Multimedia Primary Source Discussion Set

Busing in Boston, 1974-1988

URL: https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/busing-boston

Teaching Tips

The videos included in this collection detail violent reactions to busing in Boston and provide differing perspectives on causes of the crisis. The sources suggest a range of possible factors contributed to the crisis, including federal intervention, racism, and politics. Students must consider the videos’ sources and the context in which they were created to understand the causes of the crisis.

Background Information

Before engaging with this resource set, students should be familiar with the following:

- The African American Civil Rights Movement
- The Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision and subsequent efforts to desegregate schools
- How redlining policies contributed to segregated neighborhoods

Essential Question

What caused the Boston busing crisis?
General Discussion Questions

- Why might the people in the videos suggest different causes of the Boston busing crisis?
- How was the Boston busing crisis connected to the Brown v. Board of Education decision?
- What were the effects of the Boston busing crisis? Who was impacted?
- Why did Boston struggle to desegregate its schools?

Classroom Activities

1. Ask students to watch the following sources:
   - [Landsmark Press Conference](#) (1976)
   - [Interview with Anti-Busing Activist](#) (1976) watch 00:00-2:20 and 07:57-11:06
   - [Psychologist Thomas Pettigrew Interview](#) (1967)

   According to each speaker, who was responsible for the Boston busing crisis? Why might these sources have such divergent views about who was responsible? Students should note the differing backgrounds of each person and identify ways in which their backgrounds influenced what they said. For example, the anti-busing activist is likely motivated to blame the “liberal establishment” for the busing crisis in order to deflect blame from anti-busing groups.

2. Ask students to watch the following sources:
   - [Boston Mayor Kevin White Addresses Residents of Boston Before Start of Busing](#) (1974)

   How are the two addresses by the mayor similar? How are they different? What happened between the filming of these two sources? (If students are unsure, ask them to watch the source labeled [News Report About First Day of Busing](#).) The first clip was recorded before busing began, and the second was recorded after the violence in response to busing, which prompted Mayor Kevin White to seek federal support to implement the court order. Students should compare and contrast these documents in light of this contextual information.
3. Ask students to watch the following sources:

- Landsmark Press Conference (1976)

According to Landsmark, what prompted the attack on him? The second source was recorded at a news conference. What does that suggest about public interest in this event? How might public interest in the attack have influenced what Landsmark said during the press conference? Students should note that there was intense public interest in the attack on Landsmark and that he identified racism as the root of the problem. In his remarks, Landsmark advocated for change to address the various problems facing Boston.