

Interview with **Juanita Wade**

Date: May 15, 1998

Interviewer: Jacqueline Shearer

Camera Rolls: 4135-4136

Sound Rolls: 479-480

Team: D

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**Preferred Citation**

Interview with Juanita Wade, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on May 15, 1998 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #4135]

[sound roll #479]

00:00:10:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

And mark.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK. Take one.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Any time, Jackie.

00:00:17:00

Interviewer:

So, back in the 1960s, why was there a need for community schools, and how were they different from the Boston public schools?

00:00:27:00

Juanita Wade:

Well, the mid-sixties represented a time for particularly Black parents in Boston to seek alternatives to public education. *Parents saw that public education was not offering young people not only the, the ed...the strong education that they needed but the social relationships, a recognition of who they were as African Americans just was not happening in the Boston Public School System, so there was a real move community wide to develop institutions that would meet both of those needs.* An opportunity for parents to have close relationship with teachers, for them to have some say over what got taught in the classroom, how young people interacted, and the directions that young people set for themselves. We know in the mid-sixties if you think back, many teachers in the Boston Public School System limited our options, told us we were going to be menial laborers, that we were not going to be professionals. And parents wanted options, different options to that. So, the community school movement developed very, very quickly. Parents began to take over some of the institutions that were run by the archdiocese. And parents just began to use homes for classrooms, starting small with, with small tuitions to get families to begin to come together and say, We can build an educational institution. Many parents worked in the schools without degrees. We're talking about parents who knew child rearing, who knew nurturing, and knew loving, and were not necessarily prepared for...to understand all of the methods of instruction. But based on their willingness and strong belief that they can in fact educate their own children participated in that educational process as teachers. And many of those parents went on to, to college to become educators now, professionally educated.

00:02:23:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. Wonderful. Good.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take two.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #3:

All right, hold on. I didn't speed.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Oh!

Camera Crew Member #1:

One more time.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Second sticks.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take two.

00:02:33:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Thanks.

Interviewer:

OK?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

00:02:37:00

How did you feel about the NAACP suit against the school committee for desegregation?

00:02:44:00

Juanita Wade:

Well, in 1972, parents I guess had come to the end of their rope and worked with the NAACP to bring suit against the Boston School Committee for its segregationist policies, particularly as it impacted African American students. Young African American children in elementary school were tracked into particular middle schools and then tracked into particular high schools. So, the options of going to some of the high schools that offered career...different career options were not available to the majority of African American high school students. While I felt very strongly and many parents understood why the suit was necessary, we were demanding quality education. We were demanding the right to attend any high school we

chose in safety. That was not happening. So, we understood why it was important to fight the legal battle, but parents also felt, many parents felt that the legal battle was being fought for the wrong thing. Parents were struggling for quality education. In fact the NAACP suit focused primarily on where children ascended—attended school. Their assumption was that any school that had 51 percent minority students or more was an inferior program, and therefore they needed to change the numbers so that no school would have a majority children of color. Therefore the resources would get allocated to where the White students were, and therefore the Black children and other minority students would get the benefit of those resources. I think that assumption when you look at it on the surface may sound right, but all the lawsuit did was mix children around. And the burden of African American children moving from schools that were close to home to schools that were all over the city was a tremendous one. And I think unfortunately a detrimental one.

00:04:42:00

Interviewer:

What do you think is correct or incorrect about feeling that putting a Black kid next to a White kid would mean that the education would improve?

00:04:54:00

Juanita Wade:

Well, clearly we saw...the community saw that over the six or seven years that we had been implementing independent educational programs, we saw this...it was a farce to say that young Black children could not learn amongst themselves. That for some strange reason they had to sit in the classroom next to White students to get properly educated. The focus on moving children was inappropriate. The focus should have been on the control. Who controlled the Boston Public School System, and whose interests were they working on? In fact they weren't even working on the interests of poor White children because they were disenfranchised as it related to education as well. They were not getting...South Boston High was not considered a fantastically good high school. In fact the high schools that even working-class White families wanted to go to were in the neighborhoods where upper income White people lived. And so the resources even to...for White students wasn't equitable. So, the wrong battle was being fought. The battle was being fought for integration and not for quality education.

00:06:11:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take three.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK.

00:06:18:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

00:06:20:00

Interviewer:

So, what was that statement you made to us before about parents and what they wanted?

00:06:28:00

Juanita Wade:

What was interesting about 1972 and the role of the NAACP was I think they misinterpreted the struggle in Boston to be similar to struggles that they had waged particularly throughout the South. Boston parents had had a taste of controlling their own institutions. In effect, the struggle to desegregate the schools in the manner that the NAACP was putting forward diluted that struggle. Was in fact taking power away from parents in their own neighborhoods and saying, These young people will go all over the place. We will disperse them. So, parents were in fact powerless in South Boston, in Hyde Parke, in Roslindale. Not only were they not able to organize with their neighborhood for quality education in their local schools, but they could not even go in those neighborhoods in safety to organize with those parents. So, the power that they had been able to amass particularly through the community control struggles was totally diluted and dissipated.

00:07:28:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. Good.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Ready?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take four.

00:07:37:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:07:39:00

Interviewer:

So, let's stand back in 1977 or '78. As you look back over all that's been happening. As a, as a teacher and as a Black parent, was it worth it?

00:07:51:00

Juanita Wade:

Oh, absolutely. The question of whether the struggle was worth is, is probably something that need never be asked. As African American people in this country, first of all, nothing will ever come easy for us. And our existence in this country is going to be marked by struggle for housing, for adequate health care, for education, for control of our destiny and our neighborhoods. That's a struggle that has to be waged, and it's a struggle that we educate our young children to understand they have to be apart of. So many young people now look around and say, I don't have anything to latch onto. We have to educate and teach our young people about the struggles we participated in in the early '70s, the late '70s particularly around quality education, control of our neighborhoods, control of our school system. And then, then they'll understand their role in the, the '90s in terms of continuing their struggle. We're far from done.

00:08:53:00

Interviewer:

OK. But now I'd like you to pull this back to Boston specifically—

Juanita Wade:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

—and tell me what your assessment was. How were you feeling back in the late '70s? How were you feeling then about what was going on? Could things have been any different?

00:09:09:00

Juanita Wade:

I think the struggle in the '70s could have been different if the NAACP and those who supported the suit began to reframe the question around what parents really want and not what the lawyers and the legalists saw as important. Parents demanded quality education, the opportunity to determine for themselves what was best for their children. That required a certain amount of political power in Boston, which we didn't have in the late '70s. While a few Blacks held political office on the state level, state representatives office, we did not hold political power in the city and in fact had no political power as it related to public education. And so it could have been different had we been able to change the direction of the struggle.

00:10:08:00

Interviewer:

Do you think that the real issue was one of education, or was it one of control and power?

00:10:14:00

Juanita Wade:

Oh, I think control and power was the real issue. And remains the real issue today. Education is only one part of the social struggle that African Americans have to go through. While education is certainly at the core of a community being able to grow and survive, without political power...empowerment you can't set policies on education. So, again, I have to say that the struggle was on the wrong, was on the wrong focus. We should have put our energies as, as parents did around community control 'cause community control of, of our educational institutions was not just a, an opportunity to control schools, but it was an opportunity to

have a real influential voice in the city. City officials paid attention to what those parent organizations who were organized around independent schools said. We were—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Juanita Wade:

—setting the standards for education in these small independent systems.

00:11:22:00

Interviewer:

OK. Sorry, we ran out. [unintelligible]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Just missed the last—

[cut]

[camera roll #4136]

[sound roll #480]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take five.

[slate]

00:11:28:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

Interviewer:

OK?

00:11:30:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mm-hmm.

00:11:32:00

Interviewer:

So, what was that you told us about you used as a very short graphic description of where you thought Black community sentiment lay.

00:11:41:00

Juanita Wade:

Well, you know, I never heard a parent say, I want my child to go to a desegregated school. Parents always called for quality education in all Boston public schools.

00:11:51:00

Interviewer:

Great. And can you tell me what your relationship to the community school movement was?

00:11:58:00

Juanita Wade:

I was a teacher in the community schools in the early '70s and middle '70s. And worked in counseling and social support for the school after school hours and on the weekends.

00:12:11:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut.

Camera Crew Member #3:

She said '70s on the—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

And mark.

00:12:14:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take six.

[slate]

00:12:19:00

Interviewer:

So, again, you're back down...back then in time, and Boston is being racked by racial violence—

Juanita Wade:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

—and fear, and confusion. How did you feel about the burden that Black families had?

00:12:33:00

Juanita Wade:

The implementation of the desegregation plan was very difficult on the Black community. The burden of desegregating the schools fell on Black families from Roxbury, the South End, Dorchester, and Mattapan. Our young children had to ride the buses into communities, into violence, anger, every day. It was uncomfortable, and it was difficult. Many parents at that time said, I will not do this to my child. Many parents rode in their cars behind the buses so that they could escort their individual child through the doorway, through the police barricades, around the angry residents of those neighborhoods. That was a time for particularly Black parents where desegregation, it wasn't worth it. Parents were saying, This is not worth it. Particularly faced with the fact that there was nothing being done particularly around the quality of education in the classroom. This was merely a plan to mix children around.

00:13:40:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

And mark it.

00:13:43:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take seven.

[slate]

00:13:47:00

Interviewer:

So, still staying back then, as a lifelong Boston resident, how did you feel about what was going on in the city and in the community?

00:13:56:00

Juanita Wade:

As a lifelong resident of Boston, the activities that were taking place in the... '70s, [car passes] the early '70s around the desegregation plan angered me. I felt that Black parents and my family in particular were being attacked not just physically through the violence but politically in that the city did not come to our defense around what was in our best interests as citizens of Boston. The desegregation orders made it even more difficult for us to move around the city to go to work, to, to go to the movies, to go to social activities. I was very angry and channeled that anger around organizing parents to not fight the law but demand that the law work the way it would serve our interests as parents demanding quality education.

00:15:00:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:15:04:00

Copyright 2021 Washington University Libraries