might not be the students in the school —the problem might be people in the neighborhood—animosity that's built up.

**CAIN:** Yup. So in your own school, did you become adjusted to the demographics shift in your school?

**VOTO:** Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. Well when I was younger, yes. And in the magnet school I actually chose to go there because it was, like I said, it was considered one of the best schools. It wasn't quite an exam school because it was—but it was an experiment, it was called the Umana Harborside School of Science and Technology, and they tried to gear everything towards science, technology—that's what they pushed. And I went—I chose that school because you could choose these schools like the magnet schools, and there were other people in the city of Boston choosing this school. So I ended up—I didn't get sent there, I chose to go to this school. And now it's a middle school, it's no longer—it's called Joseph H. Barnes Middle School.

But I did choose to go there, and the demographics were primarily—it was—it wasn't even fifty-fifty. I'd say it was predominantly people from other neighborhoods, whether it be Chinese, Spanish, Black, you know, different cultures—and South Boston, Charlestown. So there was a lot of different people in this school.

I knew I wanted to go to college, and I figured that was my best shot with no guidance—my parents didn't tell me where I could go.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** I would just pick, I mean, you know, I want to go here; I'm in the seventh grade.

**CAIN:** So you say you chose to go to the magnet school when you went in seventh grade—

**VOTO:** Because that would keep me in the neighborhood.

**CAIN:** Right, because it was in East Boston.

**VOTO:** It was in East Boston. But if you didn't choose one of these schools, I think the way it worked, they could send you to another school.

**CAIN:** They could send you—right—

**VOTO:** So they knew what they were doing—there was something going on; I don't know what was going on, but if you look at it, you say, "Well why did they start magnet schools?" If you interview teachers—"What was the purpose of it?" It was—I could stay in that community, but it was diversity in that school; it was really diverse. It was different. Very few kids from my neighborhood went there.

**CAIN:** Yeah.

**VOTO:** All of my friends, and two of my closest friends. I had, like, dozens—maybe like three or four of them went to this school. Because you had to have certain academic levels to get into school.

**CAIN:** So what was class like when you were in middle school first, when the busing first happened? What was the classroom like when you started? Do you remember?

**VOTO:** Umm, there were no issues in the classroom.

**CAIN:** No?

**VOTO:** No. Nope. People knew that—a lot of people were there to learn. I mean, there were fights—I've seen fights in the classroom; it had nothing to do with color or anything like that.

No, there were fights and it would be primarily an East Boston kid, fighting with a South Boston kid. Dorchester guy fighting with a guy from West Roxbury, or something like that. The only ones that were really quiet were the Asians. Very quiet. Never started any trouble. They came to school every day. And very little—in this school, there was very little in the way of racial issues.

**CAIN:** So when you went to the magnet school, it was still the same way like that? There weren't big racial issues?

**VOTO:** Nope. Nope. But in the other schools, I know there was. Like you go to South Boston High, East Boston High. I don't know why—I don't know why it was like that.

**CAIN:** So obviously, at that young age when you were in the middle school, kids typically didn't get that upset about being integrated into the classroom.

**VOTO:** No, I mean, it was nice—I mean, to be honest with you, now you're getting into middle school, you're beginning to be like a teenager and you're coming into yourself—you're looking at different girls. It's a natural thing, and vice versa, it's the other way. God created some very beautiful people and it was a nice thing.

I mean, you learn a lot of things. I learned culture for sure. I learned culture, all different types of musical backgrounds, which I would have never got if I was in the strictly all this, all that—like Japan. Japan, it has everything. But to me it's a boring place. Homogenous to me, I don't like it. I like things different. I like to look at something different.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** Rap music, come on. I knew what rap music was before—

**CAIN:** Yeah, before anybody knew.

**VOTO:** Asian music. I knew where Chinatown was.

**CAIN:** So, I'm sure you think that—to say the class became racially balanced, would you disagree with that statement, or would you say it became more culturally balanced, I mean, what—

**VOTO:** I say more culturally balanced. I mean, okay, within the school I know that they had the top students in one class and the lesser students in another class. What they did— they had something—they had some sort of an experiment—I don't know if this came from the Department of Education—but they'd put you in these pods in the classrooms. I don't know where you went to school, but our classrooms were all glass so you could see in—I swear they did this on purpose, so that instead of having a closed door, you would look out and see diversity—you would *see* diversity and the teacher would—there'd be a person in the pod—there'd be four teachers and there'd be a person in the pod that could watch the whole pod. It was—I think it was planned. Subliminally, you're constantly—if you see something all the time—

**CAIN:** Right, then you get used to it.

**VOTO:** You get used to it. Whereas if the door was closed—it's like communism in Russia; once the doors open up, they change—I could be wrong, but it makes sense now that I look back. It makes sense

**CAIN:** Yeah, it does make sense.

**VOTO:** But, when you went to high school, did you have—we had like five or six classrooms, and we would call them pods.

**CAIN:** Yeah. Well, we called them quads because we had—

**VOTO:** But did you have glass windows? We could see—you could see people.

**CAIN:** No, there wasn't glass, but—

**VOTO:** We could see what was going on. But yeah, the teacher could see.

**CAIN:** That's interesting. So—

**VOTO:** Could be for safety, but maybe not. Your brain is powerful, and they know that. That's what they go to school for. Educators, they want to—

**CAIN:** It seems like a major point you're making is that—

**VOTO:** Come on, forget about sitting in the classroom. You have to go to gym!

**CAIN:** Yeah. (laughs)

**VOTO:** Think about it, now you're changing and undressing. It's a big thing. You know what I'm saying?

**CAIN:** Yeah.

**VOTO:** That's a big issue. So picture the obstacles that you'd have to overcome.

**CAIN:** Right.

**VOTO:** It's not sitting with you, but just think about you going into your high school, you're white, now you're all changed and you're in gym, and now you're changing and you got a Chinese guy here, a Spanish guy here, a black guy there, black guy there [tapping the table]. Maybe you never came in contact—now you're actually changing, so—and there were no problems. I'm telling you, there were no issues. Like in this school—you went to the other school, there were issues. I mean, there were fights, sure. There was this and there was that.

But it wasn't like—people weren't constantly trying to protest at our school because we chose to be there. It was the schools that they didn't want to—like you see the historical perspective—South Boston. I mean, East Boston High had some issues. I know that because I would hear, "Oh, they're fighting up at the high school" or something.

**CAIN:** So this is at the magnet school you're talking about?

**VOTO:** The magnet school was good—it was good.

**CAIN:** Right, because everybody wanted to be there?

**VOTO:** Everybody wanted to—pretty much. Most of the people wanted to be there; they knew why they were there.

**CAIN:** So you think that with—if you didn't have a choice in the matter and you were forced, then that would make hostility rather than—

**VOTO:** Of course. Who wants your arm twisted? That's what it was. They were twisting—and I wonder if they started the magnet school program because—it was a work in progress kind of thing for them; they had never done anything like this before. You know?

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm. Now obviously it seems like there wasn't that much going around your schools, but was there media around your neighborhood in East Boston, or—?

**VOTO:** Yup.

**CAIN:** There was?

**VOTO:** Yeah, there was media. And we had issues—forget the school busing thing, there was—they tried to integrate neighborhoods and there were issues about—

**CAIN:** How did they try to integrate neighborhoods?

**VOTO:** Well, mostly like public housing developments in the city, they integrated them. Before, like South Boston would be the public housing development for the poorer Irish—we had in East Boston the poor Italians and so on (tapping table) and so on. But I think over the years, the government started to mandate to the city that you had to have X amount—to have money. I think it's still this way today. You had to integrate your public housing.

It's like anything you hear, you have to have a certain balance or mix. Right now the problem is there's an issue with the Boston Police Department. They're complaining that it's not integrated enough. But yeah, when they tried to integrate the neighborhoods there was a lot of animosity. That I really remember—fights and just violence.

**CAIN:** So, did you—

**VOTO:** And that had nothing to do with schools, this is just the neighborhood now.

**CAIN:** This is just your neighborhood now?

**VOTO:** Yeah, now, I'm still young, I'm probably not even a teenager—but it was all centered around the housing projects. It still happens to this day. You hear about it. Like Charlestown, there's always problems.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm. So in your neighborhood you really didn't find that any violence started as a result of the busing or anything, did you?

**VOTO:** No. No, I don't think it had anything to do with busing. I just think they just saw it as outsiders coming in. It would be like any kind of outsider who came in. You'd be an outsider and you'd be tested. But they had to leave and, I mean, I know a really good person, if I could get in touch with you to interview and he really went through it because he's African American, and this guy—and he's one of those guys, he's from East Boston, and he'll always be that. He's

a really good guy. And he would tell us stories about what it was like when his family moved in and things people would say and do to him, and he's a really nice guy. People have (inaudible).

It took years and years before they can integrate the neighborhood again. Now, if you look at East Boston, it's predominantly minority, which that wasn't happening in the '70s and '80s. It was like—it was really, We're going to keep people out, we're going to keep people out. I mean, they fought an airport—to keep an airport out, people. When it came to fighting against—"We don't want people to move in". And that's what was going on. Now it's diverse, it's a diverse neighborhood. Really diverse.

**CAIN:** So as time went on, did you find that—obviously, you didn't have a real first-hand feeling of any dissent with the busing because you chose to go to a school later on that was a peaceful environment. But did you find that anything changed over the years, for better or worse, because of the busing in your neighborhood? Did you find that anything changed? You know, like people that were against it in your neighborhood—not necessarily you but—or for it—did they change their minds as things happened or things went on?

**VOTO:** (pauses to think) Some people did. Some people never liked it and the people that didn't like it were the ones who sent their kids to private schools.

**CAIN:** So from your first-hand witnessing, you saw that basically anybody that didn't like it, you saw pretty much everybody pulling out—

**VOTO:** They went to the parochial schools. Even in a poor neighborhood, there's a class system, and the class system existed. The poorer you were, the less likely you were to go to the parochial schools and that's just the bottom line. There's nothing you can do. When all you have is all you have, you become resourceful and you adjust to it. What would be the point if my mother and father couldn't send me to a parochial school, but then they're telling me they don't like what's going on in this school? They have to make the best situations, say, The only way you can get out, and not just getting out of the school, is to get out of the neighborhood and make something of yourself—is to get an education. And that's all they could do. They didn't have

the money, they didn't have any other resources, we didn't have a parent or a relative that would sign for us to go—we didn't have that, and a lot of people didn't have that. Come on, I don't think they were going to the parochial schools for the Catholic education.

**CAIN:** Right.

**VOTO:** I mean these people, they weren't going to church on Sundays, and the education is just as good. I'll match whatever I got from my education—as I went on in high school, I did transfer to a private school on my own, because it was my choice, my choice. Because I thought I'd have a better chance at getting into a college. But once again, I chose to go—I went to school in Lynn, which is a diverse community—I wanted diversity. I went to an all-boys school for one year and I hated it. I couldn't stand it. So I left.

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm.

**VOTO:** So you could tell, the people that didn't like it, did it—without saying, "I don't like it," they don't have to say whether they like it or not. They just—they did it. People that didn't like it and said it, are the people that you would see on TV. They're telling you—because they can't do anything, they can't do anything.

**CAIN:** So you found living in East Boston that it was one of the more peaceful neighborhoods per se, as to, basically, if they didn't like it—they went to parochial schools.

**VOTO:** They went to parochial schools, yeah.

**CAIN:** So do you think because of that, that's why there wasn't that much violence or upset in your area?

**VOTO:** Yeah. Yup. That's true. "Let the city send people wherever they want; they can put them in this neighborhood, but we're not sending our kids to those schools." That was the

mentality of a lot of people, or they would just move out of the neighborhood, move into the next town, which would be a town like Winthrop, which is the next town over. Small town.

**CAIN:** So, as you—you went from middle school where this first happened, and then you went to the magnet school. Did you develop any strong feelings that you had towards a side, as to this is—"It's good that they're integrating these kids through busing," or "No, I don't like it"? Did you develop any strong feelings?

**VOTO:** I didn't think about it. You don't have—when you're that age even in high school—you can talk to the top high schools students. Yeah, they may be book smart, but they don't have wisdom. It took me years and years later as an adult to see that when I go to certain places, certain neighborhoods in the city, I go into—I've been all over the world. I've been in Africa, I've been the only white person in a situation where there's Asians or blacks or Hispanics, and I'm not intimidated and I feel comfortable and I adjust to the situation. Whereas I see a lot of people, they get very nervous when they're in a situation that they're not comfortable with their surroundings. But at that age, you don't know. It's tough.

I bet though when you talk to the older people—I'm not talking about older students; like the teachers, people that were really there, they'll have an opinion. They'll say, "It worked," "It didn't work for me"—because I don't know what they were trying to accomplish, all I know is that I was put into a situation, and mine was a little bit different. I wasn't the person going on the bus. People on the buses were coming in. I chose what I wanted to choose. You're going to hear all different stories. You'll hear a different story. I remember, they'd give you a form and you'd pick what school you'd want to go to and my parents—I loved them and everything—but they weren't educated and they [said], Oh whatever you want to do. As long as you get an—study, study, study. You've got to learn, you've got to learn.

**CAIN:** So now that you're at your age now, do you find that you've learned a great deal from your youth, with going to the schools that you did?

**VOTO:** Oh yeah, definitely. You know, people talk—they talk a good game like they're out for diversity and this and that. But if you look at where most people live, they want to live in a suburb, they want to be with only this kind of person. It doesn't matter—that's what they want. They'll say, Oh yeah, well why don't you live in a neighborhood like that? I knew. I grew up in a neighborhood that was—like I said, it was one way and then it switched, and I stayed there. I didn't leave. Go to a neighborhood like Dorchester; very diverse neighborhood. Huge neighborhood. People lived there for life. They could say, "I want to leave." Some people do leave; they may want to live in Scituate or something like that, but, people say they want things but they really don't. Action is the best thing, you know?

**CAIN:** So exactly what things made you look different—just more that you should try to just go out in the world?

**VOTO:** I honestly believe that from being exposed at a young age to difference—me being the type of person that—like I said, I've been in a lot of different countries. And I grew up and when I do look back, I say, "Whoa, here I am, standing on a hill in South America," and I say to myself, "I'm just a guy from East Boston." But if I was close-minded, I might not have taken that trip. But I think that it's because of all of the years of having diversity—real diversity. I've definitely grown. I was always curious about the other person, because the other person was always there, you know?

**CAIN:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**VOTO:** If two different people walked in the room, it's only human nature—if you don't have the ability to say, "Well maybe I might be interested in what this person next to me is going to say," then you're not doing yourself any good at all. So I learned to be able to be around people, and adapt to my surroundings. It doesn't happen a lot in the United States.

**CAIN:** So you definitely contribute the fact that you met different ethnicities in your middle school when they started coming in through the busing, and then when you went to the magnet

school—because you were young—you started at a young age—you think that that was most important in—

**VOTO:** Yes. Definitely.

**CAIN:** And if it had started later—

**VOTO:** If I was a teenager, my mind probably could have been made up by—people are impressionable, you know?

**CAIN:** Yeah.

**VOTO:** People will do whatever they're pushed to do, or they look up to adults, and sometimes they're looking up to the wrong people. Come on, when I was a kid I thought that you could dig a hole to go into China. But then when I first met someone who was Chinese, I realized—I looked on the map and said, "You can't dig a hole and get to China!" You know what I'm saying? A lot of people have never, at that point, they never had seen anything except what they knew, and you're looking at your own people. Come on, Irish and Italian neighborhoods, there was a class system. It was totally segregated. It's the same way in Chinese neighborhoods, there's segregation. In their own neighborhoods there's segregation, in Hispanic neighborhoods and in African American neighborhoods. It's a fact that there is this group, and then there's that group. And by throwing everything up—you get a pot, if you just keep everything warm and don't mix it up—you know, you got soup, what happens? It starts to burn. Once you mix it up, it makes for a good stew.

**CAIN:** I like that. So although you weren't yourself—because you were too young, so young, and because you didn't find yourself directly related with, per se, the busing, now when you just know about it and hear about it, and you think about all of Boston, do you think that it was a good thing that they did it?

**VOTO:** I think it is, yeah.

**CAIN:** You do?

**VOTO:** Yeah.

**CAIN:** Simply because of the integration of the cultures you'd say?

**VOTO:** Yeah. Not only should they bus to the city of Boston, but they should do it Greater Boston-wise. Get kids from Newton and ship them into the inner city. You know, I played football, I played baseball. We'd go to Newton, we'd play them and we'd hear them say, "Those kids are carrying knives!" We weren't carrying knives! We didn't have to carry knives. We would just beat you up and that was the bottom line! We were hardened kids, but people say things and that's just not true.

**CAIN:** And if—

**VOTO:** People probably felt the same way about them. People coming into—when I say them, I mean people coming into a neighborhood that's different, whether it be—I don't know what it was like. I don't know what it was like at that young age but I know that the people that I know that were bused into the minority neighborhoods, they had issues, just like they had over in the white neighborhoods, and I think it was always revenge. "Oh, this person this." "Oh, when they come over to Southie High, we're gonna do this." I don't know. I'd like to hear what it was like from going into those neighborhoods because I don't know because I wasn't there.

**CAIN:** So you can only say that you think it was good because based on your own experience, it was a great experience for you?

**VOTO:** Yeah. Someone that was bused out into a big neighborhood, like a white person going to a black neighborhood, might say, "I didn't like it." I stayed in my own neighborhood. I had my safety net around me. I had a safety net. I felt good in my own neighborhood but within there it was totally different. My school day was different—it was totally different. I could tell

my friend, "Oh yeah, I met this girl today." "Oh, what's her name?" "Oh, her name is Yung Chim We," or something like that—whatever a Chinese name was. Oh man, you know? Whereas my friend in the other school was like, "Oh, I talked to Kelly today," you know what I'm saying? There's a big difference.

**CAIN:** Yeah, yeah.

**VOTO:** And my friends do say I'm a little bit different then them. And I can go up to anybody and start a conversation. Culturally, I know certain cultures. Like know that a Chinese name means something. When you meet someone who's Chinese, it means something. I wouldn't have known that!

**CAIN:** Yeah. If it hadn't had happened.

**VOTO:** You think that they name us—okay, you're Jared, I'm Anthony, but their name when they name them—it means something. Which I would have never known that.

**CAIN:** And obviously you made plenty of friends all across the spectrum when you went throughout your schooling.

**VOTO:** Yeah.

**CAIN:** By having that experience.

**VOTO:** Names. I can remember some of the names of some of these people. And I do run into them occasionally here and there in the city—in a city of what? Six hundred thousand people? It's very common to run into people. I can be seen all over the city. You never know where you could see me, and people have seen me and said, "What are you doing over here?" And I say, "Well, I'm just hanging out, I'm getting some food over here." Like Saturday, I'll be in Chinatown eating dim sum with a friend of ours—my wife's friend, who's Chinese. And my wife's from New Hampshire and she never had dim sum. I said, "Oh, I'll take you for dim sum.

You need to eat dim sum, it's good!" So now we're going with her Chinese friend. Have you ever had dim sum?

**CAIN:** No, what is it?

**VOTO:** See, you have to go for dim sum. I'm going to take you for dim sum!

**CAIN:** (laughs) Okay.

**VOTO:** Yeah, I'm going to take you. I'm going to email you and say, "Oh, we're going for dim sum!"

**CAIN:** (laughs) Alright.

**VOTO:** You sit at the tables, and they'll ask you, "Do you want to sit together?" I'd say, "No, I don't want to sit together, I want to sit with the Chinese family," or whoever's in there at the time, and you sit at the table and it could be a Chinese couple—another Chinese couple with their kid and you eat dim sum. They say, "Oh, you want chopsticks?" I say, "Sure, I'll eat with the chopsticks," and women push around this cart and—what look like little dumpling things—I'm trying to explain to you—like dumplings, like Peking ravioli. They might have prawn or something. And you just point, and then she takes it and you get a card and she punches your card, puts it on the plate—and you can have, like, five or six different things on your plate, you see what I'm saying?

**CAIN:** Yeah. Yeah.

**VOTO:** Instead of having, "I only want to eat meat and potatoes," but the thing is, you don't know what's coming by on the cart. It isn't on the menu. And you look and see, Do I like that? It's definitely a good place if you want to go and impress someone. Like a girl, you want to go and take her on a date, and she's never done it, she'll say—and if she thinks that this is dumb or [she'll say], "Eww," or something like that, then that's not the girl you want to go with because

you want someone who's open-minded. And my son's ten years old and he's been to dim sum a dozen times. We go—we like it there.

**CAIN:** So obviously it seems like—would you say that this—going through younger schooling days—do you think that it was one of the best experiences you've had, or—?

**VOTO:** Yeah. Definitely. When I was in that magnet school, so I was in the eight grade, and they'd let you try out for varsity baseball and I was good enough. I made the team, and they said, Okay, we're going to play you on JV [junior varsity]. There was a lot of kids on the team but they're all from different neighborhoods. So as time went on, now I'm in high school, I get a call from one of the kids I played with—he was on a team in Roxbury. There was me, and then my friend who was a pitcher, and he said, "I want you to play for us. You're going to play on our team." And most of the team was black—we were these white guys. He said, "Oh, you're going to have to take the train," because we didn't have the car—we couldn't afford a car. So we took the train, we get off at Dudley Station, and—he was worried about us; he was worried that people would give us a hard time, but we were two white kids with baseball uniforms on and people didn't really hassle us that much. I don't think we—we never had an issue. But I would have never met them, I would have never played baseball—I played baseball all over the city. I played in the Park League system, and this guy had a team. He tracked me down and I met him at that school, and he was one of the best players on the team. So I made friends all over the city.

**CAIN:** Did you?

**VOTO:** Yep.

**CAIN:** Obviously, you wouldn't take any of it back.

**VOTO:** No, no. It was a good thing. (laughs) At 600,000 people, that's really only a small neighborhood—the city of Boston.

**CAIN:** Yeah, that's true. So, is there anything else you want to say about—

**VOTO:** No, thank you for the interview, and I hope that I was a little bit enlightening and humorous.

**CAIN:** Absolutely.

**VOTO:** And wherever you go with it, good luck. But I think it was a success. I hear a lot of intellectuals say, Oh, the whole busing thing! But for me, it opened my eyes and it gave me the sense that I can get out. I have a chance to get out. I can do something different. Every day, I grew up across from the harbor, and I see buildings, skyscrapers—now, there's significantly more—and I'd look and I'd say, "Wow. That's the American dream right there. That's the piece of apple pie. And I want my piece." And I believe this is because I was surrounded by different things. If I was just going one way—if you look at a white wall all the time like I'm looking at right now, it's pretty boring. Like, you eat your eggs the same way—that's pretty boring. It's good to have eggs Benedict or over-easy.

**CAIN:** Yeah. Good parallel.

**VOTO:** That's it!

**CAIN:** (laughs) Alright, thank you Anthony.

**END OF INTERVIEW**