



Oral History Interview of Mary Ann Hardenbergh (OH-058)

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Oral History Interview of Mary Ann Hardenbergh

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Interview Summary

Mary Ann Hardenbergh, who served as a member and as chair of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, reflects on her experiences during the time surrounding the 1974 Garrity decision, which required some students to be bused between Boston neighborhoods with the intention of creating racial balance in the public schools. She discusses her involvement with the decision and the concept of forced busing; her experiences living in Boston's Hyde Park neighborhood; her children's educational experiences; the issue of race in Boston; and possible alternatives to the plan that was implemented as a result of the Garrity decision. She concludes by discussing the current state of education in Massachusetts.

Subject Headings

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Busing for school integration

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Hardenbergh, Mary Ann

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Morgan v. Hennigan (379 F. Supp. 410)



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Interview Transcript

ROBERT METZ: My name is Robert Metz. We're at the Moakley Archives. It's February 16, 2006, and it's approximately 4:20pm. Could you please say your full name?

MARY ANN HARDENBERGH: Yes, Mary Ann Hardenbergh.

METZ: And Mary Ann, where do you currently live and how long have you lived there?

HARDENBERGH: In Back Bay in Boston. 180 Commonwealth Avenue. We have lived there since 1985, bought the condo in '75, started off in 1969 in Hyde Park.

METZ: Okay, and could you just describe generally your connection to the school systems?

HARDENBERGH: Yeah, I was active with the Boston League of Women Voters, and the president of the league was in a graduate program at Harvard University, and when Joe Cronin became secretary of education—the secretary of education in those days, this is late sixties, early seventies, recommended members for the state board of education to be appointed by the governor. And because they were looking for a Boston parent and because Gertrude¹ knew I was active in the schools, [and had] five kids in the Boston public schools, she recommended me and I went through a whole interview process, and then a few glitches, and I was appointed to the board in February of 1972.

METZ: And prior to becoming a member of the state board, what did you do?

HARDENBERGH: I was a volunteer in the Boston Public Schools.

METZ: So you've definitely been involved in education for a while.

HARDENBERGH: This is my thirty-seventh year.

¹ Gertrude Perlman was the president of the Boston League of Women Voters.

METZ: Excellent, excellent. So you described how you became a member. When you first heard about the Garrity decision, what were your thoughts? What were your feelings?

HARDENBERGH: Of course we knew all about it. We brought the first case against Boston, which they did not adhere to. We would not have recommended, did not recommend as dramatic a proposal as Judge Garrity came up with, but we thought the only recourse we had at that point was to support his decision. Thought it would be problematic, thought that the Boston School Committee was a total disaster and that they were lying to people, to parents, saying, It'll never happen, it'll never happen, you'll never have to integrate these schools. So a lot of the reaction, I think, against Garrity's decision was because people had been lied to.

METZ: And as far as your official role on the board of education—

HARDENBERGH: I was a member; I was chair in the middle seventies.

METZ: Chair in the middle seventies. And the interaction between the public and the board, what was that like? Was there a lot of pressure and things like that from the community?

HARDENBERGH: Yes, well I'll describe. The word got out that we were in fact going to receive a court order in 1974 that would force schools to integrate. And there was an informational meeting down at Hyde Park Municipal Center, and I went. And it had been announced that day—this is after three or four months of negotiations—that a new woman had just been appointed to the state board of education. She did not represent Boston parents because she was supportive of integration. We had a black foster daughter living with us at the time. And there was a huge, ugly out roar, and people were yelling, “She'd never dare show up, she'd never dare show up to this meeting.” And I raised my hand, I went up front, went up on the podium, and people spat at me, and went on and on and on. And I said, “The problem is, you have been lied to, because this was inevitable. The constitution requires it, and we could have done it in a much better way in 1972 with the state board plan, which would not have been nearly as dramatic as this plan.” So I left this meeting. Someone had offered to drive me home because I

walked down and we were followed by cars honking and everything, and we had police protection for about six months.

METZ: Wow. Was your personal opinion pretty well-defined before any interaction with the community? Did the community response to the decision influence your personal opinion?

HARDENBERGH: It influenced, if only to say how tragic it was that people there were such racists. As I mentioned, we had a black foster daughter, five kids plus Aida. And people would say to me, “Well, we don’t want any blacks coming into our schools or living in our neighborhoods, but she’s okay.”

METZ: Being on the board of education and also being part of the community, were there any conflicts between professional obligations and personal beliefs?

HARDENBERGH: Well, I was not a professional in the sense that members from the state board of ed., from the original Willis-Harrington Act in 1965,² could not be professional educators. Quite a few business people, some other people that were community activists. I think I was the only one who actually had children in public schools. My professional life at the time was as a full-time citizen volunteer. I was able to be at home with my kids.

METZ: And a little more in terms of conversations you might have had with neighbors and community members?

HARDENBERGH: A couple of things happened which solidified, in a sense, my feeling about the necessity of the court order. Soon after we moved there [to Hyde Park] in 1969, I realized there was no library in our elementary school, and Boston Partners in Education, which was called School Volunteers in Boston, for which I had volunteered, was in a big campaign to put libraries in elementary schools. So I got involved with that and made some good friends because everybody agreed that we needed a library, I mean, duh. And I was just shocked. I can tell you,

² The legislation known as the Willis-Harrington Act restructured the Massachusetts Department of Education and created the Board of Education and the Board of Higher Education. (See the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts website at <http://www.lwvma.org/education.shtml>)

the textbooks and style of teaching was [from the] fifties. I mean some of the textbooks that my kids got were unbelievable, their history and everything; they were so far behind.

There was a very strong Roman Catholic influence in Boston, stronger than it is now. People would pull their kids out of parochial schools and put them in public schools and take them out of public schools and put them in parochial schools. And many of the teachers themselves had gone to parochial schools, so I would say that the attitude about teaching was definitely a parochial school model.

A couple of things happened: there was a program in Boston called Exodus; it was begun by black parents in Roxbury that got the school committee to agree voluntarily that if there were empty seats in the urban outlying areas, where the better schools were, newer schools, better teachers, more motivated staff, the whole deal—if there were empty seats in those schools, they could bring their kids—it wasn't going to be paid for by the city—to these schools. My husband and I became active in the parent teacher association, called Home and School Association, and we went to a meeting and the principal of the school, who was about as progressive as any educator I've ever known, announced with great pride that she had hidden all the extra seats in the basement. And I raised my hand and I said, "I don't think that's right," she said, "We do what we want to here in this neighborhood." So you see there was just this constant putting your head in the sand and avoiding anything that was coming.

After the supreme court decision—the federal court decision came down—our older kids were in high schools at the time and so they weren't basically affected by the court order. But our daughter, who was going into third grade, was forced-bused into Mattapan to an all-black middle school, must've been elementary school. Maybe she was higher; she was going into middle school, and this was an all-black middle school. And I volunteered in the library and I rode on the first bus where the windows were shattered by the black kids; that's after the white kids had shattered the black buses. But I rode with my daughter every day for about a month and volunteered in the library there. And parents would come up to me as I would be walking down the street to meet the bus at the corner, and say, Do you think it's going to be safe? I mean, they

would whisper behind the hedges, Is it going to be safe? I can't afford to send my child to parochial school or private school, so will it be okay? And I said, "Yes, it will be okay."

Within a month or so I realized that none of the teachers were giving homework, and there are mixed academic or educational theories on homework. I happen to believe—I did adult literacy for quite a while—that repetition is the strongest form of intention, so repetition and doing written homework, I think, is valuable. I went to one of the teachers and said, "Deedee hasn't brought home any homework. I knew there would be a transition time, so I waited for a month or so." She said, "Oh we don't send home homework." I said, "Well that's very interesting, why don't you do that?" "Well, they," meaning the black kids, "never would do it, so we just gave up." So there was a perfect personification of the attitude of the white teachers towards the black kids: *they* can't succeed; *their* parents don't care. And in the meetings that we went to out in the neighborhoods about this, in the black neighborhoods, we had parents stand up and scream and yell and say, "I'd bus my kid to hell to get a good education." So you see the public reception among the whites and blacks was really frightening I think.

METZ: In terms of—and I definitely want to get back to the experiences and the children and the schools, but as far as the board goes, if you could describe the nature of the interaction of the board members regarding this—was everybody on the same page or—?

HARDENBERGH: Yes, everybody was on the same page. And we became absolutely convinced that that was the only solution since the Boston School Committee thwarted every other plan we'd ever done. And we had some people on the department of ed. who had actually worked with the judge on trying to modify some of the plans, the biggest one being really East Boston, having to bus their kids in through the tunnel. You know, that was, "We're going to blow up the tunnel," said by the racists. Or South Boston where most of the kids were low income anyway, being mixed up—and their schools were not wonderful—with black kids who were low income in worse schools. So the mix, we knew, was going to be difficult.

METZ: Yeah, in terms of—you described a little bit that the community reaction in Hyde Park to the decision. Is there anything to elaborate on in terms of neighbors and conversations and things like that?

HARDENBERGH: Just that no one would speak to me publicly so they could be seen, but I would get phone calls asking how school was going and what it was like and all of that. But everything was very—the predominant view in the community was that black kids were inferior. Yes, we know their schools are inferior, but it's their fault.

METZ: Did you feel, in any sense, ostracized in the community for your role? Were there any acts of, not necessarily violence, but—

HARDENBERGH: Oh yeah, well, there were acts of violence; I mean, that's why we had the police protection. We had to take our phone off at night because of death threats, and we had rocks thrown at the house. There was an organization called ROAR, Restore Our Alienated Rights, coming out of South Boston. And they would begin these Sunday cavalcades; you know, lines of cars hanging “Nigger go home,” and all of that. They'd leave from Dedham and drive—Hyde Park is right on the edge next to Dedham—would drive up our street and would just stop in front of the house and yell threats and scream and yell and at night people would chalk things on our driveway.

METZ: Did any of that pressure ever force you to reconsider things? I mean, it seems like you must've been very brave to take the position you did on the issue.

HARDENBERGH: Well, I'd really become involved on the whole issue of civil rights by then, and felt very strongly about it. I went through a course sponsored by the Episcopal Church on white racism. Jim Reeve,³ who died in Selma, was a friend, a close personal friend, and our minister of our Unitarian church down in Braintree was very much of an activist, part of the

³ Jim Reeve was a Boston resident who was beaten to death during a civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965. (See the Shiller Institute website at http://www.schillerinstitute.org/conf-iclc/2007/landbridge_conf_amelia.html)

Metco program,⁴ where they had families who welcomed black kids into the neighborhood and all of that. So my persuasion came that the way that blacks have been treated has been absolutely wrong, illegal, and if somebody doesn't begin stand up and begin to address the question—yes, I was strong, I was courageous; my kids didn't like it. They were upset—some of them are still upset, although they all went to the exam schools and all did well; went on to college and you know, but there is that resentment that their mother was the one being sort of pointed out as somebody who was ruining education in Boston, helping white flight; that was the big issue.

METZ: So as far as your children, you mentioned you had a number of them in the school systems; how old were they at the time?

HARDENBERGH: Our oldest son—well there was a nine year difference between our oldest and our youngest. And I think Doug, the first year of deseg[regation] went into Boston Tech,⁵ the next three went into Boston Latin,⁶ and the youngest son went to one of the experimental schools, magnet schools⁷ we called them, that Judge Garrity set up, the Trotter School, and so we took responsibility for getting him to school. So he went in to a truly integrated school that was a fabulous education. Everybody was mixed right from the beginning. That was really good.

METZ: Whereabouts is the Trotter School?

HARDENBERGH: In Roxbury, yeah, and my husband—because I was on the state board, I couldn't really be that active locally. I mean, I was volunteering all the time in the libraries and things like that, and I volunteered at a number of the kids' schools. But my husband was very active as a parent at the Trotter, was the co-chair of the Parent Council.

⁴ The Metco Program is a grant program funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It is a voluntary program intended to expand educational opportunities and reduce racial imbalance, by permitting students in certain cities to attend public schools in other communities that have agreed to participate. (Taken from the Massachusetts Department of Education website, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/>)

⁵ Boston Technical High School was in existence from 1944 until 1989, when it merged with Mario Umana Technical High School and became the John D. O'Bryant School of Math and Science. (See the O'Bryant School website at <http://obryant.us/servlet/pub?REQTYPE=pubhistory>.)

⁶ Boston Latin School is a public exam school and the oldest public school in the United States.

⁷ 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.)

METZ: Excellent. And the first day of school, September 1974—

HARDENBERGH: Five, I think it was. The court order came down in I thought '74, and it wasn't until '75 school year.⁸

METZ: That might be the case.

HARDENBERGH: You'll need to check that; maybe my memory isn't as accurate.

METZ: I will look into that. Well, the first day of school after the decision was handed down and this is all coming about, what was it like for your kids—

HARDENBERGH: Well, the older kids weren't affected because they were already in middle or junior high schools, which were then changed to middle schools, but they stayed in the same schools and went on to the, as I said, exam schools. Our daughter was affected by going into the Thompson School in Mattapan, an all-black school. So the first day, we were the only white—no, Deedee had a couple of friends whose parents were willing, as long as I was riding along, to send their kids. And I got some of them actively involved in the schools, who had been very reluctant to begin with because they couldn't see the value of mixing kids up. And so the first day of school, on the way home, we heard about the white kids of South Boston stoning the black buses. The second day of school, I was riding the bus, sitting next to the window, came down the street from the Thompson, made a left hand turn, and there were a bunch of kids with stones. And the window right here was broken, so I was the person who yelled, "Down on the floor, under the seats!"

METZ: Must've been a very, just shocking moment.

HARDENBERGH: Oh yeah, but it was inevitable. And then we had a police escort from that time on.

⁸ The busing plan was implemented on September 13, 1975, the first day of school.

METZ: Were there any further incidents after that, even with a police escort?

HARDENBERGH: No, and some of the parents after a couple of months did send their kids to school. So the number of white kids—our daughter went through a situation where a bunch of black kids ganged up on her, called her “whitey” and threatening her, and she stood up to them and that was the end of it.

METZ: Wow, good for her. And that was really one of the only—were there any other incidents?

HARDENBERGH: Oh, well other things that were happening in the city are—[my] third son, who’s a tennis pro, was taking tennis lessons at Jim Smith’s—who’s the black—Arthur Ashe Center in Roxbury. And Jim knowing that white kids—this was on Blue Hill Avenue in Mattapan area—knowing that black kids were throwing rocks at white kids, he actually drove Craig after school, after his practice into Mattapan, where I would pick him up.

METZ: And when you found out that your daughter, Deedee, was going to the—you know, basically having her shipped to the school in Mattapan, what did you know about the community then, as far as Mattapan and the reputation of it and the school systems?

HARDENBERGH: Just that I knew that the black schools were not good schools, so it was all part of the risk we took, with the hope of improving the schools, all the schools. I was equally hoping that this would force Hyde Park schools to improve, because I mentioned, they were very regressive.

METZ: Were there other examples of, or experiences that maybe other family members or neighbors had in the school systems regarding this conflict or—?

HARDENBERGH: Well I know another member of the state board, Evelyn Morash who did not have kids in school but lived in East Boston, her house was also stoned. The other members

of the state board were very sympathetic and supportive, so that sort of reinforced us, and Evelyn and I talked a lot obviously.

METZ: And you and Evelyn were the only two—

HARDENBERGH: Bostonians, yeah

METZ: Right, so that must've created an interesting dynamic.

HARDENBERGH: Well, they didn't even have anyone on there until they had me, I mean no one from Boston, when they knew that school deseg. was coming down the Pike—[that] was just not smart.

METZ: And so after that initial—that first day when the bus was stoned, and the police escort was present afterwards, there were no further examples?

HARDENBERGH: Well there were stonings but the windows weren't broken and the police were riding on either side of the bus.

METZ: How far was the trip?

HARDENBERGH: Oh, my husband says I exaggerate time, or don't—I would say it was twenty minutes to a half hour bus ride, by the time we picked up other kids and sort of went through the side streets and everything.

METZ: And what age were the children on the bus?

HARDENBERGH: This was sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. You know, the whole court case was based on the fact that the white schools were junior high schools, seven, eight and nine—no, the other way around; the white kids had middle school, six, seven, and eight, which meant they could go from there into ninth grade into Latin schools. And the black kids had seven, eight, and

nine, which made it much harder for them to transfer after junior high school. That was one of the original cases—reasons for the court order.

METZ: So throughout the school year, with your children's experiences, it seems as if it did improve, to an extent. Is that accurate?

HARDENBERGH: I think so. I mean, our youngest son had very good black friends because right from kindergarten or first grade on, kindergarten on, he really was not in a negative environment. So I mean we would drive him down to Dorchester and his friends would come and stay with us, white and black usually mixed together. The older kids hated the whole scene and I guess I mentioned that their mother was sort of the focus of all this negative stuff. People are still living those days and it's scary to me.

I've been very much involved in a program called Citywide Dialogues, began two years ago, where we were bringing people, blacks and whites, together in neighborhood groups to do a four-session curriculum on racism. And I did the very first one in Back Bay, it was very hard to get black participants, but they did one in Charlestown and when we facilitators met on a regular basis, they said, We can't believe it, they're still reliving '74, '75.

METZ: And have the feelings and opinions of your children, have they changed over the years, maybe even modified when they look back on things?

HARDENBERGH: I think so. Our second son is head of the Community Action Program in the state of Alaska, where they do a lot of outreach to, not as much blacks, but Native Indians. He was in the Peace Corps. Our third son's brother-in-law had a black child and therefore Melissa has been a part of their family, so I think they are very open and they attend a born-again church which is black and white. But they're the only two. Deedee still is upset that we made her go through it. [Content omitted]

METZ: Right. You mentioned that you had an adopted—

HARDENBERGH: Foster daughter.

METZ: Right, foster daughter. Now as I understand it, one of the things that the Boston schools did to try to determine the issues of race was to have to basically indicate whether you were white or black and there were some issues with that. And one of the things I had heard in my research about this was that some of the families who had mentioned that they had white children and black children, there was an issue with that. Did you encounter anything like that?

HARDENBERGH: Well, let me tell you what happened. We were living in Hackensack, New Jersey, before we moved up to Boston in 1969, and Aida had come to live with us during New York City's school strike. And she was going into tenth grade, had third grade reading and math, no other skills. So we did not want to put her back into the New York City schools and so we agreed—this is when we became foster parents—that we would bring her to Boston. And I contacted the Hyde Park High School headmaster, wrote him three times, and said, “We’re bringing our daughter in in six months. She has gained three grade levels [in her reading and math skills], and she will need help.” She isn’t a special ed. kid, she was just never educated.

I think the kids started high school first, so the others went off on the buses and everything and knew how to do that and I think I went with many of them. So the second day I guess it was when the high school kids were starting, maybe three or four days before the elementary school kids. I went down and made an appointment at Hyde Park High with the headmaster. We were delayed; they kept us waiting about a half hour, or hour. It was the worst school I’ve ever seen. I said to Aida, “Sweetie, I just don’t think we’re going to leave you here.” We got into the headmaster’s—he was not a bad guy, but again, he was living in another world entirely. Got into his office, and there were my three letters, each one with a please send me back any information I need to know.

He said, “Well, I guess we never got around to contacting you did we?” I said, “No, you didn’t and I consider it to be quite rude.” He said, “Well Mrs. Hardenberg, even though she is your foster daughter, you’ll have to pay tuition for her to go to this public school.” Something like nine hundred dollars a year, which in that—this is 1970, ‘69, was a lot of money. And I said, “I

think you have a terrible school.” I had already begun to do a little investigating; found out that 12 percent of their graduating classes went onto any form of higher education or voc training, or anything. I mean, 12 percent—just a disaster. And again it was a forced bused school.

So I got home, called my husband, and I said, “We just can’t put Aida in that school. I don’t know what to do.” He was talking out loud about, “Have you thought about this, thought about that? Maybe we could find another school.” But it was all very geographically determined, and the man next to him—this was at the New England Telephone Company, good old MA Bell days—overheard him, because they had the low partitions, and said, “Dan, are you having a problem?” And Dan explained why, and he said, “Well, my brother happens to be head of the Boston Archdiocese School System; let’s see what we can do.” Because they had already known that we brought Aida up, and everybody thought it was wonderful that we were doing that and tutoring her and all of that.

So we got her in to Jeanne D’Arc Academy, which was a Catholic school in Milton, but it was right on the end of our street. And he called back and said—I guess he spoke to the brother, the brother spoke to Mother Superior and he said, “Take Aida over there just to see what can be worked out.” Well, this Mother Superior was a hot shot, absolutely dynamite; young gun—wore regular clothes and was just really great. And she said, “You’re doing all you can to redress a situation that all of us should have been addressing for years, and we will have Aida come in tuition free. You will have to buy her uniform and her books, but we will do everything possible to help.”

So she started going to private school. She was going into eleventh grade. And again, several things happen, as you know. As a teacher—if you’ve done an intensive amount of catch up learning, you reach a plateau and unfortunately she was still there at sixth grade. And the private school environment—the kids were wonderful to her. It was not an integrated school. She was the only black, but they had her over for overnights, we had them over our house for overnights. She started dating a dear friend of one of the white classmates who worked in a drug store because this black guy there—she [the white classmate] thought Aida and he would get along, which they did. She struggled through eleventh grade, and by the time she got to twelfth grade,

although she wanted to go to nursing school—that’s how we originally connected with her—and she realized that she was still so far behind and we said, Well, we’ll do whatever we can; we’ll provide some interim education, we’ll do whatever.”

She got pregnant. This was the standard East Harlem way of escaping your family. We went through an abortion experience. I mean, it’s much more complicated. She now is very close to us. But [she] left school; our contract with her was, as long as you are in school, then you may stay here. So she never did graduate, and had a terrible accident—her husband was in the air force over in Holland—and [she] was totally paralyzed and had to learn how to crawl and walk and definitely had brain damage, so in a sense there was no way we could ever catch up. She is one of the wisest people I know, but she certainly is not academically inclined or gifted.

METZ: And your other daughter that was bused, what grade was she in?

HARDENBERGH: She was going into the new structure which was six, seven, and eight of all schools. This had been a six, seven, and eight because it was a black school, and so she was going into sixth grade.

METZ: As far as being able to look back and reflect on things and kind of compare how things were then and now, in terms of the neighborhood—I know you don’t live in Hyde Park anymore—

HARDENBERGH: No, we moved out after twenty years.

METZ: But has your opinion on the neighborhood changed at all?

HARDENBERGH: Well, they’re integrated. Black families have moved in. I’m not sure if the racism—I’m very active in civil rights things. The racism is not as blatant, but it’s still there.

METZ: More of an institutional form of it.

HARDENBERGH: Exactly.

METZ: What about as far as your opinion on the schools? Do you feel there's measured progress in the time span that we've seen elapse?

HARDENBERGH: Tom Payzant is a good friend. [He's the] superintendent. He's been there now for eleven years. I think he's done as good a job as anyone could do. I think until we retire most of the old teachers, that racism is always going to be there. It's low expectations for black kids. I think the schools got worse because all the—a lot of the white families pulled out, which left a poor, black minority system, with all of the problems that that involves. I think they have potential for getting better. I think some of them are absolutely fabulous, I volunteer at the Quincy School, which is a majority Chinese school, in the Chinatown area. And it's an absolutely superb school, but it's such a mixed bag everywhere. Depends on the principal, depends on community involvement, you know, a lot of things.

METZ: As far as media coverage of the issue, did you have any personal interaction with the members of the media, national or local or—?

HARDENBERGH: Well of course, I got phone calls all the time and all of that. I think they tried—I think the *Globe* really did its best to really keep the lid on. The mayor, Kevin White, did his best. In fact, he has Alzheimer's so he doesn't remember a lot, but I've seen him recently at some political things, and he does remember coming out to Hyde Park, meeting in the kitchens with groups of us that would put parents together. [Robert J.] DiGrazia, who was the police chief at the time, really did his damndest to try to keep things safe. I think the ministers and other local activists, when they realized it was blowing up, really made an effort to keep things under control.

METZ: In terms of the media coverage, both local and national, do you think it was a fair representation of the issue?

HARDENBERGH: Well all they could do was to report incidents, as I say the *Globe* really tried to keep the lid on by not reporting a lot of what would have been inflammatory incidents. I don't know, it's hard for me to gauge. I was so in the middle of it that it was almost irrelevant what the media was saying. Except they did tend to focus on the hot spots, that would be my one criticism, not on the places where it was going better.

METZ: Right. As far as the impression on how the city of Boston was portrayed, both in the media but also in people's minds and perceptions, was it a fair portrayal?

HARDENBERGH: It was a terribly racist city, and as I say, much more blatant then, but a lot of that is still there.

METZ: Do you think things have changed?

HARDENBERGH: I think things have absolutely changed. I think younger people coming in are much more open. I think the mayor has made a strong commitment to an integrated city. He's got a majority minority city now, so he doesn't have much choice. So I think that the leadership there is very much anti-racist, but the pockets are still out there where this is still happening. You see it in housing, you see it in lots of other places.

METZ: Are there any things that you wish you had done differently? Any actions you might have taken?

HARDENBERGH: I wish that the state board plan of 1972 went through because it was a more moderate plan. It would have gradually integrated the schools, not all at one time. Would've started at elementary school then gradually moved through the system, and not force kids to go as far as they eventually had to go. The irony is that in the sixties, Harvard School of Education proposed a pie-shaped districting for the city of Boston that would've solved all the problems because right from the beginning, you would've had that natural mix geographically of black and white and poor and middle class and, you know, it was just fought. Any rational decision or effort was fought all the way.

METZ: What do you think was the motive for that?

HARDENBERGH: Political. The Louise Day-Hicks⁹ and the John Kerrigans.¹⁰ John Kerrigan used to scream at me as I'd be walking down Tremont Street, "Oh, there's that lady that's as welcome in Boston as an Arab at an Israeli barbecue." Stuff like that, just really awful. And he moved to Quincy. I mean, ironically, many of the school committee members didn't have their kids in schools, or in public schools. And it was a stepping stone to city council and then the whole political process.

METZ: I see. Now, in terms of the abandonment of the state board's proposal of redistricting, how did it go from that to what Judge Garrity's final decision was?

HARDENBERGH: Because the school committee refused to implement the proposal by the state board—what we did was—this is very dramatic because it was the only way that we knew how to impact—we told Boston that we would withdraw all state education funds, federal and state education funds. Which, you know, wasn't the majority of funds in Boston, like all the school systems in Massachusetts are predominantly 70 percent local and 30 percent and 4 to 5 percent fed. money. We said we're not going to release the state money unless you integrate, and that scared them. So they then began a court suit against the state board, saying you have no right to do that. The attorney general came to our aid. That's required in Massachusetts; the attorney general has to support the state agencies. And when they continued to refuse, the attorney general then convinced the NAACP to bring the federal suit.

METZ: I see. Is there anything further in terms of comments on your role professionally that you want to share?

⁹ Louise Day Hicks (1916-2003), a Democrat, served on the Boston School Committee from 1962 to 1967 (serving as chairman from 1963 to 1965), ran unsuccessfully for the mayoralty of Boston in 1967 and in 1971, and served on the Boston City Council before being elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1970, representing Massachusetts Ninth Congressional District. She was an outspoken critic of busing.

¹⁰ John J. Kerrigan (1932-1996) was a member of the Boston School Committee from 1968 to 1976. He gained notoriety as one of the city's most outspoken critics of busing.

HARDENBERGH: I will never regret that it happened. People can't believe that and they say, Oh, but we had white flight and schools went nowhere. And I say, "The schools were going nowhere anyway." Tragically in my own building in Back Bay, the young couples move in, they have children and they're afraid to keep their kids here. Now we don't have an elementary school in Back Bay, Beacon Hill area, so part of that is just that there isn't a local choice per se. And they move out, they move to the 'burbs, Brookline, Newton, you name it. And I think that's very sad. I think that we lose that whole stabilizing factor. Some of it is misperception of the schools because the public view—now this isn't just Boston—the public view is that public education has failed.

I was at a huge meeting today, we're doing a legislative briefing on a whole new report we put out called, "Education of the Whole Child," which is basically an anti-MCAS¹¹ effort talking about multiple measurement systems which is what the law specifies, the school reform law. And what we're battling is the anti-public school perception by the public and by the legislature and even by the governor, that privatization is the only way to go. What the businesses say, our entry level employees are not educated therefore we need to do charter schools or take over schools. This is the new proposal by Mass. Inside, which is one of those education business groups that's doing research and making proposals. The Pioneer Institute, which has been at the basis of their whole privatization is talking about vouchers, supporting vouchers. Which I'm totally and absolutely against; I support public schools. I think even charter schools are a problem because they draw away resources from the schools. I mean financially, it's a disaster because they get a state average that often is higher than what they pay per student, so it's off the top of their school budgets. Now you're in a school system that has done very well under MCAS, they were number one in the state with the first MCAS results. I don't think that's true now, Medway is—

METZ: Yeah, I think they're like seventh now.

HARDENBERGH: Yeah, but I remember that specifically. But what we're focusing on with this "Education of the Whole Child" is that the achievement gap has widened because if you're

¹¹ MCAS refers to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, which includes a standardized test that all public school students must pass in order to graduate high school.

teaching to a test, and a very narrow test, you're losing the skills that kids that are not academically brought up, in a sense, have. And you're also doing it in a punitive way when you're making it a graduation requirement, even though it's three years and all that kind of stuff. Plus we know the curriculum has been narrowed, not just in Boston. We've lost phys. ed., we've lost practically all of things that might be appealing to motivate kids to stay in school, but you're hearing it from the 'burbs as well. The teachers are teaching to the test and are losing a lot of what encourages kids to stay in school and to try to do better. So the dropout rate is phenomenal, much more than what department of ed.—I mean we've got researchers that are tracking it because kids are now dropping out after eighth grade because they're anticipating this whole new high school environment, so we're losing kids much earlier and nobody's acknowledging that.

METZ: And as far as personal experiences during this time, is there anything you want to just add or elaborate on?

HARDENBERGH: Well I became more committed than ever and I helped to create the Greater Boston Civil Rights Coalition in '79. I chair two statewide organizations, Citizens for Public Schools, which fought the voucher, the private aid to public schools plan in '82 and '86 and won. And I chair another coalition called the Mass. Coalition for Equitable Education, that's fighting the resegregation of schools. So my experience led me to say that I believe that education is a way out—way up, not way out—way up for kids. And if we don't ensure that kids of all nationalities and income levels and all of that, have access to a good school then we're not doing the job we should be doing. So I'm very active.

METZ: Well, I definitely want to thank you very much for this experience and sharing.

HARDENBERGH: Well, you heard the real story from someone who lived it. I think one of the things that bothered me a lot about *Common Ground*—have you heard about that book that was written?¹²

METZ: Yes, I have.

¹² *Common Ground* by Anthony Lukas was published in 1985 by Knopf.

HARDENBERGH: Tony Lukas; is that who wrote it? We know the white couple that was from the South End. They've now moved away, but we knew them. And then there was another white family from Charlestown and another white family from South Boston and we felt that the book focused on the negatives not the positives, and tragically, the couple that were touted in the South End, the Divers, Joan and Colin Diver, took their kids out of school. And my point was, why didn't you find somebody who kept their kids in the school because you're giving a very lopsided view of many of us who struggled and had to compensate. I'm not an educator, but I've done enough in education, obviously, that the commissioner at the time when I was on the state board, Greg Anrig, who has since died, but went to head up ETS [Educational Testing Services] in Princeton [New Jersey], said, "Mary Ann, you've earned your doctorate many times over."

That state board was a very exciting place to be. We created Chapter 766, which was the first special ed. law in the country, 108 pages of regulations, and I travel around the state to all the public hearings. We created the bilingual education program, which is tragic that we lost that, because the perception that you don't need to be bilingual is just so bad in this global economy. The Hardenberg Amendment put forward by the state board was Chapter 622, which allowed women access to the resources that were being given to boys, for sports for example, and extracurricular activities, that encourage more culturally relevant—like soccer; who ever heard about soccer in 1975?

So there were some very exciting things that we did during that time, much of which we have lost because the present state board is a disaster. It is made up of people who only know higher education, who are for privatization, are not public school proponents, and they are gradually destroying all of the inclusive things that we were doing in the seventies and eighties. So I mean it's just so discouraging. We're going to get back—we'll have to do another special ed. law, we'll have to do another bilingual ed. law, we'll have to do another inclusive kind of law, we'll have to do another segregation effort of some kind because the stats are really scary around the state on the resegregating of the schools.

METZ: Can you elaborate a little on that?

HARDENBERGH: Yeah, I mean, you should talk to someone at the Civil Rights Project, Gary Orfield. It's at Harvard.¹³ They have done the most outstanding research on issues, black, white issues around the country, housing, job opportunities, levels of education, at the higher level as well as graduate school. And they have begun to put together stats on the resegregation of the schools, not just in Massachusetts, but all around the country because of the withdrawal of the courts and that's very sad to see. I know that in Boston, the Latin schools, the percentage of kids of color going in have dropped dramatically, and kids are leaving—kids of color are leaving because they feel they don't have a supportive cohort. A lot of it is numbers, masses, and if you're the only kid, in a whole class, of color, then it's not a welcoming kind of environment.

So we know that the Boston schools are resegregating, and that's when the Garrity court had to pull out. And then even more recent court decisions with the Wessmann decision¹⁴ about Latin school admissions where the percentages were taken away. So it's just very sad to see, so we're going to fight that battle all over again. And fortunately we're now beginning to develop a cadre of young people who I think are beginning to understand that in a global world and in a society that needs to be integrated and that needs to educate all children for their own economic benefit, that we're going to see research and some people who are saying, We've got to do better, eliminate the achievement gap, talk about educating the whole child. So that's my passion.

METZ: Well, I definitely want to thank you for sharing it, the whole experience.

HARDENBERGH: Fine, but I do think the Civil Rights Project would be a good one for you all to think about at least getting that information.

¹³ In 2006, the Civil Rights Project moved from Harvard University to the University of California at Los Angeles. (See <http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/> for more information.)

¹⁴ In *Wessmann v. Boston School Committee*, 996 F. Supp. 120 (D. Mass. 1998), Henry Robert Wessmann brought suit against the Boston School Committee on behalf of his daughter, Sarah Wessmann, who was denied admission to Boston Latin School, a public exam school, on the basis of her race (white). At that time there was school policy that allowed preferential acceptance of minorities, even if they scored lower than non-minorities on their entrance exams, after half of the spots in the incoming freshman class were filled without using race as an acceptance factor. The district court ruled in favor of the school committee, but on appeal in *Wessmann v. Gittens*, 160 F. 3d 790 (1st Cir. 1998), the federal court found that the school's policy was unconstitutional, and the policy was abandoned.

END OF INTERVIEW