

SHIFTING IDENTITIES IN SOUTH KANSAS CITY:
HICKMAN MILLS'S TRANSFORMATION FROM A SUBURBAN TO URBAN SCHOOL
DISTRICT

By

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SHIFTING IDENTITIES IN SOUTH KANSAS CITY:
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the history and development of a suburban school district, as its surrounding community transformed from a quiet village to a white, blue-collar suburb, then to an urban space with predominantly non-white residents and students. The study's five chapters present an analysis of fifty years (1950–2000) of the history of Hickman Mills, a small community on the south side of Kansas City, Missouri. The history of the school district and the neighborhoods it served reveals the flawed distinctions often made between rural, suburban, and urban spaces. In particular, this study questions the common definitions assigned to urban and suburban communities, as well as schools. In analyzing this suburban space, my methodology includes documentary analysis, personal interviews to collect oral histories, quantitative data collection from the U.S. Census, as well as spatial analysis in the form of census tract maps within the school district. I employ geographic and sociological theories of urbanization and racial change to examine the transformation of Missouri's first consolidated school district from suburban to urban, white to black.

Chapter one primarily explores the postwar period for Kansas City and Hickman Mills, with rapid population growth within district borders as white families moved to the area and sent their children to school. Chapter two provides an analysis of two early crises within the school district, both occurring between 1957 and 1960, with an explanation of how the events in these three years helped shift district and community identity. Chapter three further addresses questions of community identity during the 1960s when Kansas City, Missouri annexed the district neighborhoods, as well as reticence on the part of Hickmanites to support their schools through increased tax levies. Chapter four demonstrates another change in community identity during the 1970s and 1980s as residents largely banded together to fight what they saw as threats to the community, chief among them low-income housing, school consolidation with Kansas

City, Missouri, and the entrance of large numbers of African-American families. Chapter five focuses on Hickman Mills in the 1990s, as local white perception of the community and the schools deteriorated when larger numbers of black families moved to the area.

At the same time that this study adds to a burgeoning scholarship on race in suburban communities and school districts, it also complicates traditional stories of white flight and urbanization. The history of Hickman Mills's transformation from a "suburban" community to an "urban" one, as well as the perception of the school district changing from "good" to "bad," broadens our understanding of the history of race and schooling as well as the effects of desegregation upon communities. I argue that the change Hickman Mills underwent was largely a result of how its neighborhoods were perceived as racial spaces, first as white and "normal," then as black and "unsafe." Ultimately, this study exemplifies how the social construction of space plays a significant role in neighborhoods and schools.

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Introduction: Hickman Mills

Perception and Reality in School and Community Identity

The story of the rise and fall of urban communities and the schools that serve them are not rare in educational and historical research. At the same time, emerging scholarship on suburban school districts and communities highlights the growth of neighborhoods along the edges of metropolitan areas and the school districts that exist within them. Less has been written about places that have come to exist between these extremes, as little scholarship focuses on communities that exhibit both urban and suburban qualities and often serve as a type of buffer between more distant suburbs and the city core. Often comprised of a racial or ethnic minority and a lower middle-class/blue-collar populace, these places typically began as all-white rural and suburban neighborhoods that, in the past thirty years, have become an extension of the urban core, sometimes exhibiting some of the problems that inner cities face.¹ More studies of these communities throughout the nation are valuable because the history of urban sprawl suggests the creation of more locales that do not fit the categorization of urban or suburban spaces. Most recent scholarship is beginning to look at these areas across the country, with some prominent social scientists arguing that racial and economic change in suburban America is the next great crisis we need to more fully address.²

One such example of a space that exists as such a transition zone comes from the chief neighborhoods constituting the Hickman Mills C-1 School District in Kansas City, Missouri.

¹ Two excellent examples of these spaces come from Emily Strauss' dissertation on Compton, California, and Mary Pattillo-McCoy's ethnography of "Groveland" on the south-side of Chicago. Emily Strauss, "The Making of the American School Crisis: Compton, California and the Death of the Suburban Dream" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2006); Mary Patillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Also of note are Bruce Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001) and Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

² Gary Orfield and Erica Frankenberg, eds., *The Resegregation of Suburban Schools: A Hidden Crisis in American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012), 2-5.

Hickman Mills has the historical distinction of being the first consolidated school district in Missouri. It originated as an all-white school system, yet recently has become majority black. Additionally, having boasted a triple "A" rating from the Missouri Board of Education early in its existence, Hickman Mills now struggles to maintain its state accreditation. After experiencing a housing boom immediately following World War II, the neighborhoods comprising Hickman Mills now are a mix of middle and lower-income housing. Yet the district itself serves a student body that is overwhelmingly poor.³ On the surface, this story seems to match that of many inner-city school districts such as Detroit, which in some ways it does.⁴ However, the history of Hickman Mills is unusual in that it did not start as an inner-city school district and still is not "inner-city" even if its demographic profile has changed. This school district on the south side of Kansas City, Missouri (and technically part of the city itself) has undergone a significant shift from a prosperous to a struggling institution, just as the community shifted from a growing suburb to a collection of stagnant neighborhoods. The purpose of this dissertation is to address why and how this transformation occurred. More specifically, my purpose is to analyze the growth of Hickman Mills as a community and a school district, as well as its struggle to remain separate from Kansas City, even as the city absorbed the suburb.

The Larger Context

Because the story of Hickman Mills is both suburban and urban in nature, other studies of both types of school systems are relevant to an analysis of the district. In the early part of the twentieth century, an important demographic change began to occur within the urban centers, an alteration that had a deep impact on the course of schooling in urban America. Black migration

³ Seventy-seven percent of Hickman Mills students are registered as receiving free and/or reduced lunches. Reduced lunches do not necessarily match poor students, but the free and reduced category in schools serves as a useful tool for measuring the socio-economic status of pupils in the area.

⁴ See Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

from the South to northern cities had been occurring since the end of the Civil War, but around 1890, rural southern blacks began to move in large numbers to cities in the northeastern and northcentral areas of the country.⁵ Lawrence Cremin's discussion of city schools suggests that black families and their children faced considerable difficulty in migration and procuring an education in light of white prejudice.⁶

Other historians, including David Tyack, Larry Cuban, William Reese, Jeffrey Mirel, and John Rury, argued that the quality of education in the city largely depended upon race, as whites were given much greater opportunities than black students. Before the Great Migration, northern blacks either established their own separate schools or attended schools created by abolitionists, such as the Manumission Society's African Free School in New York.⁷ However, the school reforms of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing on scientific management and social efficacy, did not focus much on with African Americans. Black families were relegated to the poorest parts of the city, often segregated in overcrowded schools with inexperienced teachers.⁸ As of 1896, black students in many parts of the country were forbidden to attend white schools. Although the legal definition of "separate but equal" under the *Plessey v Ferguson* decision influenced local boards to provide some education for black students and funding for facilities, segregated schools were often underfunded and neglected by white school

⁵ Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 123. Cremin shows that by 1980, over half of black Americans lived outside of the South, with three quarters living in urban centers.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 123-126.

⁷ John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 45-47, 114. Cremin describes the schools that African Americans created for themselves in the cities as extensions of their churches (*American Education*, 124-25). This is parallel with the formation of schools for whites in New England, for whom school and church shared a special relationship. See Carl E. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 3.

⁸ Rury, *Education and Social Change*, 194.

boards.⁹ Before World War II, urban schools were often strong institutions for white students; they were well funded and provided a comprehensive education with a curriculum aimed at preparing students for vocations or to enter college.¹⁰ In the years before the widespread popularity of suburban living, middle-class whites lived in cities and they happily and proudly sent their children to local schools.¹¹

The plight of African Americans was not confined to schooling. As the black population began to expand in the cities during the 1940s and 1950s, urban whites often displayed open hostility to blacks who tried to cross residential or school lines. Arnold Hirsch and Thomas Sugrue demonstrate that many northern whites were just as reluctant to integrate with blacks as their southern counterparts. They employed intimidation tactics, including violence, to keep blacks out of predominantly white neighborhoods in Chicago and Detroit.¹² In a separate work, Hirsch describes how the confluence of working-class whites in Chicago who fought to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods and the white elites who manipulated housing agencies led to the creation of what historians call “the second ghetto.”¹³ In his insightful essay on the interplay between urban, suburban, and education history, Jack Dougherty pointed out that the rise of the

⁹ William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 210-11; Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 156.

¹⁰ David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 275; Rury, *Education and Social Change*, 179.

¹¹ David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 12-13. Tyack and Cuban explain that polls in 1938 showed that when asked what changes should be made to their local school, 24 percent of respondents replied “none.” 29 percent did not respond to the question, and 47 percent marked that they had minor complaints about their local schools. Jeffrey Mirel, “The Politics of Educational Retrenchment in Detroit, 1929-1935,” in *Urban Education in the United States: A Historical Reader*, ed. John L. Rury (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 179-81.

¹² Arnold R. Hirsch, “Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966,” *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 522-50; Thomas J. Sugrue, “Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction Against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964,” *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 551-78.

¹³ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 13-15.

suburbs, growing numbers of African Americans in the cities, and educational policies worked together to bring about the downfall of the urban educational system.¹⁴

The transition middle-class whites made as they moved from urban centers to suburban communities was slow at first, just as the economic decline of the cities did not reach a nadir until the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵ The implementation and failure of desegregation efforts played a vital part in the ongoing development of urban education, which occurred during this complex period of suburbanization and economic change from the 1950s through the 1980s. In 1954, the Supreme Court overturned *Plessey v. Ferguson*, deciding that separate was inherently unequal and declaring that the schools of the nation must integrate.¹⁶ A year later, the Supreme Court addressed its first ruling and determined that school districts needed to desegregate “with all deliberate speed.”¹⁷ Gary Orfield demonstrates that the vagueness of that phrase allowed anti-integration interests to bring case after case to the courts questioning any desegregation measures. Combined with this ambiguous language was a political shift within the Supreme Court as President Nixon appointed justices who were opposed to desegregation.¹⁸ Overall, *Brown v. Board* was taken apart piece by piece through political wrangling, complicated by spatial changes in the cities that occurred as whites moved from the city centers to the peripheries, as well as to the suburbs. By the 1980s and 1990s, American suburbs were

¹⁴ Jack Dougherty, “Bridging the Gap Between Urban, Suburban, and Educational History,” in *Rethinking the History of American Education*, ed. William J. Reese and John L. Rury (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 250-54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 252-56.

¹⁶ For a very moving, yet long and complex, story on how *Brown v. Board* occurred, see Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 749.

¹⁸ Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton, eds., *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 7-13.

predominantly white and the central core of American cities were largely non-white.¹⁹ Essentially, the excellent urban school white parents sent their children to through the 1950s changed as whites moved away and sent their children to suburban schools. Residents who stayed in the cities were welcome to the buildings in urban areas, but much of the infrastructure by way of teachers and leadership had left. At the same time, America experienced an economic recession and manufacturing jobs in the cities became scarcer as plants permanently closed or were relocated elsewhere.²⁰

The work of Jeffrey Mirel highlights the shift an urban school district underwent as it transformed from a functioning, healthy provider of urban education (for white students) to a largely dysfunctional, underfunded institution supplying relatively poor schooling for urban children, who were mostly non-white. He explores how the Detroit public school system changed from being a paragon of progressive education in the early twentieth century to a “dismal failure” by the end of the same century.²¹ Public schools in Detroit were not segregated until black migration to the city and white migration to the suburbs began to re-shape the racial characteristics of the inner city in the early 1930s through the 1950s.²² The corresponding city schools became heavily segregated because the neighborhoods were doing the same. However, Mirel showed how school boards took an active part in separating white and black students, enabled white outmigration, and contributed to the decay of the urban school. School boundaries shifted according to where white students were living and white families were given permission

¹⁹ Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 37. Also of note is a study reflecting on Charles Tilly’s conception of “opportunity hoarding” as it applies to the suburbs. After analyzing census data on seventeen-year olds in suburbs and cities after World War II, the authors concluded that suburban, white students gained and held on to academic advantage, which was “linked to forms of social exclusion.” See John L. Rury and Argun Saatcioglu, “Suburban Advantage: Opportunity Hoarding and Secondary Attainment in the Postwar Metropolitan North,” *American Journal of Education* 117, no. 3 (May 2011), 330.

²⁰ Dougherty, “Bridging the Gap,” 255-56.

²¹ Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, ix-x.

²² *Ibid.*, 152-154.

to send their children to school buildings outside the local school's boundaries. These options were not always extended to black students. The schools that came to serve a primarily African-American student body then began to receive less funding than their white, suburban counterparts. Thus, Mirel asserts that the deplorable condition of the overwhelmingly black urban schools was a result of both larger social and economic factors as well as poor choices on the part of the educational establishment.²³ Additionally, Mirel makes clear in his analysis of the Detroit school district that the two vital elements of general urban decline are problems of "resources and politics."²⁴ Mirel is not alone in his assertion, as other scholars have repeated his observation about unequal resources and political will. Gary Orfield observes that segregated schools will never be equal "so long as the rest of society is profoundly unequal."²⁵ John Rury and Argun Saatcioglu argue that without "dramatic, sweeping policy measures" like increased funding of city schools, "exclusion and inequity will continue to shape educational outcomes for the foreseeable future."²⁶

Bringing the issue of schooling between the suburbs and the cities closer to Hickman Mills, Sherry L. Schirmer writes about color separation in schools in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. Focusing chiefly upon court decisions to segregate the public schools, Schirmer laid out four themes that are helpful in understanding attitudes surrounding the issue of school segregation. The first outlines an "overriding concern over use and control of urban space."²⁷ White flight, highway construction, and residential versus commercial zoning changes demonstrated an emphasis on the needs of a white middle class over African-American families.

²³ Ibid., 188-90, 253-54.

²⁴ Ibid., 401.

²⁵ Orfield and Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation*, 361.

²⁶ Rury and Saatcioglu, "Suburban Advantage," 333.

²⁷ Sherry L. Schirmer, *A City Divided: The Racial Landscape of Kansas City, 1900-1960* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 2.

The second theme involves the use of misdirection, as whites claimed that segregation was for the protection of non-whites, or that segregation among the schools was a natural occurrence and not racially based. For example, opposition to subsidized housing in many white neighborhoods was couched in the language of worries over the possibilities of increased crime.²⁸

Schirmer's third theme deals with the coded language whites used when talking about minorities, especially African Americans. Assumptions about black citizens made for quick and easy labels of black students, such as "low-achieving...undisciplined, violent students with low test scores, apathetic parents, and a fondness for vandalism."²⁹ Finally, Schirmer did provide one positive element in the segregation of the Kansas City schools: "a minority of whites sought interracial contacts in the belief that integration would uplift individual and community values."³⁰ Some whites opposed segregation, just as some white families refused to move to the suburbs when their neighborhoods became increasingly black. These whites insisted on sending their children to multiracial schools, believing that cultural diversity made for a better education. This group, however, was a small minority.³¹

Kevin Fox Gotham's study of race and housing in Kansas City demonstrates that urban and suburban areas are inherently racialized, with uneven development and unequal prospects for "quality education, employment opportunities, and other tangible resources."³² Kansas City is an example of a "hypersegregated" metropolitan area in particular, as many of the surrounding suburbs on both the Kansas and Missouri side have enjoyed prosperous economic growth coupled with high quality school districts since World War II, while the core area of the city has

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 2.

³¹ Ibid., 4.

³² Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 13.

experienced severe economic and scholastic decline.³³ Thus, the scholarship tends to place a distinct line between urban and suburban communities, or between white and black neighborhoods.³⁴

Suburban scholarship in the past has added to this dichotomy, as influential historians Kenneth Jackson and Arnold Hirsch effectively write the story of the middle-class/elite white suburb resisting the entrance of non-whites, resulting in the intensifying of racial segregation in both the city and the suburb.³⁵ More recent scholarship on suburban communities complicates the dominant narrative of the powerful, wealthy, white suburb versus the poor non-white city. Becky Nicolaides's work explores the experiences of working-class whites in suburban California, arguing that the blue-collar suburbanites banded together to create their own power base and further their own interests within their neighborhoods.³⁶ Andrew Wiese brings readers' attention to black suburbanites throughout the country in the twentieth century, demonstrating the tenacity of black homeowners in gaining and keeping their suburban homes in the face of personal and institutional racism.³⁷

Hickman Mills then serves as an example of a homogenous community that, like other suburbs, fought against desegregation, lost, and ultimately transformed as many middle-class whites left for other places. As black families moved into the communities and sent their children to Hickman Mills' schools, white families largely opted to leave, mostly for other

³³ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 75-77; Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 12-13.

³⁴ Gotham's major argument is that Troost Street is the color line in Kansas City—this demarcation was not Gotham's creation, as residents throughout the greater Kansas City metropolitan area consider Troost to be the barrier between white and non-white, as well as middle-class/affluent and poor/working class.

³⁵ See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*. Also see Thomas J. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³⁶ Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

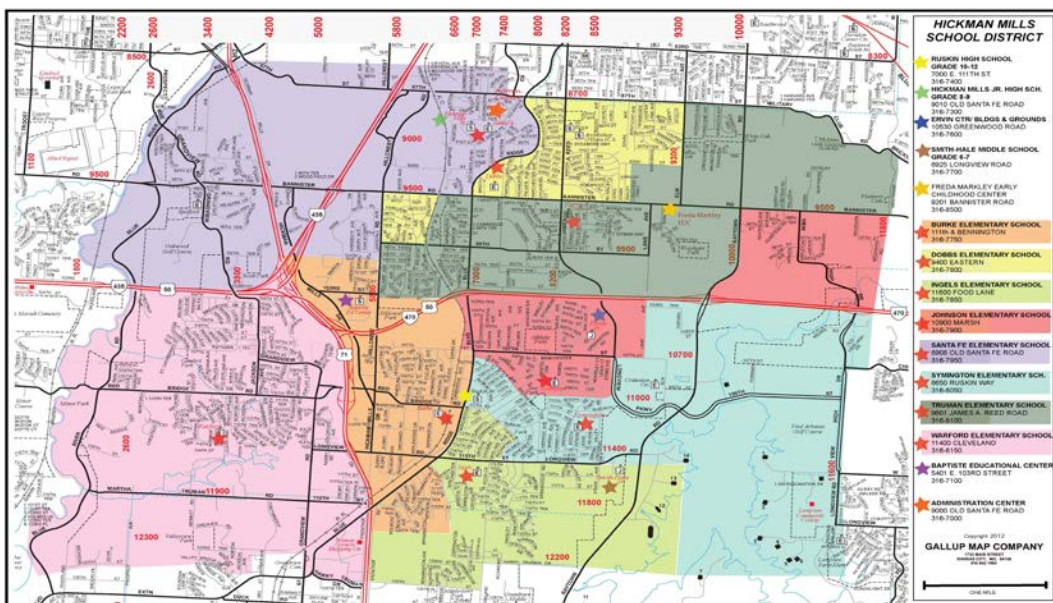
³⁷ Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, 291-92.

homogenous locales close by such as Raytown, Lee’s Summit, and Independence. The story of Hickman Mills then to a degree holds true to the predominant scholarship on communities that urbanize and the effect that urbanization has upon the school district. However Hickman Mills’s difficult relationship with Kansas City as a suburb and as a part of the city significantly affected the development and trajectory of the school district. This relationship, coupled with the actions taken (or sometimes not taken) by residents of Hickman Mills towards schooling, housing, and urbanization helps add to the growing scholarship on suburbs and suburban school districts.

Hickman Mills

The Hickman Mills School District, located within ten miles of downtown Kansas City, is separated from the Kansas City Missouri School District (KCMSD) by a small portion of the Central and Raytown school districts. Located near the intersection of US highways 470 and 435, Hickman Mills is a medium to small-sized metropolitan district, extending east from the Blue River to Longview Lake, and south from 87th Street to Harry Truman Drive (Map 1).

Map 1: Hickman Mills C-1 school district boundaries



Even numbered houses are on the north or west side of the street.
 Odd numbered houses are on the south or east side of the street.

- 1) Holiday Drive from Blue Ridge to 119th street- West side goes to Burke; East side goes to Ingels.
- 2) Sycamore Terrace from Blue Ridge to Bristol Terr-- Both sides go to Johnson.
- 3) Longview Parkway- Both sides go to Truman.
- 4) Both sides of 108th from 8000 to 8500 go to Ervin.
- 5) 92nd st. between Elm and Farley- Both sides go to Dobbs.
- 6) Jackson between Dr. Greaves Rd. and 125th St.- Both sides belong to Hickman Mills C-1.

The borders of the school district form a misshapen rectangle, with the most populous neighborhoods located in the center and southeast corner of the district, as the southwest portion of the region remains relatively sparse. The district itself serves six thousand students as of the 2012-2013 school year, which is impressive compared to its small beginnings as a school body of two hundred. At the same time, it is less imposing when compared to the boom of the 1950s and 60s, resulting in an enrollment of thirteen thousand children.

Having been largely a small, rural community since its inception during the Civil War era, the neighborhoods that together comprise the Hickman Mills school district exist as a “first ring” suburb and mostly grew with the population and housing explosion that occurred after World War II.³⁸ Largely racially and economically homogenous, Hickman Mills was annexed by Kansas City in 1961, which predated by seven years the trickle of non-white residents coming to the district to live and send their children.³⁹ From the late sixties through the eighties, black presence slowly increased within the district’s borders until, in 1991, Hickman Mills had the highest population of black students outside of the two Kansas City school districts, at thirty-seven percent.⁴⁰ During these thirty years, the district struggled to convince its patrons to pass bonds and raise school levies, maintain facilities in the face of the decline of the baby boom, and convince whites to remain within school boundaries.⁴¹ By the end of the twentieth century, whites had largely left the communities and the schools within Hickman Mills. As previously stated, the school district is currently fourteen-percent white, a drastic change from having only two non-white students in 1968.⁴²

³⁸ Jami Parkison, *The Journey to Our Future: The History of Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 1902-2002* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 2002), 28-29, 63.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 83-89, 93. The first black family to move to the district was the Gatewoods, who came in 1968.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 106-11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 92.

Hickman Mills' rise and decline as a quality school district within metropolitan Kansas City coincides with the racial change that communities within the district experienced. White resistance to racial desegregation seems to have contributed heavily to the area's transformation from a semi-rural, quaint district with average test scores and relatively high graduation rates with general parental satisfaction, to a school system struggling to address various socioeconomic difficulties and relatively low achievement. The arc of Hickman Mills's existence reflects to an extent that of its larger and more discussed counterpart to the north, the Kansas City Missouri School District, in that white flight from the urban center ultimately harmed the economy of the city and the reputation of the schools, just as what occurred in Hickman Mills.

Current scholarship indicates that school funding, being tied to property taxes, is severely harmed when communities become "urbanized." In his study on housing in Kansas City, Missouri, Gotham asserts that white resistance to black expansion in metropolitan Kansas City led to housing devaluation and neighborhood blight, which affected the school district's funding, translating to an inability to meet specific educational needs.⁴³ In her analysis of Compton, the infamous suburb of Los Angeles, Emily Strauss's argument that residents in the community ultimately harmed themselves by refusing to raise the school levy in the face of declining property values further explains how schools are often doubly adversely affected by neighborhood decline.⁴⁴ While school leadership in Hickman Mills tirelessly and repeatedly strove to pass school bonds and raise the school mill levy, ultimately, the district could not convince residents to pay enough taxes in order to appropriately fund the schools. Thus, race was not a factor itself in changing the status of the schools of Hickman Mills, but a reluctance to

⁴³ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 7-8.

⁴⁴ Strauss, "American School Crisis," 4-5.

co-habit with black people led to a white-flight from the suburb, which negatively impacted the economy of the neighborhoods of Hickman Mills C-1. Thus racism and insufficient school levies lay at the heart of the current plight of Hickman Mills.

Methodology

In order to understand more clearly what occurred within Hickman Mills in the latter half of the twentieth century, I employ various methodologies in researching the large shift in the school district: documentary analysis from archival research, qualitative analysis in the form of oral history interviews, and quantitative analysis focused upon census records from the tracts located within the Hickman Mills district boundaries. I collected and compiled census data from the U.S. Census of the Population for the decades 1950 through 2000, primarily to create a snapshot of white and black populations in the different census tracts within Hickman Mills. I also collected articles from the *Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Times*, primarily those that dealt with the annexation of Hickman Mills, but also writings on South Kansas City, as the neighborhoods comprising Hickman Mills would become known. The two newspapers also proved valuable in understanding the conflict between city commissions, housing authorities, and residential neighborhoods from the 1960s through the 1990s. Surprisingly, I was not able to find relevant information about Hickman Mills from issues between 1950 and 2000 of *The Call*, Kansas City's African-American owned and targeted newspaper. This is likely because Hickman Mills did not become part of Kansas City until 1961 and did not have any black residents until 1968. Additionally, between 1968 and most of the 1980s, the black population in Hickman Mills remained very small, with it significantly increasing only in the 1990s, and mostly towards the end of the decade.

However, a major source of documentary history came from a small, weekly newspaper called the *Jackson County Advocate*, run mostly by a single family in Grandview, focuses almost exclusively on issues and events pertinent to Hickman Mills and its southern neighbor, the city of Grandview, Missouri.⁴⁵ The paper proved to be an essential source in understanding levy and bond battles, school operations and leadership, and neighborhood opposition to unwanted outside forces such as industrialization and desegregation. Additional documents came from a collection of papers compiled by the legal team involved in Kansas City, Missouri's suit against its surrounding suburbs, including Hickman Mills in the early 1980s, which can be found at UMKC. Yearbooks from the two high schools in the district provided further views into student life, but more importantly demonstrated racial change, particularly in the late 1990s, as the majority of the school portraits shifted from white faces to black ones.

I also conducted interviews with former students, teachers, administrators and parents from Hickman Mills, which provided important information about major events, including the 1957 tornado and the 1961 annexation. Interviews with current and former residents also gave glimpses into attitudes among white community members as they watched their neighborhoods change in ways they did not always appreciate. Talking with black residents of Hickman Mills revealed prejudice and difficulty in the development of the neighborhoods and the school district, and also gave a counterpoint to white views toward the "urbanization" of the land. I interviewed twelve "Ruskinites," seven white and five black. Five of the residents lived in the area since their own childhoods and seven moved into the region as adults. Nine of the interviewees lived in the district for more than twenty years, with five being raised completely in the school district.

⁴⁵ The *Jackson County Advocate*'s operations have grown over time and now the newspaper has multiple employees who work in a very small four-room office.

Of the twelve persons interviewed, eight remain in the same neighborhoods: four black and four white. The other four moved to neighboring Raytown, Lee's Summit, or Independence.

Theory of Suburbanization and Urbanization

Hickman Mills's transition from a rural to suburban community, followed by its apparent transformation into an urban space problematizes public assumptions about what is "suburban" and what is "urban." Additionally, the development of the school district at the heart of the community in South Kansas City reveals blurred lines between "urban" versus "suburban" growth. For example, widened streets, highways, lighting, as well as sewer and gas lines are effects of urbanization, yet are vital to the existence and growth of suburban neighborhoods. The Hickman Mills community largely embraced urbanization when it benefited residents, but fought against aspects of urban growth when it conflicted with their sense of normalcy in the suburb. Specifically, Hickmanites opposed landfills, low-income housing, and school desegregation, because residents expressed that those elements would harm the community's economy and independence from Kansas City.⁴⁶ A discussion of the scholarship on urbanization and the role of suburbs, combined with an analysis of public perception of suburban and urban communities and schools demonstrates Robert Sampson's argument that neighborhoods "are not inherent but are socially reproduced."⁴⁷ To a large degree, the separation between suburbs and cities is illusory, yet by common agreement, remain powerful and binding.

Objective measures of city size and demography support the idea that suburbs are a social construction. For instance, while the U.S. Census differentiates between "rural" and "urban," it does not employ the term "suburban." The census's categorization includes "urbanized areas," communities of 50,000 or more people; "urban clusters," with at least 2,500 but less than 50,000

⁴⁶ Ironically, Hickman Mills was already officially part of the city when it voiced greatest opposition.

⁴⁷ Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 425.

residents; finally “rural,” being any “population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.”⁴⁸ Suburbs do not gain a special categorization when counting numbers of people and where they live. Instead, suburbs as a space gained their definition through social status, which was usually defined by means of a combination of factors such as education level, average income, and race.⁴⁹

Studies on education have largely supported a dichotomy between urban and suburban schools, beginning with James Conant’s problematic yet influential comparison of suburban and urban schools in 1946, *Slums and Suburbs*.⁵⁰ The language of the title alone alludes to Conant’s assertion that urban schools, like the communities in which they were situated, deteriorated to the point of being harmful.⁵¹ Conant suggested improvements to be made to urban high schools in order to slow the movement of white families to the suburbs, which he argued had schools that were more “college-oriented.”⁵² *Slums and Suburbs* made clear distinctions between urban and suburban schools, well before urban schools and communities experienced decline. In some ways, Conant proved to be prescient, as urban schools did largely experience a decline while suburban schools rose in prominence, all in the last fifty to sixty years. In fact, much of educational scholarship today that addresses urban schooling focuses on the rise and fall of school districts in city centers, while suburban educational scholarship is new and still developing.

Research on both urban and suburban schools often emphasize the role race plays in the schools and communities, which have been traditionally part of the defining characteristics

⁴⁸ U.S. Census, Urban and Rural Classification. <http://www.census.gov/geo/reference/urban-rural.html>

⁴⁹ Leo F. Schnore, *Class and Race in Cities and Suburbs* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1972), 44-48.

⁵⁰ James Bryant Conant, *Slums and Suburbs: A Commentary on Schools in Metropolitan Areas* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1946).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 78.

between “urban” and “suburban.” Because the racial divide between urban and suburban communities and schools has been changing, scholars are beginning to call for a shift in how we address race and schools. Erica Frankenberg commented on the reality of racial change in suburban areas with a plea for “a new way of thinking about suburbs and suburban school districts.”⁵³ Some scholars have delved into the story of black suburbanization, such as Andrew Wiese, Mary-Patillo McCoy, and Bruce D. Haynes, which complicate the prevailing myth of the white suburb. Regardless, the perception of suburban neighborhoods and schools as spaces for white middle-class families continues.⁵⁴ However, racial and economic changes in suburban communities like Hickman Mills supports Frankenberg’s assertion that suburbs are not monolithic and require a new conceptualization.

Urban historians and sociologists have explained that technically, there is no such thing as suburbanization, as all sprawl is urban in nature.⁵⁵ Suburban development is an extension of urban growth, a particular kind that has favored relatively large tracts of residential housing for middle-class white families.⁵⁶ Phillip Hauser admitted that the definition of urban is “a complex matter,” depending on “political, historical, or cultural considerations” and not only demography.⁵⁷ The fact that residents of Hickman Mills did not consider themselves urbanites

⁵³ Erica Frankenberg, “Understanding Suburban School District Transformation: A Typology of Suburban Districts,” in *The Resegregation of Suburban Schools: A Hidden Crisis in American Education*, eds. Erica Frankenberg and Gary Orfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012), 27.

⁵⁴ Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy, *Suburbs and the Census: Patterns of Growth and Decline*, by William H. Lucy and David L. Phillips (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2001), 2-3. Becky Nicolaides, “How Hell Moved from the City to the Suburbs,” in *The New Suburban History*, eds. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 80-84.

⁵⁵ Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 183. Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Random House, 1991), 398-399. Philip M. Hauser and Leo F. Schnore, *The Study of Urbanization* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967), 8-14. The National Commission on Urban Problems, *The Challenge of America’s Metropolitan Population Outlook, 1960-1985*, by Patricia Leavey Hodge and Philip M. Hauser (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1968), 1-4. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 486.

⁵⁶ Schnore, *Class and Race*, 2-3.

⁵⁷ Hauser and Schnore, *Study of Urbanization*, 9.

until African Americans moved into the neighborhoods in larger numbers demonstrates that race became the defining characteristic of the community in South Kansas City. When it was white, Hickman Mills was a suburb. When it became majority black, Hickman Mills was urban. This study addresses the transformation the district and its surrounding neighborhoods underwent, but by doing so it calls into question racist and classist definitions of living space in American society.

The history of Hickman Mills also demonstrates the importance of identity, in this case identity with the school district over the municipality. Even though the neighborhoods comprising Hickman Mills were incorporated by Kansas City, Missouri in 1961 and thus technically fit the definition of an urban community, residents identified themselves with the school district instead of the city. The school boundaries became the borders for Hickman Mills as a suburban community in the minds of the local residents, as school identity became the symbol of a separation between the southern Kansas City neighborhoods and the city itself. Views on race reinforced the separation between Hickman Mills and the rest of Kansas City, in that Hickmanites identified with a predominantly white school, while Kansas City Missouri School District served a growing number of black students. Hickmanites continued to self-identify as suburbanites, until a strong African-American presence emerged in several neighborhoods in the district during the 1990s. The perception of the community then shifted to being an urban locale too similar to Kansas City, so discontents sought other places to live.

The story of Hickman Mills is an important addition to the overall study of urban sprawl and suburbanization, because it adds to a burgeoning scholarship that complicates the myth of the suburb as a relatively quiet and tranquil space. Residents of Hickman Mills fought over

school funding, school board control, and even common identity, only strongly uniting when faced with the outside threat of continued urbanization from neighboring Kansas City.

Hickman Mills was a suburban community largely in name only, yet that identity was powerful in the lives of its residents. Few in Hickman Mills wanted to identify themselves as urban residents and would most likely have opposed the annexation of their neighborhoods in 1961 if they had any legal recourse. Opposition came instead to joining Kansas City, Missouri school district in 1964, then to a metropolitan school district plan in 1968 and 1969. When residents of Hickman Mills could fight against city control, they did, even though Hickmanites were also Kansas Citians. Hickman Mills was a suburb, but was in actuality a collection of neighborhoods that identified themselves with the school district. At the same time, municipal boundaries made Hickman Mills a part of Kansas City, even if the residents largely attempted to keep the city at arm's length.

Purpose of the Study

The dissertation examines the history of Hickman Mills as it transformed from a village to a school district within a sprawling city. I describe how the primary concern among school leaders shifted from a preoccupation with being able to build enough schools in order to accommodate the rapid population growth occurring from the 1950s through part of the 1970s, to worries over actions from Kansas City and Missouri that would lead to community and school desegregation, to profound concerns on how to operate an underfunded school district. Another important element of the story of Hickman Mills centers on accreditation, essentially approval from the state and a national organization called the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges. School leaders were largely obsessed over accreditation, as at first in the 1950s and 1960s they sought to gain it. In the 1970s and 1980s they strove to keep it, and in the 1990s they

were prepared to lose it.⁵⁸ In a sense, this is a history of the rise and decline of a school district and the community it serves. However, it is also a story of change, some of it prompted by the actions of those living in Hickman Mills, and some of it out of residents' control.

Throughout the first three chapters of this study, I explain battles the community and the school leadership fought over taxation. Tensions between the school board and a portion of the community resulted from repeated attempts to raise the school levy while a small but significant number of residents opposed any increase in their property taxes. This funding issue was important for the district, as more money allowed them to be able to expand more readily in order to accommodate the continually growing student body, another important theme in the first three chapters. Thus the main crux of the first half of this study explains how for the most part, residents of Hickman Mills were focused on within the community and the school district. The second half of the dissertation, chapters four and five, analyzes a shift in Hickman Mills as residents fought against "outside influences" that were perceived to be attempts to change or even destroy the community.

This story of Hickman Mills is also an analysis of power held by different groups of people within the school district's borders. Power and local control was largely held by white suburbanites during the growth and expansion of the school district and the community it served up until 1961, when annexation by Kansas City Missouri established that the residents of Hickman Mills did not have as much control as they imagined. After 1961, the general actions taken by leaders of the Hickman Mills School District, along with neighborhood associations and community groups, demonstrated an attempt by locals to exert any power or control they could, usually to oppose measures taken or even suggested by outside state or even city authorities.

⁵⁸ The district lost complete accreditation with the state of Missouri in 2012, having since carried the status of a provisionally accredited district.

This is the point that race and class become a prominent issue in Hickman Mills, as the center of the controversies experienced by South Kansas Citians was their reluctance to live near or attend school with poor or black people.

Chapter one (1845-1957) presents Hickman Mills's back story: how it came to be, where it exists and the nature of its relationship to Kansas City through the 1950s. The first chapter also deals with the beginnings of suburban growth in the region, specifically the entrance of highways and large housing developments. I explain how a rural community became a suburban one and how that changed the way schools operated.

In chapter two (1957-1960), I focus on the last few years of the 1950s, with two large events that altered the trajectory of the district: a tornado and a political storm with the school board. Both events were traumatic for the community and yet, the aftermath of the natural disaster and the school fight led to an accredited school district with improved physical facilities, the kind of schools of which suburban Kansas Citians could be proud.

Chapter three (1959-1970) addresses a growing concern in the 1960s among residents in Hickman Mills that growth may have been too rapid. I analyze the effects of annexation by Kansas City, something residents were powerless to stop. However, when school leaders attempted a merge with Kansas City Missouri School District as a means to better afford to educate the residents' children, community members clearly and strongly demonstrated their ability to oppose the measure. Hickman Mills's residents may not have been able to block their own annexation to Kansas City, but they unmistakably verified that they could and would oppose completely joining with Kansas City via its school district.

Chapter four (1964-1990) addresses how many white residents of Hickman Mills opposed desegregation efforts in housing or schooling from the 1960s through the 1980s.

Struggles against other elements of urbanization (such as mobile homes, low-income housing, and landfills) are also addressed in this chapter, as they help reveal the central tension between Hickman Mills and Kansas City. Residents of Hickman Mills resented efforts made by Kansas City officials to “devalue” their neighborhoods, whether through housing or dumps. I emphasize the rancor Ruskinites expressed against “forced integration,” another perception on the part of whites in South Kansas City that their peaceful community was going to be ruined for the sake of social experimentation.

In chapter five (1990-2000), I focus on the importance of perception in Hickman Mills, as locals as well as the Kansas City metropolitan area at large began to associate Hickman Mills with crime, violence, and poverty. Eventually, the school district would educate a larger population of poor students, and crime and violence did rise significantly in the area during the 2000s, but the reputation and vision of Hickman Mills as an urban school district serving urban neighborhoods was created in the 1990s, even though school officials tried to fight it. Hickman Mills transformed into part of urban Kansas City, Missouri.

Finally, I analyze the beginnings of white flight in prominent neighborhoods as residents sought to escape what they saw as the extremely negative effects of low-income housing, section eight housing, and the fears that neighborhoods will become “run-down.” When black presence in Hickman Mills became large enough to constitute a “threat,” whites left, or they stayed but became less involved in their community and their schools. Essentially, while the citizens of Hickman Mills felt empowered before the annexation to Kansas City, after 1961 long-time residents felt that they were losing more battles to the city to the north. Eventually, with a “tipping point” in low-income housing and black presence in the suburb that occurred in the

2000s, many whites demonstrated their loss of power and control by either by moving away or shutting in their houses and retreating from community involvement.

Chapter 1: Growing Pains and the Search for Identity

The Creation of the Hickman Mills School District and its Rapid Growth During the Postwar Boom, 1845-1957

The Hickman Mills community today is proud of its pioneer heritage, of existing in a space where Americans pushed westward during the mid-1800s. One can see that with sculptures and signs celebrating westward trails and historical markers that dot the landscape in south Kansas City. And yet, the area of Hickman Mills is largely residentially or commercially developed, with some neighborhoods appearing to be more suburban while others more urban. For much of Hickman Mills's early growth, school and community leaders were not focused on creating a suburb, instead they sought to build a strong, self-sustaining community with an independent school district. This chapter explores the beginnings of the community and the school district it created, with an emphasis on how school leaders tried to meet the educational demands of a suddenly rising population in the 1950s.

Understanding the difficulties Hickman Mills experienced during its transition from a rural to suburban community compared to the later "urbanization" of Hickman Mills complicates the popular narrative of a "rising and falling" school district. For example, the growth and development of Hickman Mills and its schools that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century was fraught with misgivings on the part of its residents. Additionally, school battles were bitterly fought long before the district was seen as going into decline. Post-war suburbanization of the region led locals to begin to question their identity in the 1950s. School and community leaders began posing questions asking if Hickman Mills ought to become village, a suburb, or part of Kansas City. For the people living in the small yet rapidly growing area to the south of Kansas City, Hickman Mills's expansion was neither easy nor simple.

Growth of a Small Village with Country Schools

The communities constituting the Hickman Mills C-1 School District and what is now commonly referred to as southern Kansas City first existed as a sparsely populated area of rich farmland inhabited by settlers who were pushing west in the early nineteenth century.¹ As part of Washington Township within Jackson County, Missouri, this region, while less famous than Independence to the northeast, served as a way station for groups traveling on the Santa Fe, California, or Oregon Trails.² In 1845, one group of settlers attempted to establish a town to be called Union Point, but its efforts resulted only in the construction of a schoolhouse and a blacksmith's shop, not a thriving community large enough to support the newly minted "town."³ Though the town existed essentially in name only, through the efforts of some enterprising settlers, the farmland began to attract more people and a burgeoning village came into being.⁴ Commercial opportunities in selling goods to travelers brought the attention of a Midwestern entrepreneur named Edwin Hickman, who, in 1854, moved from nearby Independence, another stopping point for those bound west, to the area that would become southern Kansas City. He built a mill, donated neighboring land for a church, and began to establish the village that would be named after him and his mill.⁵

Success was short-lived for Hickman, as five years after beginning his venture, banking and speculation failures caused his mill to go out of business, forcing him to sell. Even so, the

¹ Jami Parkison, *The Journey to Our Future: The History of Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 1902-2002* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 2002), 5. The designation C-1 refers to the district's status as the first consolidated school district in Missouri.

² *Ibid.*, 7. "Township" was a designation given to the area during the nineteenth century, denoting a subsection of the county.

³ *Ibid.*, 27-28. Union Point was officially a town, as per the plat with the State of Missouri in 1855. However, the population never grew sufficiently to support the town as originally planned.

⁴ The US Census typically defines a town as having one hundred to thousands of residents, while a village is described as being smaller than a town, normally less organized, and existing on unincorporated land. For much of Hickman Mills' early history, it existed as a village.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

name for the growing community became associated with its originator: Hickman's Mill.⁶ Other commercial and transportation boons helped the fledgling village continue to grow. By 1900, a hundred families or so lived within the borders of Hickman's Mill and residents requested a post office and mail station. The construction of a railway station near what is now the intersection of Grandview and Red Bridge Road subsequently brought traffic from farmers and ranchers who formerly brought their livestock to central Kansas City for slaughter, but began to deliver their cattle to southern Kansas City instead.⁷ At the same time as the railroad significantly contributed to the growth of southern Kansas City in the early twentieth century, it also facilitated the growth of industry in Hickman's Mill, first in the form of a powder plant and then a rabbit farm.⁸ Along with more farms, a post office, a blacksmith, stores, and factories came families, and from 1900 to 1950 the village (often called "town," but was not officially designated as such) of Hickman's Mill grew, albeit slowly. According to legend, a clerical error within the post office inadvertently changed the name of the village from Hickman's Mill to Hickman Mills, making the new, albeit inaccurate, moniker official and eventually becoming the common title among residents.⁹

The steady influx of families to Hickman Mills brought children to the community and residents demonstrated a clear concern for the education of their offspring by building schools. Four original schoolhouses were constructed and operated during the latter half of the nineteenth century before district consolidation in 1901. Technically, a school existed within Hickman Mills before the village itself did, as the founders of the failed Union Point built a small one-

⁶ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 8-9; Union Historical Company, *The History of Jackson County, Missouri, Containing A History of The County, Its Cities, Towns, Etc.* (Kansas City, MO: Birdsall, Williams & Co., 1881), 361.

⁷ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 28.

⁸ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 30; Stephen S. Slaughter, oral history interview, April 19, 1984, transcript, p. 103, Truman Library, Independence, MO.

⁹ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 9.

room schoolhouse in 1855, naming it Union Point.¹⁰ The Union Point school remained after the town's founders left and became one of the four elementary schools in the newly formed Hickman Mills School District in 1901. The building was replaced with a larger brick school, but retained its name and operated until 1980.¹¹ The other three original schools, Holmes Park, Rockford, and Hickman that were built before district consolidation were later renovated and expanded, eventually operating as small elementary schools until the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹² In Hickman Mills' beginnings, these four schools served as educational centers for the community because originally, there was no school district for the Hickman Mills neighborhoods. Missouri did not begin to consolidate schools under common leadership until 1901, hence none of the four schools was centrally located in the town.¹³

School Consolidation

As in other cities and rural towns throughout the country, several early leaders of the Hickman Mills community sought to create an official school district, including a high school, in order to provide more educational opportunities and training for their children. Three prominent figures in Hickman Mills's early history, Orlando Slaughter, T.T. Moore, and William Johnson, worked together to create the first consolidated school district in the state of Missouri, which remains a source of pride for Hickman Mills residents today.¹⁴ These three men petitioned the Missouri General Assembly to support a bill that would allow two or more common school districts to consolidate, residents vote for school directors, as well as raise bonds for educational

¹⁰ Ibid., 25.

¹¹ Ibid., 31-32.

¹² Ibid., 33-34.

¹³ See figure 1 in appendix I.

¹⁴ In each of the interviews I conducted with former and current residents of Hickman Mills, those I interviewed made sure to point out that Hickman Mills was the first consolidated district in Missouri. Additionally, meetings with centralized staff members at Hickman Mills's district offices resulted in the same conversation. Residents of the Hickman Mills district are incredibly proud of being first, and quick to point it out.

expenses.¹⁵ The state legislature passed the consolidation measure in March of 1901, which was to go into effect in October of that year. Slaughter, Moore, and Johnson had six months to convince the four individual common school boards of Hickman Mills, Rockford, Holmes Park, and Union Point, including the communities that comprised them to combine and create a larger school district.¹⁶ While the schools in the Hickman Mills area could legally consolidate in October 1901, residents did not vote on consolidation until April 1902, at which point Holmes Park, Union Point, Rockford, and Hickman Mills common schools officially joined together as one district and voters approved a bond issue of \$3,250 in order to build a high school.¹⁷ Support for consolidation was fairly strong, especially with the promise that the school board would be comprised of members from each of the four former common school districts. The high school was finished quickly, with the bond passing in April, construction starting in the summer, and Ruskin High officially opening in October 1902.¹⁸ From this point forward until after World War II, the Hickman Mills community and its accompanying school district slowly grew. In essence, Hickman Mills as a school district encountered more growth than the community itself. As was the case in much of the country in the beginning of the twentieth century, more children started attending grade and high school, but Hickman Mills as a village did not dramatically change.

¹⁵ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 41.

¹⁶ The existence of a consolidated school district was one step in facilitating Hickman Mills's growth and prosperity. Slaughter, Moore, and Johnson later formed a chamber of commerce and successfully petitioned for an official branch that was specifically associated with the school district, having the same boundaries. South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, "History: From Chamber of Commerce of Consolidated School District #1 to South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, 1931-2007" (unpublished document, 2012).

¹⁷ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 43. 3250 dollars in 1902 would equate to over 88,000 dollars in 2012. While this was a large sum of money to raise in a very small community, it was relatively small amount to fund construction of a high school.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44. Ruskin was named after the essayist and art critic John Ruskin. No one could agree on a name, so the school board turned to William Johnson, who selected the name of his favorite author, Ruskin. Because many school districts held the same name as the high school, for quite a long time many referred to Hickman Mills School District as "Ruskin," which was never the name of the school district.

Even considering the community support in passing the bond and the consolidation of the four elementary schools, the early period of the district's establishment and growth set a pattern that would come to define and shape the district's history. From its inception as a district, Hickman Mills experienced difficulties and opposition even while attempting to expand. Within ten years of the district's consolidation, a vocal minority of residents formed an anti-tax league and pushed for a vote on dissolving the school district in order to decrease county levies and bonds.¹⁹ Supporters of Hickman Mills's schools held the vote in 1914, with forty-four persons voting for dismantling the district and 139 for keeping it.²⁰ This measure reveals how small the populace was at this time and it marks the beginning of a long history of contention in Hickman Mills over the role of the district, the nature of the community, as well as taxation policy. This tension over the function of the local school remains as one of the most enduring problems Hickman Mills has and continues to face.

From the formation of the school district in 1902 to its transformation in the face of the population explosion of the 1950s, Hickman Mills consistently developed its buildings and updated facilities in order to keep up with population growth.²¹ Each of the four original common schools were expanded and then completely rebuilt in order to accommodate more students and provide better educational experiences.²² Ruskin High School experienced a similar evolution, as it was rebuilt in 1931 for the second time in order to accommodate the

¹⁹ Ibid.,54.

²⁰ Ibid., 54-55.

²¹ During this period of burgeoning growth, Harry S. Truman, long before becoming president, served on the Hickman Mills school board. Truman's family lived in Grandview, just south of Hickman Mills, and his involvement with the board was very brief, only a few months in the summer of 1916 before joining the army to fight in World War I. See Jon Turner, *Truman's Grandview Farm* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 31; Mary Jane Truman (Harry S. Truman's sister), oral history interview, January 2, 1976, transcript, p. 11, Truman Library, Independence, MO.

²² For example, the four schools would eventually help introduce Kindergarten classes into the district in the late 1950s, a crucial step for the district to gain accreditation, which will be addressed in chapter 2.

growth of the student body and the inclusion of families from outlying areas.²³ The high school became the largest building in the Hickman Mills region, and thus became a type of village town square. Even when Hickman Mills became part of Kansas City later in its history, the high school remained a civic center for the community.

Suburban Growth South of Kansas City

Hickman Mills changed from a sleepy rural village south of Kansas City to a working-class suburb after the 1940s as Kansas City, like many large municipalities across the country, was expanding to accommodate a population explosion. The economic geography of Kansas City led to Hickman Mills being an ideal place for lower middle-class whites, as explained by James Shortridge:

If the Country Club District represented an idealized but largely unattainable vision of Kansas City for an average white resident and if the East Side was an area to ignore, suburban developments to the south, southeast, and north were practicable realities. Here were new and affordable homes, green grass, good schools and convenient shopping centers. With postwar prosperity, growth came rapidly.²⁴

The suburban neighborhoods being created in Johnson County, Kansas, to the west of Kansas City, were much too expensive for lower-middle-class and working-class Kansas Citians to afford. Additionally, Shortridge argues that the East side of Kansas City was either considered “too black” or too distant from places of work in downtown Kansas City.²⁵ Hickman Mills, as a village just to the south of Kansas City with available land and promises of easy access due to a growing highway system, offered a feasible alternative for those who wanted to escape from the congestion of the city.

²³ Ibid., 58.

²⁴ James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822-2011* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 121.

²⁵ Ibid.

Longtime residents of Hickman Mills confirm this reality in expressing that affordable housing, employment, and proximity to Kansas City proper were chief motivations to relocating to Hickman Mills. For the Baker and Husman families, moving to Hickman Mills brought them closer to places of work and allowed them to afford more spacious housing. In recounting her entrance to the community in 1954, Carla Baker explained that the school district was not a draw as much as “there was property available, and we had a GI loan, the price was right, so we moved here.”²⁶ Carla’s husband was a photographer who worked for the Bendix Corporation (at the Bannister Federal Complex), just west of Hickman Mills, so their relocation also allowed them easy access to her husband’s place of work. For the Husmans, Hickman Mills was a convenient location between the Richards-Gebaur Air Base to the south and Kansas City to the north. Lilly Husman shared, “my father worked on jet engines on the base, but the layout near the base was bad, so my parents got a house in Ruskin Heights.”²⁷ Other families, like the Hills, relocated specifically as they wanted to leave the city because of family expansion. The Hills were living in Kansas City, were expecting their first baby in 1956, and wanted to leave their apartment in the city for a house and some land to raise children. While heading to a drive-in movie on Bannister and State Line, they saw a billboard that advertised small houses for a \$99 down payment and \$99 a month mortgage. As Gloria Hill recounted,

we were paying no attention to the school district, it hadn’t even crossed our minds. We wanted a bigger place to live at an affordable price. It seemed a long way out at the time, but we got to have cows in our back yard! It was like living in the country!”²⁸

The affordable housing, spacious land, and seemingly pristine environment of Hickman Mills, as well as its location close to downtown Kansas City, with its accessibility thanks to a growing interstate system of highways was a major draw for young families.

²⁶ Carla Baker, interview with author, August 14, 2012.

²⁷ Lilly Husman, interview with author, August 25, 2012.

²⁸ Gloria Cardona, interview with author, August 30, 2012; James Hill, interview with author, August 30, 2012.

These favorable conditions were also the result of the work of Praver and Sons, a housing development company based in New York that, after seeing the success of Levittown, began erecting pre-fabricated homes in suburban neighborhoods.²⁹ The houses they built in Hickman Mills came in four varieties: two bedrooms, three bedrooms, three bedrooms and a basement, and three bedrooms and a crawl space.³⁰ They also were equipped with new electric stoves, which Praver and Sons included as a major selling point.³¹ The three-bedroom house cost \$11,200 (around \$94,000 in 2012 dollars), with a basement addition costing \$1,500 (\$12,685 in 2012).³² Almost all the homes were built without a basement, a decision that many residents would later regret. Business boomed for Praver, as by 1957, they had built nearly two thousand homes, sometimes pouring twenty-five slabs a day.³³ In addition to achieving national recognition by winning an award from the American Institute of Architects, these homes, particularly in Ruskin Heights, were wildly popular locally both for their spaciousness and affordability.³⁴

Imitating more famous developers such as William Leavitt and J.C. Nichols, Praver ensured that each house had an open backyard and the housing developments were located within walking distance of a park.³⁵ Moreover, Praver and other developers used the locations of their homes relative to recreation and commercial properties to drive demand for their housing, as well as spurring retail growth to attract residents and shoppers. The ultimate goal for Praver, like Leavitt and Nichols, was to also develop businesses, particularly shopping areas, in order to

²⁹ Carolyn Glenn Brewer, *Caught In the Path: A Tornado's Fury, A Community's Rebirth* (Kansas City, MO: Prairie Figure Books, 1997), 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ "Big Surprises With New Home in Ruskin Heights," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 52, January 7, 1954, 3.

³² Mike Smith, *Warnings: The True Story of How Science Tamed the Weather* (Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2010), 15.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ As mentioned in a Miami newspaper, Praver and Sons won awards for developments in Kansas City, New York, and South Dade Florida. "Culter Ridge Praver Homes," *The Miami News*, May 18, 1958, E1.

³⁵ Brewer, *Caught In the Path*, 7.

further entice families to buy houses. In addition, developing commercial zones also helped ensure that families' needs and desires were met and that property values would remain high. Industrial development did occur on the fringes of the Praver neighborhoods, with Truman Corners to the southwest on Grandview's town border, as well as the eventual Bannister development to the north on Bannister road and what would later become state highway 71. These developments were important for the area, as they transformed the landscape from a rural prairie to suburban sprawl. They also had a profound impact on the school district, as the growth of housing meant a sudden and rapid rise in student enrollments. The concern over housing and student accommodation would be a dominant concern for the school district leadership for the next two decades.

Other developers got involved with the growth of suburban neighborhoods in the southland, particularly in the Ruskin Heights region. In 1954, the Charles F. Curry Real Estate Company (a Kansas City firm founded in 1924) built the Ruskin Heights Shopping Center along Blue Ridge Road as it meets Red Ridge Road.³⁶ The shopping plaza had hardware, toy, clothing, and auto stores, along with a barbershop, salon, pharmacy, dance school, bakery, shoe-repair, dry-cleaner and a Ben Franklin variety store.³⁷ The center quickly became a major local shopping destination even meriting a stop on the Kansas City bus line, which brought customers from central Kansas City.³⁸

Seeing almost immediate success in Ruskin Heights, Praver and Sons expanded and built an additional suburban community to the immediate west of their first development, announcing

³⁶ "Ruskin Heights New Shopping Center!" Advertisement, *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 3, no. 46, November 25, 1954, 3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Dell Jacobs, interview with author, December 4, 2012.

in 1955 the opening of Ruskin Hills.³⁹ Boasting that this area is “where exclusive suburban homes are built,” Praver offered three and four-bedroom ranch-style homes with attached garages and two bathrooms, all priced between eleven and fourteen thousand dollars, with a one hundred dollar down payment.⁴⁰ Like Ruskin Heights, these new homes were filled with modern electric appliances, in addition to offering air conditioning and basements if pre-ordered.⁴¹ Ruskin Hills homes were a little more expensive than their Ruskin Heights counterparts, but they were larger and offered more amenities. Praver & Sons continued to expand in this new neighborhood and three years after opening Ruskin Hills, the company announced a new style of home, the “tri-lux” four-bedroom, two bath model, with covered parking, and a basement for eleven thousand dollars and no down payment for qualified veterans.⁴² Advertisements for the neighborhood homes promised that residents would “enjoy living in a quiet suburban community!”⁴³ The developer’s work resulted in solid suburban growth in Hickman Mills.

Just as Ruskin Heights homes brought commercial development, Ruskin Hills as a housing development spurred community growth. Just south of the Ruskin Heights neighborhood, a trio of families formed the Hickman Mills Country Club in 1955, built at Longview and Blue Ridge Road.⁴⁴ The club was advertised as “one of the most modern in any

³⁹ “Praver & Sons Back Again—Ruskin Hills” Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 37, November 3, 1955, 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid. A \$14,000 house in 1955 would cost \$118,395 in 2012 dollars.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Eight all new 1958 Models by...Praver & Sons” Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 33, October 3, 1957, 5.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ State of Missouri Certificate of Incorporation, Hickman Mills Country Club of Hickman Mills, Missouri, Jefferson City, MO, December 8, 1955, Papers of the Ruskin Hills Home Association. The incorporators (also original board of directors) were three sets of couples—the Sharps, living north on Euclid Avenue in Kansas City; the Cones, living east on Suwanee Road in Johnson County; and the Hudsons, the most “local” couple, living in Hickman Mills on Route #1. The country club would be renamed within two years (Holiday Country Club) and apparently had some operational issues, as the board was warned in 1958 and 1959 that it failed to file an annual report to state officials. The state finally ordered the club closed in 1983 for continually failing to submit annual membership and financial reports. See James C. Kirkpatrick, Secretary of State for the State of Missouri, “Forfeiture of Charter or Authority to do Business,” January 1, 1983.

suburban community in the United States, and certainly comparable to any in the Kansas City area.”⁴⁵ Sporting a large swimming pool, picnic grounds, tennis courts, ballroom and spacious dining area, the country club offered memberships for \$250 to \$350, the equivalent of two to three times the down payment on many of the homes in the area.⁴⁶ Country clubs were not abnormal for upscale suburban communities, which Ruskin Heights (and later, Ruskin Hills) was turning out to be, even if they were not as exclusive as the neighborhoods being built to the west in Johnson County.⁴⁷ Regardless, by the beginning of 1959, Hickman Mills, particularly residents of Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills, had a country club to call their own.

The construction of both homes and businesses continued to attract families to the Hickman Mills area. In 1950, there were about 2,500 people living in Hickman Mills; by 1959, there were 23,000.⁴⁸ From another perspective, in 1950, the neighborhoods of Hickman Mills were too small and sparsely populated for the US Census to assign them a census tract, instead they were part of the overall Jackson County figures of about 877 people per square mile. By 1960, just ten years later, Hickman Mills contained three full census tracts and pieces of three others. The Ruskin Heights neighborhood alone dominated one tract with about two thousand people per square mile.⁴⁹ The growth was fast, which benefited contractors and businesses, but made the job of the school district suddenly more difficult, as new facilities, teachers, and supplies had to be found or created in order to accommodate the rush of children.

Even though the growth of housing developments would directly benefit the schools of Hickman Mills during the 1950s building boom, schools did not factor largely into Praver’s

⁴⁵ “You are invited to become A Charter Member of the Hickman Mills Country Club” Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 38, November 10, 1955, 9.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ For more on the significance, history and role of country clubs in communities, see James M. Mayo, *The American Country Club: Its Origins and Development* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 63.

⁴⁹ U.S. Census of the Population, 1950, 1960.

plans. The Hickman Mills school district benefited from suburban development in Ruskin Heights and other neighborhoods because it brought students who were funded by taxes on solid home property values, but Praver never used the schools in advertising homes in the area. Contrary to what is popularly thought of the relationship between suburban schools and suburban communities, Hickman Mills school district did not build up the community, instead, the suburban community expanded the schools. Schools were not a draw for living in Hickman Mills in the 1950s. This is partially due to the fact that the school district, like the community itself, was relatively small before suburbanization. Housing development fundamentally changed the way the school district operated, which proved to be a difficult transition for school leaders as well as community members.

School Expansion, School Funding

As development in Hickman Mills expanded in the form of suburban housing, couples moved south from Kansas City with their children or had children shortly after moving in. The resulting increase in population became especially significant for the school district, as it meant that more facilities would be needed to accommodate a growing student body. One of the first suburban neighborhoods created in the school district was Ruskin Heights, located in the center of the district, which necessitated the building of a new school. The other four existing elementary schools, Union Point, Holmes Park, Rockford, and Hickman, were already overflowing with students and located too far away from Ruskin Heights to be feasible options. Thus Ruskin Heights needed its own elementary school.

Fortunately for Hickman Mills's school leaders, during the 1950s, federal grants were available for schools considered to be within "defense impact areas," and the district's proximity to Richards-Gebaur Air Base and the Bendix complex qualified them qualified for federal

assistance.⁵⁰ The school board received an \$89,000 grant to purchase land and begin construction on a four-room school (with a plan for expansion to eighteen rooms in the future) in August of 1953, with the full knowledge that the building would not be able to accommodate all students in the area. In addition to constructing a new school, school officials began to request space in local churches and stores to use in accommodating the burgeoning student population.⁵¹ By December of the same year, the district received another defense grant, this time for \$162,000, which was slated for construction of a six-room structure meant for seventh and eighth grade students.⁵²

These buildings were still not enough to accommodate the influx of families into the district and members of the school board knew that the defense grants were not going to provide sufficient funds for continued construction and operation of additional schools. For Superintendent Lewis Shultz (1949-1954) and the Hickman Mills school board, early attempts to raise capital proved frustrating as school leaders could not convince enough residents that new facilities or expanded buildings were needed. Missouri state law mandated school districts obtain a two-thirds majority vote from the communities within district boundaries in order to raise school levies.⁵³ This law made the work of passing bonds and levies particularly onerous for the school board in Hickman Mills.

⁵⁰ "South City View School and Ruskin Receive Grants," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 49, December 17, 1953, 1; Richard Apling, "The Impact Aid Program Under Section 3 of Public Law 81-874," Congressional Research Service, Report EPW-88-440, June 17, 1988, 16. The Richards-Gebaur airbase was a military installation and the Bendix Corporation, located at the Bannister Federal Complex alongside Honeywell and AlliedSignal, made non-nuclear components for nuclear weapons.

⁵¹ "Ruskin Buys New School Site; To Start Construction Soon," *The Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 38, August 20, 1953, 1; Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 64-65.

⁵² "South City View School and Ruskin Receive Grants," *The Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 49, December 17, 1953, 1.

⁵³ Missouri General Assembly, Constitution of Missouri, article X, section 11c. This provision in state school funding laws was and still is a major hurdle for the Hickman Mills school district, along with other school districts in Missouri, particularly when compared to districts in Kansas, which allows for a simple majority to pass levies and bonds.

The school board introduced a fifty-cent levy increase to voters on March 28, 1953, which was to finance a \$350,000 bond. This proposal came while Hickman Mills's residents had the opportunity to declare themselves candidates for the school board election, hence the levy vote quickly became a campaign issue.⁵⁴ The local tax opposition group supported candidate Harold E. Rakes, who vociferously argued that the Hickman school board both mismanaged money and refused to be open about its finances with the larger community.⁵⁵ Exacerbating headaches for the board was public fallout over the planning of the fifty-cent levy increase on the March ballot, and another on an April ballot for eighty cents. If both levies passed, property taxes would rise by \$1.30 for every \$1,000 of assessed value.⁵⁶

Rakes campaigned on the anti-tax platform, pointing out that the proposed tax hikes, when added to state, county, water, and current school and library taxes, would total \$4.34 per \$1,000 assessed property value, thirty-two cents higher than Kansas City, Missouri taxes.⁵⁷ "Being a father and now a grandfather, I believe in education," assured Rakes, "but I still believe that it can be obtained without exorbitant or excessive costs."⁵⁸ Rakes was not a lone voice, as his group paid for a full-page ad in the local paper (previously a tactic only taken by the pro-tax school board), arguing against raising the levy. The ad proclaimed:

Let's not stop the growth of Hickman Mills by mortgaging the community to the point that working people cannot afford to live here...let's re-organize the school...then see what is needed...let's keep our heads and not be stampeded into voting for a bond issue we may regret for years to come...VOTE AGAINST The School Bond Issue, March 28, 1953.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ "Hickman Groups Clash on School Bond Issue," *The Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 11, March 26, 1953, 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ "Notice! Notice! Notice!" Full-Page Advertisement, *The Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 11, March 26, 1953, 5. The text of the advertisement has been transcribed as it appeared in the paper, with the inclusion of the ellipses.

The opponents, more publicly vocal than in the past, won—the election on March 28th resulted in 461 votes for the bond and 288 against, thirty-four votes shy of reaching the two-thirds majority vote needed to pass the bond.⁶⁰ Victory was not complete for the anti-tax group, as Harold Rakes subsequently lost in the school board election ten days later.⁶¹ At this point, the board now had a high-stakes levy fight in April, with another \$350,000 bond issue of an eighty-cent levy increase up for a vote on April 18.

Superintendent Shultz and the board met early in April to discuss a new attempt to raise money for building construction.⁶² The meeting turned confrontational when one hundred fifty local citizens arrived to question the board about its construction and finance plans. Essentially, the board meeting became a staging ground for a debate between Ralph Skudlarek, another vociferous opponent to tax increases, and Dr. George Englehart, the director of school building services for the Missouri department of education and a visitor to the district.⁶³ Their interchange was terse and, on Englehart's part, sarcastic and biting. Englehart was explaining to the crowd that the district was going to lose eighty-nine thousand dollars in state grants if it did not pass the bond issue in order to help with needed construction, at which point Skudlarek interrupted with a question,

Skudlarek: "What is the cost of two-story construction?"

Englehart: "About the same as single-story construction."

S: "Do you feel that this 'finger' plan is an economical plan for this area?"⁶⁴

E: "In the long run it is as economical as any other."

S: "A good many architects say the 'finger' plan is not the best. They are not

⁶⁰ "\$350,000 Bond Defeated," *The Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 12, April 2, 1953, 1.

⁶¹ "Rakes loses!," *The Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 13, April 9, 1953, 1.

⁶² "More than 150 Attend Stormy School Session at Ruskin," *The Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 14, April 16, 1953, 1-2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ The "finger plan" was somewhat popular during the early baby boom period for schools, in which classrooms were designed in rows, with external hallways on both sides of the rooms. At a time when air conditioning was not common, this provided more lighting and air for the rooms via windows and doors. See Susan K. Oldroyd, "Daylighting in Schools, Grades K-12," *AIA/Architectural Record* (December 2005): 247-53. Ultimately, the schools built in Hickman Mills did not employ the finger plan.

economical, are they?”
E: “Well, the most economical would be a cell block.”⁶⁵

At this point, the meeting continued with parents giving testimonials as to the cramped nature of the classrooms, while others requested clear financing plans for the bonds.⁶⁶ Unfortunately for Engelhart, Shultz, and the rest of the school board, the meeting failed to resolve any doubts naysayers had about the bond issue. The election the following week resulted in 451 votes for and 288 against the measure, again narrowly missing (by 42 votes) the two-thirds majority needed to raise the school levy.⁶⁷

The fact that voters rejected the school bond twice within thirty days rankled with Shultz, who commented, “it looks as if the people really don’t want to build the new buildings.”⁶⁸ The superintendent then asserted that if a bond of some sort was not passed soon then the schools would have to start teaching students in two shifts.⁶⁹ One immediate measure taken was to cease teaching Kindergarten, which alleviated overcrowding to a degree, but also resulted in the district not gaining an “AAA” rating from the state board of education.⁷⁰ Shultz promptly requested help from the local chapter of the chamber of commerce in addressing overpopulation problems in the schools, particularly due to developments in Ruskin Heights, where forty school-aged children could be found in the thirty new homes occupied at the time.⁷¹ The chamber of commerce took some pity on Shultz, and created an educational committee who would keep

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “Voters Reject Ruskin Bonds,” *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no.15, April 23, 1953, 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Billy Wall (HMSD board member, 1957-1975), deposition summary, Arthur Benson Papers (1975), Box KC 250, Folder 52, 189-90, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center, University of Missouri-Kansas City University Archives, Kansas City, MO. The district would later earn the AAA rating, after it reinstated kindergarten and lowered its student/teacher ratio.

⁷¹ “Hickman Chamber Discusses Benefits of Incorporation,” *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 2, no. 20, May 28, 1953, 1.

members apprised of issues pertaining to the district.⁷² While the committee was a step towards greater community involvement which would eventually prove to be a very successful tool Schultz and the school board would use in future funding battles, for the moment, the superintendent was at an impasse. Something was going to need to change in order to get the money the district needed in order to accommodate the sudden influx of students. What Shultz and the school board did not know at the time was that their battle over a bond issue and levy increase would become a pattern in Hickman Mills. From 1953 onward, the school district would generally encounter resistance in passing a bond if it came with a tax increase. Employing members of the community outside of the school district became the main tactic in winning the public vote.

The Citizen's Committee for the Hickman Mills School District

In the last week of September 1953, Shultz and the school board met to once again propose a \$350,000 bond, expressing interest in involving community leaders in convincing voters to approve the measure. Heads of the Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, PTAs from the elementary schools, Ruskin Music Mothers Club, and Ruskin Fathers Club all volunteered to support the bond in the October 17th election. Shultz pointed out that even with the bond and federal grant money, more would have to be done to address the rising student population, predicting that in a few years another high school would need to be built.⁷³ Support for the bond was particularly high, but again voters had to pass the measure with a two-thirds majority, as it required a tax increase. This raising of the mill levy was the chief source of opposition to the bond, primarily from locals who believed the schools could operate more efficiently or build

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ "South City View School and Ruskin Receive Grants" and "Ruskin Board Votes Big Bond Proposal," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 38, October 1, 1953, 1.

cheaper buildings.⁷⁴ Shultz's answer to arguments of efficiency was that at the time, over a hundred students were attending classes in a basement, and the district had to employ an array of tactics in order to avoid teaching students in shifts.⁷⁵ The district desperately needed new buildings. Unfortunately, members of the school board and district administrators felt any community approval for additions or construction would only come after difficult and drawn-out uphill battles.

Then, serendipitously, the board received good news just four days before the bond election. The bonding agent was prepared to offer the money to the district without requiring immediate payments, resulting that the district could pass the bond without a levy increase for two years, perhaps longer. Should the levy need to be raised, it would not pass ten cents on one hundred dollar assessed valuation.⁷⁶ Essentially, even if the bond would eventually raise the levy, the district could ask for a mere ten-cent hike. This was a minor miracle for Shultz, as opponents to the measure had less to argue against. Voters overwhelmingly supported the bond at the election, with 851 votes for and 162 against.⁷⁷ The promise of not raising taxes was kept, as the board received more good news months later when it learned that the upside of suburbanization in Hickman Mills was a significant increase in property values, particularly in Ruskin Heights, which brought in enough capital without needing to raise the mill levy—thus solidifying the levy at \$2.80.⁷⁸ At the same time, the district continued to receive grant monies because of its proximity to Richards-Gebaur and Bendix.⁷⁹ The funding situation seemed positive for the district in 1953 and early 1954 and leaders were cautiously optimistic that the

⁷⁴ "Bond Drive Set at Ruskin," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 39, October 8, 1953, 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ "Good News on the Bond Issue," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 40, October 15, 1953, 1.

⁷⁷ "Quick Start on Ruskin School as Bonds Win," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 41, October 22, 1953, 1.

⁷⁸ "Ruskin School Levy to Remain the Same, \$2.80," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 2, no. 11, March 25, 1954, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

schools in the school district could grow quickly enough to match the housing developments in the area.

Hickman Mills's school leaders wasted no time in constructing new buildings to accommodate the rapid rise of students; by April 1954, C.A. Burke Elementary (111th and Longview Road) opened.⁸⁰ Superintendent Shultz also announced his upcoming retirement in June 1954 to take effect in July, with Assistant Superintendent Joseph Nesbit as Interim Superintendent until a permanent replacement could be found.⁸¹ Nesbit served as superintendent until February 1, 1957 (and would again briefly lead the district fifteen years later), continuing the battle over school funding and necessary expansion. Nesbit learned from watching his predecessor engage with portions of the community over funding, and repeated Shultz's successful technique in involving influential community groups to express support for school bonds and levies. A school funding board was created in the fall of 1954, with many of the same organizations involved as in 1953, but endowed with an expanded and more official purpose.

Nesbit explained, saying:

The purpose of the board will be to assist the school board in its work on such problems as bond issues, school construction, and picking and securing school sites. Passage of school bond issues for construction in the Ruskin district for the past several years has been a difficult task, and one which has divided the community into numerous factions, all pulling different directions. Citizens committee advocates are hoping that the group can serve as a unifying force in such matters by supplying enough precise information to satisfy the most demanding elements in the district.⁸²

⁸⁰ The elementary school was named for former school superintendent C.A. Burke, who served as school leader from 1923 to 1943. Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 60.

⁸¹ "Joe Nesbit New Super of Ruskin," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 2, no. 21, June 3, 1954, 1. Some rumors surrounded Shultz's retirement, attributing it to exhaustion at fighting battles over school funding and expansion, while others found its sources in the possibility of his being forced out by the board. See "Report on Probe of Hickman Mills School," *Nevada Daily Mail*, February 2, 1960, 3. Eventually, residents of Hickman Mills would learn that the school board forced out Shultz because of a rumor concerning Shultz's conduct in his personal life. I have not been able to learn more about the rumor, but the situation was fraught not just because of potential private issues, but also due to the difficult relationship that existed between certain members of the school board and superintendents Shultz and Wagner, as chapter 2 explores.

⁸² Nesbit, as quoted in "Hickman Chamber Urges New Citizens Group for Schools," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 2, no. 26, November 25, 1954, 1.

In addition to the same community leaders who teamed with the district in 1953, this committee also had representatives from seven local churches, the South Jackson County Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Jackson County Safety Council, a local sorority, and the Ruskin Homemakers Club.⁸³ More than a simple cheerleading group, the school funding board reviewed school budgets and projected construction costs, as well as bond sales, in offering advice to the school board on how to best raise funds to construct new buildings and provide for upkeep of older ones.⁸⁴

The Citizen's Committee started immediately in the fall of 1954, as it researched, helped write, and publicly supported a bond issue the school board was to present to the public for vote in January. Faced with an "immediate critical problem of school housing in the district," the school district was looking to pass a \$600,000 bond on top of an additional \$270,000 in federal aid. The money would be used to add a wing to the already planned new Ruskin High School, with enough space for ten more classrooms, a laboratory, and a cafeteria. The bond would also pay for construction of a new elementary school. The good news for taxpayers was that the bond would require no tax increases, but the Citizen's Committee wanted to make clear that taxes were going to need to increase in order to adequately address student growth. Delmer Berg, the chairman of the committee, shared:

Construction of these new units will take care of the new pupils coming in the next year, but next year we in the Ruskin district will probably have to vote more bonds to take care of the children coming in the following year. The district is growing at a terrific rate, and the school situation is a critical one.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "Citizen's Group Will Discuss New Budget," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 3, no. 8, March 3, 1955, 1.

⁸⁵ "Ruskin Residents to Vote Jan 22 on School Bonds," *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 2, no. 50, December 23, 1954, 1.

By this point in the 1954-55 school year, there were 1,800 students in the district, a far cry from the 200 students the district had when first consolidated fifty years previously.⁸⁶ Nesbit expected an additional thousand students for the following year.⁸⁷ Chairman Berg clarified how community growth was going to greatly affect building operations:

We on the committee have been making a close study of the district's school housing needs...and we have on file letters from builders indicating the construction of more than 3,600 new homes to be built and occupied by June of 1956. That means a huge influx of new children to the district. And we as residents of the district can't just sit idly by and not make adequate preparations for meeting the problem.⁸⁸

From this point forward, the Citizen's Committee became an essential player in district efforts to pass bonds and/or raise school levies. Additionally, by the summer of 1958, this citizen's group expanded by adding representatives from forty community organizations, and became ensconced as part of the district's school management team, which dealt with additional issues the district faced such as teacher welfare, adult education, and transportation.⁸⁹

Bonds and Taxes

For both the leaders of the school district and the new and old families living within the borders of Hickman Mills, the first few years of the 1950s were semi-tumultuous, as officials determined where students were going to be taught and how the district was going to pay for their education. As previously discussed, despite occasional setbacks and disappointments, the district was largely successful in getting bond issues passed to build new facilities without having to raise taxes. However, the warnings that previous administrators gave in stating that the bonds passed were largely stopgap measures came true very quickly. Still, the district had grown in the number and size of buildings in its fifty years as a consolidated district. By the beginning

⁸⁶ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 63.

⁸⁷ "Ruskin Residents to Vote..." 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Establish Citizens Group for Studies on Ruskin Schools," *Jackson County Advocate*, 68th year, no. 18, June 12, 1958, 1.

of the 1955 school year, the district was finishing its third rebuilding of the high school, this time as a separate and larger building (“Ruskin #2”) literally next to the “original” building (rebuilt in 1931), which was converted to a junior high.⁹⁰ Apart from the expanded four original elementary schools (Union Point, Holmes Park, Hickman and Rockford), students were attending C.A. Burke, and the board had plans for two more elementary schools to be built in 1955 and open in 1956.⁹¹

It is during the period from 1955 through early 1957 that battles over funding became more entrenched and further heated. School leaders became increasingly concerned that they were not going to be able to continue building more schools by floating additional bonds without raising the mill levy. However, quite serendipitously for the district, unexpected outside forces made it possible to pass bonds without raising taxes, which in turn made voters much more agreeable to increasing school funding. 1955 began with a major push by the district to pass a \$600,000 bond, again without raising taxes, in order to continue to build onto the high school and to begin construction for two more elementary schools.⁹² This time, the finances for the bond were a bit of a gamble, in that leaders assumed that the assessed valuation of property within the district would rise enough within three years to fully fund the bond and avoid a need to raise the mill levy.⁹³ Another complication the district faced was that it was nearing its bonded indebtedness limit, set by Missouri at ten percent of assessed valuation.⁹⁴ In other words, Hickman Mills was approaching its borrowing limit and would not be able to go much further into debt without having the community first grow in size.⁹⁵ Yet the school district

⁹⁰ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 64-65.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.; “A Ruskin School Crisis,” *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 3, no. 2, January 20, 1955, 1.

⁹³ “A Ruskin School Crisis,” 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid. School leaders were gambling exactly on this, that the high rate of growth in the early fifties would continue so that more money could be borrowed.

needed to grow, at least in physical buildings, as the five elementary schools, one junior high, and the high school were not sufficient to hold all the students. At this time the Ruskin High campus, a building originally intended for two hundred students, instead housed over five hundred. The newest school, Burke Elementary, was already exceeding capacity as well.⁹⁶ Together, the five elementary schools had one thousand students, far beyond building capacity.⁹⁷ The proposed bond was not going to get the district ahead, but merely help it to catch up.

Good news came for the school board, as the bond passed in January, with an overwhelming 734 voters in favor of spending the money and twenty-seven against.⁹⁸ The superintendent was elated and Thomas Hudson, the school board president, expressed that “the board is very, very pleased” with Nesbit exclaiming, “it just goes to show that things have changed a lot around here in a short time!”⁹⁹ The relationship between the school board and the community had probably not changed to a great degree in such a short period of time as Schultz proclaimed; rather, having a bond issue without a tax hike was likely more palatable to residents than a mill levy increase. The board and the district won, which gave school leaders a feeling of success. However, the continual problem the district and the community faced was that although the school district was to receive additional funding, it was still not sufficient to fully converge with the growing population. The district simply could not get ahead financially to stay abreast of student numbers and building demands. Additionally, district leadership was counting on rising property values and federal funds (defense money) to help the district float through its debt. This was a potentially dangerous dependency, but continually reinforced as an opportunity for another unexpected source of revenue came in 1955 from the state of Missouri in the form of

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Ruskin Grade Pupils Ready for School,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 27, August 25, 1955, 1.

⁹⁸ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 65.

⁹⁹ “Ruskin Bonds Carry by Huge Margin Saturday,” *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 3, no. 3, January 27, 1955, 1.

a cigarette tax and an even larger financial boon, the School Foundation Program. These two sources of revenue proposed by Missouri legislature would help alleviate the district's dire financial situation.

In 1955, the Missouri Legislature submitted for statewide vote the passing of a two-cent tax on packs of cigarettes, amounting to a ten-percent tax, with the intention that this money would be spent on funding schools in the state.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, voters statewide would be choosing whether to expand state school funding by creating the School Foundation Program, a proposed new entity to organize state monies for school districts. Together, both referendum 1 for the cigarette tax and referendum 2 for foundation funding would provide more money for the schools, although no one seemed exactly sure how much money would actually be raised.¹⁰¹ Both measures succeeded in the October election, with the cigarette tax receiving a strong 76.7% passing vote and the school funding obtaining 70.7% of the vote. This meant that beginning in January 1956, revenue raised by cigarette tax sales would provide more money for the district. Additionally, the state was potentially going to increase financial support for its schools, even though the funding formula had not yet been solidified. Essentially, in order to assure that school funding came through the school foundation program, the cigarette tax had to pass.¹⁰² District leaders were pleased, and by the beginning of the 1955/56 school year, the school levy was set at \$3.10 per \$100 assessed valuation.¹⁰³ Even more agreeable for Hickman Mills's

¹⁰⁰ A pack of cigarettes in 1955 in Missouri cost around 20 cents (about \$1.70 in 2012 dollars). David C. Valentine, "Constitutional Amendments, Statutory Revision and Referenda Submitted to the Voters by the General Assembly or by Initiative Petition, 1910-2010," report to Missouri Legislative Academy Institute of Public Policy (Columbia, MO: Missouri Legislative Academy, December 2010), 10; Frank J. Chaloupka, "The Economics of Tobacco Taxation in Missouri," report to University of Missouri (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, October 24, 2006), slide 11.

¹⁰¹ Valentine, "Constitutional Amendments," 10; Chaloupka, "Economics of Tobacco," 11.

¹⁰² "Support the Schools October 4th," *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 32, September 29, 1955, 1.

¹⁰³ "C-1 Financial Statement," *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 25, August 11, 1955, 7.

leaders, after taking into account the district budget and the cost of bond payments, the district had a positive balance of \$530,000.¹⁰⁴

The Hickman Mills school board capitalized on the state funding by pushing for more bonds, with the promise of keeping property taxes flat. A January bond issue in 1956 asked for \$520,000 in order to build a twenty-classroom elementary building at 103rd and Grandview Road, near the northeast corner of the district.¹⁰⁵ This bond was under consideration at the same time that the latest elementary school, Harry S. Truman, was opening on James Reed Road just south of Bannister Road.¹⁰⁶ Superintendent Nesbit was able to declare that “additional funds made available through the state’s new Foundation program will make possible the retirement of these bonds without levying more taxes on the property owners of the district.”¹⁰⁷ Like earlier, the Hickman Mills Citizens Committee demonstrated support for the bond, which resulted in overwhelming success. The measure passed 648 votes to 80, and construction on what would become Westridge Elementary began, with the intention that the school would open in the fall of the same year.¹⁰⁸ The district now had a modern high school, a large junior high nearby in the former high school building, and seven elementary schools throughout its boundaries.

Even with the eventual good news and the serendipitous additional sources of income, the school district was still dealing with heavy growth, which meant that school leaders were going to continue to search for more funding. The dilemma of how to maintain school operation with increased student growth continued in early 1957, when the school board announced a new bond issue proposal to be voted on at the end of the month. The board asked for \$530,000 this time,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “To Vote on Ruskin School Bonds Jan 21,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 47, January 12, 1956, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 66.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. The proposed site for the elementary school was not far from Holmes Park School, which was serving students beyond capacity.

¹⁰⁸ “Ruskin District Voters!” Full-Page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 48, January 19, 1956, 7; “Ruskin Voters Are 8 to 1 for School Bonds,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 65th year, no. 49, January 29, 1956, 1.

again claiming that continued and rapid growth required more facilities. Board president Marvin Langford justified the need for the bond, saying, “Ruskin is the fastest growing district in the state of Missouri, according to the department of education.”¹⁰⁹ Like previous successful bond elections, the board was quick and vocal in declaring that the bond would not require a tax increase, in this case because property values had been rising steadily and projections indicated they would continue to rise.¹¹⁰ School leaders persisted in pressing their case by placing a full-page ad in the paper that detailed enrollment numbers, making the public aware of how quickly the district had grown. In 1951, the district had 640 students. By January of 1957, it had 3,500, with a projected enrollment of 4,000 in the fall of 1957.¹¹¹ To support the assertion that taxes will not need to be raised in order to pay for the bond, the board explained that in 1954, the assessed valuation on property in the district was \$10,782,860, but in 1957, it had risen to \$21,066,000.¹¹²

The bond would allow the board to build another elementary school (20 classrooms), add eight rooms to Westridge Elementary, and buy land for future buildings.¹¹³ These additions, like the previous ones, were desperately needed, as schools were overflowing with students. The typical elementary classroom within the district in 1957 had thirty-six students for each teacher, with some classes having as many as forty-five students.¹¹⁴ When the election began on January 26th, the hopes and arguments of the school board and school supporters were vindicated, as 695 people voted for the bond and only 19 voted against.¹¹⁵ Considering that Hickman Mills as a community had not yet finished expanding as growth continued, the school board was aware that

¹⁰⁹ “Bond Issue Proposal by Ruskin Board,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 47, January 2, 1957, 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ “Why The Voters of the Ruskin School District Will Once Again Be Called Upon for a BOND Issue” Full-page advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 49, January 17, 1957, 6.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ “Vote for the School Bonds,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 50, January 24, 1957, 1.

¹¹⁵ “Big Field of Bidders For Ruskin Contract,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 57, January 31, 1957, 1.

it was going to have to continue building in the future, with projects that would require more bonds and probably more levies. But for now at least, district leadership had won.

Flirting with Incorporation and Annexation

As a community, Hickman Mills experienced identity struggles concurrently with its battles over school growth and increased taxation. Even as early as May 1953, while the school board sought to convince residents of the need to build more schools, members of the district began to question whether remaining an independent “town” was preferable to becoming part of Kansas City. The Hickman Mills Chamber of Commerce met and began to discuss the advantages of remaining a village, becoming a fourth-class city, or joining Kansas City to the north.¹¹⁶ A prominent lawyer in the town presented the benefits of annexation to Kansas City, in that the community would have increased services, especially water, sewage, fire, and police, and the annexation would most likely result in increased property values for residents.¹¹⁷

At the same time, Kansas City leadership took notice of the small but fast-growing neighborhoods in the southland, and began to take measures to annex the area, or at least to keep them from incorporating or being annexed by another city, such as Grandview. Kansas City leaders noticed the difficult relationship St. Louis was having with its surrounding suburban towns on the other side of the state, and feared becoming locked in by communities that incorporate.¹¹⁸ In November of 1954, Mayor William Kemp and the Kansas City council created two ordinances with the purpose to begin the process of annexing Hickman Mills’s neighborhoods, particularly Ruskin Heights, which was figuratively exploding with tax-paying working-class and middle-class families. Designed as “holding measures,” the ordinances stated

¹¹⁶ “Hickman Chamber Discusses Benefits of Incorporation,” *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 20, May 28, 1953, 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ William H. Lucy and David L. Phillips, “Suburbs and the Census: Patterns of Growth and Decline,” report of the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2001), 18.

that Hickman Mills could not incorporate or be annexed by any other city.¹¹⁹ When residents were asked at the time about the measure, responses were tepid with “everyone taking the announcement...with a spirit of resignation.”¹²⁰ The city touted the measure to Hickman Mills as an offer of increased services and lower taxes, but locals expressed real doubt about the chances of saving any money.¹²¹ However, nothing further developed beyond this holding measure, at least for the next few years.

Two years later Hickman Mills’s residents would be addressed by Kansas City’s leaders, this time from L.P. Cookingham, the famous city manager of Kansas City.¹²² Cookingham presented to the Hickman Mills Chamber of Commerce the benefits of incorporation, such as a better and more abundant water supply, city police, fire departments, and garbage collection, as well as improved sewer systems.¹²³ However, this time, instead of Hickman Mills looking into the possibility of joining Kansas City, the city itself was about to introduce a measure to annex Hickman Mills, which would then go to ballot for Kansas City residents.¹²⁴ This measure never materialized in 1956, but it did begin discussion both in Kansas City and in Hickman Mills about the relationship the village would have with Kansas City in the future. Residents of Hickman Mills were also beginning to feel the pressure of annexation from another direction, as only a few weeks after Cookingham’s visit to the area, the mayor and city council from Grandview filed a bid with Jackson County to annex Hickman Mills.¹²⁵ Residents opposed this measure more

¹¹⁹ “City Moves to Annex Ruskin-Hickman,” *Grandview Advocate*, vol. 2, no. 45, November 18, 1954, 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Cookingham was a major presence and influential power in Kansas City, who served as city manager for nineteen years, from 1940 to 1959. He is credited with much of the highway system in the metropolitan area and was responsible for many of the reforms Kansas City underwent after the scandalous Pendergast era. See Richard B. Fowler, *Leaders in Our Town* (Independence, MO: Burd & Fletcher, 1952), 77-80.

¹²³ “Explain City Annex Plans,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 5, March 22, 1956, 1.

¹²⁴ “See Gain IN Annexing,” *Kansas City Times*, April 21, 1958.

¹²⁵ “Grandview Moves Ahead With Annex Plans for Hickman Mills,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 8, April 12, 1956, 1.

strongly than they did Kansas City's offer, but Grandview's move demonstrated that Hickman Mills's position was somewhat precarious. If they did not incorporate or declare themselves a town or city in their own right, the rapidly growing neighborhoods were not going to remain independent for long.

Increasing Growth and Urbanization of the Southland

Metropolitan growth in the 1950s throughout Kansas City and particularly in the southern metropolitan area contributed to a heightened feeling of encroachment sensed by Hickman Mills's residents. Even with clear advantages in the form of greater and faster access to Kansas City, as well as increased commerce and economic development, locals were not convinced at joining the city. Residents were concerned in particular that annexation would encourage a larger transformation that the small rural community cum suburb would experience. Regardless, the community began to grow and develop more, this time with roads and highways. In 1956, Kansas City, Jackson County, and the Missouri highway department worked together toward expanding a north-south highway through the center of Kansas City, Missouri and extending south through Grandview. An existing route would be widened, giving limited access to Hickman Mills and Grandview, as well as a new designation: Highway 71.¹²⁶ The limited access road would run south inside the western boundary of the school district and four access points, or entrance and exit ramps, would be in Hickman Mills at Bannister Road, Red Bridge Road, 115th street, and Blue Ridge Road.¹²⁷ The highway meant increased traffic to and from the southland, but it also created greater access to goods and services in Kansas City for the southern suburb. Shopping plazas along Bannister Road and further south at Truman's Corners would further develop, bringing financial capital to the area and by extension, the school district.

¹²⁶ "New Plan for 71 Highway through City," *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 16, May 31, 1956, 1. State Highway 71 still exists in Kansas City and joins Interstate Highway 49.

¹²⁷ "State Gives Details of 71 Highway Planning," *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 19, June 2, 1956, 1.

Zoning changes followed the road expansion. During the same summer that Missouri announced construction for highway 71, the Jackson County Planning Committee held a public hearing to propose and take feedback on rezoning tracts in Hickman Mills. These changes proved to be momentous for the community both in the short and long term. Three zoning alterations directly affected Hickman Mills, with two (Bannister Road and Holmes Street; Red Bridge and Grandview) rezoning from residential and farm areas to local business, and one (111th and 112th terrace) from residential to light industry.¹²⁸ The potential (and eventual) introduction of business and industry was an exciting prospect for residents of Hickman Mills, in that it offered economic vitality and further growth. For the school district, this meant that further monies could be collected from businesses, which would alleviate the tax burden Hickman Mills's residential property owners were paying. This meant that perhaps school bonds and levies could be passed with less difficulty than previous years.¹²⁹ At the same time, this shift in land use, even though it affected just a small part of the district, signaled to residents that the quiet area in which they lived was going to become a little more like Kansas City to the north.

In many ways, Hickman Mills has a somewhat strange origin for a community, not only because it is a misspelling of the original name of an informal village. By 1957, the area the school district covered was not an incorporated town or village, and had not joined any other municipality. The only unifying organization for the neighborhoods and communities was the school district, and the people who lived in Ruskin Heights, Ruskin Hills, on the border with Grandview, next to Longview Lake or Blue River Road, all considered themselves residents of Hickman Mills (or Ruskinites, after the high school). From early on in Hickman Mills's growth, the schools became the unifying factor for people living in the region. What was once a sleepy

¹²⁸ "Jackson County To Rezone Tracts in Area," *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 20, June 28, 1956, 1.

¹²⁹ As shall be shown in the following chapters, passing levies did not become any easier than in the early 1950s.

quasi-village with a blacksmithy and a mill became a first-ring suburb of Kansas City, which was cemented when road construction gave greater access to the larger metropolitan area. But suburbanization was not as peaceful or idyllic as Praver & Sons had homebuyers believe. The period of growth was fraught with strife over taxation and school debt, as district leaders had to fight difficult battles in order to build enough schools to accommodate the steady influx of families and children.

Additionally, because of state school funding laws, bond issues generally had to be passed with a two-thirds majority, which meant school supporters had to raise much more support than tax opponents. Every bond election the school board lost still carried a majority vote, usually only needing thirty or forty (usually five to ten percent) additional votes, which must have been extraordinarily frustrating for school leaders. And yet, between 1953 and 1957, the district managed to build three elementary schools and a high school, converting the previous building to a junior high. However, most of the growth was done with very little raising of property taxes, and Hickman Mills consistently kept its mill levy lower than the neighboring school districts. Dependence upon federal funds, specifically defense dollars, and an increase in property values that came with suburban development certainly solved some pressing issues for the schools, but would later lead to disaster. For people like Lewis Schultz, Joseph Nesbit, Thomas Hudson and Delmer Berg, the long-term ramifications of keeping property taxes very low took a backseat to the immediate problem of literally having too many students to teach.

While Hickman Mills's monetary and political situation seemed to be much improved by 1957, a major event changed the way the community and the school interacted with each other, at least for a time. On May 20, 1957, a tornado hit in southern Kansas City, destroying the high school, junior high, and part of C.A. Burke, along with a wide swath of homes and businesses

from the Ruskin Shopping Center to Ruskin Heights. Forty-eight people died, and over five hundred were injured.¹³⁰ After the devastation, the community came together to repair and reconstruct homes, schools, and businesses with the idealistic intention of rebuilding the community better than it was. Unfortunately, the ties between the school and the community were only temporarily strengthened, as political squabbles and scandals involving the new superintendent resulted, at best, in an uneasy relationship between those who lived in the school district and those who worked for it. Kansas City further complicated matters for the school district in its successful move in 1961 to annex Hickman Mills, which ushered in a new and somewhat problematic relationship between the community, the school, and then the city. This had enormous ramifications in the following decades.

¹³⁰ Thomas P. Grazulis, *Significant Tornadoes 1680-1991: A Chronology and Analysis of Events* (London, UK: Environmental Films, 1993), 897-98; Brewer, *Caught In the Path*, 4-7; Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 69-73.

Chapter 2: Storm and Stress

Hickman Mills in the Wake of the 1957 Tornado and a School Board Scandal, 1957-1960

While the Hickman Mills school district struggled to accommodate a large influx of school-aged children during a period of rapid population growth, economic development, and a housing boom, a string of successful bond issues and school expansions bode well for the future of the district and placed it in good stead financially by 1957. However, the sweeping destruction left by a tornado in May 1957 interrupted the district's momentum. This chapter addresses the physical destruction and rebuilding that occurred within the district, demonstrating how effectively the community could come together and repair its schools, with the assistance of large amounts of state and federal funding. The chapter also addresses a political storm that occurred at the end of the 1950s, as a fight broke out between the superintendent and three members of the school board.

The tornado was the storm from the chapter heading, but in some ways a more challenging event occurred within eighteen months, as an ugly and embarrassingly public battle between the school superintendent and part of the school board arose. This fight was the stress, which significantly taxed any trust the community had in the school district. However, the tornado and the contention between district leaders each resulted in a greater coming together for the community—one in a physical sense and the other in a philosophical and psychological manner. The tornado was a tragedy in that people died, many were injured, and homes and businesses were destroyed. My assertion that the community ultimately became stronger after the tornado does not mean the disaster served a positive role in the development of the school district. But the aftermath of the tornado translated to larger and newer facilities as well as greater financial stability for Hickman Mills School District. Likewise, corruption and school

board intrigue were not healthy or helpful for the Hickman Mills schools, but the repercussions of the school board dispute eventually led to a triple-A rating for the state and accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. In a period of three years, the people of Hickman Mills addressed a tragedy as well as a self-inflicted wound, and ultimately came out better for it with improved facilities and more focused direction.

Tornado

A strong storm arose west of Hickman Mills in Spring Hill, Kansas on May 20, 1957, then subsequently moved eastward, showing signs of a funnel forming among black clouds.¹ The storm traveled east towards Grandview, then north along the Kansas City Southern Railroad line, which led directly into the Hickman Mills School District.² At 7:35 p.m., a category F5 tornado touched the ground first in Martin City (west of Grandview), then traveled northeast through a corner of Grandview, directly towards and ultimately through the neighborhood of Ruskin Heights.³ The storm was over by 8 p.m., but managed to destroy the high school and the junior high, as well as large areas of the surrounding neighborhoods.⁴ Immediate reports revealed that thirty-one people died that evening and over two hundred were injured.⁵ By the

¹ Jami Parkison, *The Journey to Our Future: The History of Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 1902-2002* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 2002), 69.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.; Carolyn Glenn Brewer, *Caught In the Path: A Tornado's Fury, A Community's Rebirth* (Kansas City, MO: Prairie Figure Books, 1997), 106-07. Carolyn Brewer's *Caught In the Path* is essentially a collection of interviews with a large number of the residents of Hickman Mills who experienced the tornado in 1957. As many of the adults from that time are no longer living, Brewer's volume is an excellent resource for first-hand accounts of the event. This section of the chapter, which examines peoples' experiences during and after the tornado, employs quotes from the interviews with adults that Brewer recorded, in addition to drawing on interviews that I conducted with those who were children at the time of the tornado.

⁴ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 69; "Area Reels Under Tornado Impact," *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 14, May 23, 1957, 1.

⁵ "Tornado Kills 31, Injures 200," *Kansas City Times*, May 21, 1957, 1.

time everyone in the community was accounted for, numbers were revised to show that forty-eight people died and over five hundred were injured.⁶

Considering the damage to the high school and junior high, in one sense the community was very lucky. If the tornado had happened during the day, many more children probably would have died. Even though the tornado hit in the evening, it came at the end of the school year and preparations were being made at the high school for upcoming graduation, hence some school staff did not escape unscathed. The then high school principal and future superintendent Blaine Steck was at Ruskin High and recounted his surprise at the tornado, as it destroyed the building the night before the school's graduation ceremony:

I didn't really know there was a tornado coming until it hit the school building. It was the night between baccalaureate and graduation...I had no indication whatsoever of the weather being bad, but somehow I knew what it was when I heard the noise.⁷

Steck continued with his description, re-telling what happened when the tornado hit the building:

I had started up the glass hallway from the gym to meet the nurse in her office. I heard a rumbling sound like a freight train, but of course we do have a train track just west of the school, so it didn't attract my attention that much. We have those sounds all the time. It got louder and louder and things began to hit the roof. Then I figured it was something serious so I headed back to the music room. By this time the glass hallway windows were breaking and crashing. I got inside the double doors of the music room and boy, I'm telling you, I can still hear stuff hitting that roof and the sound of all those windows breaking. I just ducked down right there in the corner. There was a wastebasket there, so I tried to get that over my head, which I did to some extent. I'll have to say, I did a little praying that the roof wouldn't cave in on me.⁸

Luckily for Steck, it did not. But he did find himself trapped as he explained the immediate aftermath of the tornado on the high school:

I had debris all over me. Especially tar from the school roof that just went everywhere. I stepped out into the hallway from the band room. To get out of there I really had to push that door hard because of the debris piled up against it. I opened that door and I'd say the

⁶ Thomas P. Grazulis, *Significant Tornadoes 1680-1991: A Chronology and Analysis of Events* (London, UK: Environmental Films, 1993), 897-98; Brewer, *Caught In the Path*, 4-7; Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 69-73.

⁷ Blaine Steck, interview by Brewer, transcribed in Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 21.

⁸ Steck, quoted by *Ibid.*, 43.

hallway was filed up with everything. Not just building materials, but everything—tires, pieces of furniture. My first thought was of Mrs. Guyall [school nurse]. So I tried to go up to the entrance of the school to see if she was O.K. I waded through material, about seventy-five to one hundred feet. Of course when I got up there I couldn't see anything. The roof was gone, and most of the walls, and I knew there wasn't any use trying to find anyone because it was dark and the halls were piled high. They found her later that night buried by the entrance. The janitor was a few yards away from her, also dead.⁹

Only three people were in the building when the tornado came, Steck was the lone survivor.

The destruction was equally vivid for those outside of the high school. As a young boy, longtime Hickman Mills resident Robert Spearman, whose family lived near the high school at the time, also saw the tornado and its destruction up close and survived:

We were all home, my mother had just gotten home, and we all got into our car—including our neighbors. So two families, ten people, crammed in our Pontiac, I think my dad thought we could drive away, but we were stuck in it, no way to drive. So we got out of the car and I watched the high school roll by.¹⁰

The high school was a recently constructed building, having opened in 1955 with additions completed in 1956. The junior high, adjacent to the high school, was previously used as the high school.¹¹ In one night, the entirety of the district's facilities for secondary education were completely destroyed.

The high school and the junior high were not the only buildings to be directly affected by the tornado, as it also ripped apart a sizable section of Burke Elementary, another relatively new building which initially opened in 1954.¹² Building Principal Joseph Nesbit, also a future superintendent, was in that building during the tornado and shared his experience, saying:

I guess I was just sort of dazed and overwhelmed by the damage it had done to the school. After awhile, I went back home and tried to get some rest, but I had to clean up first...I went to bed but I couldn't go to sleep, so after awhile I got up, dressed and went back up to the school. I could hear water running, so I shut the water to the building off

⁹ Steck, quoted by Ibid., 67.

¹⁰ Robert Spearman, interview with author, August 25, 2012.

¹¹ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 65-66.

¹² Ibid., 60; Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 57.

and turned the gas off. I don't know how long I stayed around there, but I know I went back to the house around three a.m.¹³

When Nesbit headed home, he found that the National Guard had arrived (as ordered by Missouri Governor James T. Blair, Jr.) to maintain order and limit looting:

Very few people, as I recall, were out when I went home the second time. There was an eerie stillness to the whole scene. The National Guard had moved in, and I remember a guardsman on the corner of 113th and Bennington stopped me. But I convinced him that I was not a sightseer and that I lived down there and I was on my way home. I was just dumbfounded and dazed by the scope of destruction, and that was just in Hickman Mills.¹⁴

Later, Nesbit learned from the district insurance company that Burke elementary was thirty-five percent destroyed:

The upper wing, closest to the railroad tracks, was practically gone. It blew the walls down and blew part of the roof off the all-purpose room. The center wing was still standing but had damage to the roof and broken windows. The lower wing, or the west side, had mostly debris blown in and broken windows.¹⁵

Finding something positive to notice, Nesbit added, “fortunately, all the enrollment cards were in a safe in my office and they were all right.”¹⁶ In the aftermath of the tornado, the neighborhoods needed cleaning up and schools, businesses, and homes required rebuilding. Considering the devastation, then new superintendent Carl Wagner (hired three months before the tornado hit) immediately took action. Classes were cancelled for both high school and junior high students and high school graduation was postponed.¹⁷ After deliberating with the elementary principals, Wagner decided to end the school year early, most likely because there was only one week of school left in the semester.¹⁸

¹³ Joseph Nesbit, interview by Brewer, transcribed in Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 57.

¹⁴ Nesbit, quoted by Ibid.

¹⁵ Nesbit, quoted by Ibid., 123.

¹⁶ Nesbit, quoted by Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107. Brewer explains that the students decided to not sing their planned graduation song “Winds Across the Sky.”

¹⁸ Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 123; “Area Reels Under Tornado Impact,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 14, May 23, 1957, p 1.

Reconstruction and Urbanization

To the credit of Missouri governor James T. Blair, Jr. and Kansas City Mayor H. Roe Bartle, residents of Hickman Mills quickly received assistance. The governor declared martial law and sent out part of the National Guard, while the mayor sent police and firefighters into the Hickman Mills neighborhoods to limit damage and search for survivors.¹⁹ Mayor Maurice Henrie of neighboring Grandview also sent help from the city's police and fire departments. Additionally, the 110th Engineers Army Reserve from Richards-Gebaur also arrived to assist.²⁰ Eventually, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Jackson County Health Department, along with multiple local stores and businesses became involved in search-and-rescue efforts, then property recovery.²¹ Nesbit remembered preparations during the summer after the tornado and before the new school year:

The Red Cross moved right in and started serving meals from the Burke kitchen. The kitchen part of the school wasn't hurt much, but we did have a problem with the roof over the all-purpose room where the meals were served. It didn't bother them or slow them down. I ate many meals there that summer. Several of us principals worked at least five days a week salvaging school materials. We moved a lot of furniture around, and to different buildings, trying to get ready for the next school year. None of us got a vacation that summer, but no one complained. Just before school started, we all went down to the Lake of the Ozarks together for a long weekend.²²

Of course, the schools were not the only part of Hickman Mills that needed repair and reconstruction. After the tornado, the community underwent a massive effort to rebuild the neighborhoods destroyed by the storm. On Saturday, May 25, the Ruskin Homes Association held a meeting in the parking lot of Ruskin shopping center to discuss insurance, disaster aid, and reconstruction with community members. Estimates for repairs totaled \$75 million, with \$25

¹⁹ Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 125; "Area Reels," 1.

²⁰ Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 125.

²¹ *Ibid.*; "Reconstruction Is In Full Swing in the Tornado Area," *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 17, June 13, 1957, 1.

²² Nesbit, quoted by Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 138.

million under federal disaster review.²³ The meeting included state, federal, and local organizations in order to answer questions about insurance, taxes, and schools. Additionally, Prayer & Sons created a reconstruction company, even though homeowners were not obligated to have their homes rebuilt by Prayer.²⁴

After assessing the damage, businesses were rebuilt and new homes were constructed, usually with much fanfare. By October, Prayer & Sons were advertising improved housing in Ruskin Hills, with three or four bedrooms and a new feature that was welcomed by the community—basements.²⁵ Truman Corners, located near the intersection of Blue Ridge Road and Highway 71, was another victim of the tornado but reopened in mid-November, with forty-five thousand shoppers celebrating the rebuilt mall.²⁶ Ruskin Heights Shopping Center, just one and a half miles northeast of Truman Corners along Blue Ridge Road, was completely destroyed in the storm. However, by early December the plaza re-opened with eleven of its original nineteen stores returning, as well as nine new vendors.²⁷

This recovery brought housing expansion to the southland, and as Ruskin Heights and Hills were continuing to expand with new homes and commercial developments, the sleepy village of Hickman Mills was slowly urbanizing. As discussed in chapter one, highways were

²³ Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 141; “Ahead on Reconstruction In Ruskin School District,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 23, July 25, 1957, 1, 4.

²⁴ Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 141.

²⁵ “All New Ruskin Hills!” Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 33, October 3, 1957, 5. In both formal and informal conversations during my research, residents of Hickman Mills spoke about both the devastation of the tornado and how it redefined priorities in housing in Hickman Mills, as basements became a necessity, not a luxury. Those I interviewed who cited the importance of basements include Carla Baker, interview with author, August 14, 2012; Colleen Hamilton, interview with author, August 14, 2012; Robert Spearman, interview with author, August 25, 2012; Allison Wade, interview with author, September 8, 2012. Hickman Mills has not had a tornado touch down again or even come near the area since 1957.

²⁶ “Truman Corners Shopping Center in Grand Opening” Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 38, November 7, 1957, 13; “Throng to Opening of Shopping Center,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 40, November 21, 1957, 1, 4. While Truman Corners sits within the boundaries of the city of Grandview, it is also situated in the Hickman Mills School District. Tax money from the plaza was split between the municipality and the school district, which led to some fighting between the two communities over school boundaries, as will be discussed further in chapter 3.

²⁷ “Ruskin Center Reopening is Thursday, Dec 12,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 42, December 5, 1957, 1.

beginning to enter the Hickman Mills area, resulting in increased traffic. With increased traffic and housing developments, residents in some of the neighborhoods like Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills began to demand street lighting.²⁸ However, the hurdle for residents in obtaining lighting was that Hickman Mills existed as a separate entity than Kansas City or Grandview, but was an unincorporated village with no real central leadership. Additionally, Jackson County did not offer street lighting for residential neighborhoods. As a solution, people in Hickman Mills turned to their home associations, who had been overseeing cleaning, park maintenance, and sewage for the neighborhoods after construction, with association dues paying for the services.²⁹ The Ruskin Homes Association conducted a study in early 1958, determining that it could use association dues to pay for electricity for 176 streetlights in the neighborhood, purchased from Kansas City Power & Light.³⁰ This was possible because at the same time, Ruskin Heights, Ruskin Village, and Ruskin Hills neighborhoods were all transitioning their sewage operations from their own neighborhood associations to Jackson County, with an offer by Praver & Sons to cover the cost of further construction. Neighborhood dues could then go toward electricity and not sewage, as the costs of water and drainage would come from county taxes.³¹ This was an early marker of the trend towards increasing urbanization for Hickman Mills. As will be discussed in chapter 3, one of the advantages residents experienced by being annexed by Kansas

²⁸ “Study Street Lighting Plan for Ruskin Heights,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 52, February 6, 1958, 1.

²⁹ The neighborhood associations served various functions, as laid out in their charter—they also provided traffic and street signs, garbage cans, street repair, and had the power to enact levies to cover unforeseen costs. State of Missouri Certificate of Incorporation, Ruskin Hills Homes Association, Inc., signed Walter H. Herman, Secretary of State, April 16, 1956. Papers of the Ruskin Hills Homes Association.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ “Present Plans for New Ruskin Sewer System,” *Jackson County Advocate* 68th year, no. 1, February 13, 1958, 1. One could imagine that Praver & Sons was volunteering to cover sewer lines out of goodwill after the tornado aftermath, but probably saw the incentive in having expanded sewer systems for its own construction and sale of suburban housing.

City in 1961 was the large municipality offered improved services such as water, electricity, fire, and police at a lower cost than Jackson County could provide.

School Rebuilding

Just as the neighborhoods in Hickman Mills were modernizing, the school district made efforts in the 1960s to expand facilities. While the devastation in 1957 remained forefront in the minds of the residents of Hickman Mills, in some ways, Hickman Mills as a school district came out of the tornado better for having been hit by it. The district's insurance policy covered the cost of repair and much of the rebuilding that occurred resulted in larger, more "state of the art" facilities that were largely financed by a combination of insurance and disaster relief funds. District leadership had been working towards expanding schools for almost a decade and it took advantage of the recovery period to develop as much as possible. Principal Steck pointed out the "silver linings" that came for the district after the tornado:

The high school was built back with a grant from the government. The old brick junior high building was torn down and the new high school extended up into that area. The building was built back so a third floor could be added. It was most unfortunate that the building was destroyed, but the community and district were better off. They got so much more back.³²

Steck continued, extolling the virtues of the school district staff who worked very hard in the summer of 1957 to be ready to open the schools in the fall and positing that the tornado gave a reason for the community to come together in order to help each other.³³ Burke principal Joseph Nesbit echoed Steck's sentiments and asserted that not only did immediate community members help rebuild, but the efforts of politicians like Stuart Symington helped the school "get the

³² Brewer, *Caught in the Path*, 152.

³³ *Ibid.*

wheels moving and cut through red tape” with the federal government in order to obtain disaster relief funds that essentially funded reconstruction efforts.³⁴

The insurance money together with federal and state disaster relief was important for the school board in rebuilding, but it was the creative use of funds in reconstruction that allowed Hickman Mills to build better and larger facilities than it had before the tornado. Local television affiliate KCMO news director Joe Kramer lived in Ruskin Heights and shared how school leaders used disaster relief funds to rebuild the high school:

We had a young school superintendent, Dr. Carl Wagner. Thanks to Senator Symington and other lawmakers we were getting a lot of disaster-relief funding, much of it was going to the schools. Ruskin High School was a fairly new school at the time, but pretty badly wrecked. Dr. Wagner asked whatever federal authorities he would have asked, whether it was necessary to reconstruct Ruskin as it was, or could the money be spent to produce a more efficient facility. They said, “Hey, it’s your money. Spend it the way you feel it should be spent, as long as it meets the purpose that it formally served.” He had it redesigned for more efficiency, more usable space for educational purposes. He used the federal aid proceeds from that disaster to very beneficial effect.³⁵

The federal funding came with some caveats, one being that monies provided be used only to rebuilt and not expand.³⁶ So builders, in conjunction with the school board, came up with a plan to be able to build a larger school with the 1.9 million dollars received from a combination of a federal grant and school insurance money; they constructed the second floor and set up plans for a future third floor initially, with an eleven foot high “crawl space” underneath, which was later turned into the main floor.³⁷ This bit of trickery allowed for the district to use funds for a two-story building in order to really construct a three-story one.

³⁴Ibid., 152-153. Stuart Symington was a senator from Missouri who was instrumental in obtaining disaster relief funds for Hickman Mills. The school district was so appreciative that it named Symington Elementary after him when it was completed in 1959.

³⁵ Ibid., 158-159.

³⁶ Ibid., 157; Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 78-79.

³⁷ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 79; “Ahead on Reconstruction In Ruskin School District,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 23, July 25, 1957, 1.

Even with federal and state help, repairing the schools and preparing the district to begin the 1957-58 school year was not an easy task. Fortunately, construction on the new high school was swift and by July, school leaders felt confident that they would have the building finished enough to accommodate the anticipated seven-hundred high school students coming in the fall.³⁸ The district was also finishing construction of a new elementary school, William H. Johnson on Marsh Avenue (between Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills neighborhoods), when the tornado hit. The damage done to the building, similar to that suffered by Burke Elementary, was covered by the district's insurance policy, hence repairs were made quickly and both schools received students in September of 1957.³⁹ While the tornado was not a welcome event for the Hickman Mills community, school leaders like Wagner were able to take advantage of recovery efforts and funding to provide better schools than had existed in the first place. While the tornado was traumatic for the community on the whole and tragic for those who were affected by injury and loss of life, the aftermath of the unfortunate event improved the Hickman Mills school district.

District Growth...Again

Insurance money and federal disaster aid only covered reconstruction and it was not long until, once again, school leaders began asking the community anew for more money in order to expand educational facilities. As described in chapter one, Hickman Mills was struggling to accommodate the large influx of students that resulted from population growth inside the district's borders. And yet, as in the past, Hickman Mills received serendipitous monetary support even while it struggled to adjust to the increase in student numbers. This time, district leaders were given a gift of land to build a school. JM and Mary Baptiste, successful chemists and business owners, lived on a large estate called "Sleepy Hollow" near 103rd Street and

³⁸ "School Men Discuss Aid for Tornado Reconstruction," *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 22, July 18, 1957, 1.

³⁹ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 88.

Highway 71.⁴⁰ Before JM's death in 1944, the two had decided to donate their land for educational or public use.⁴¹ In July 1957, only two months after the tornado, Mary, who took over as president of the company and manager of the estate after her husband passed away, offered fifteen acres of her land (valued at \$45,000) to the school district with the expressed desire to construct a school building.⁴² School board member Marvin Langford quickly accepted the gifted land and declared that a junior high would be built, which would replace the junior high destroyed in the tornado.⁴³

However fortuitous, unforeseen gifts did not completely alleviate Hickman Mills's overcrowding situation. As in the previous years, the school board needed to buy more land and to build more schools so it began to take steps to do so, actions which were met with opposition from anti-tax citizen groups. By the end of 1957, Langford suggested the district acquire an additional fifteen acres to build another elementary school, with the intention of purchasing the land from the developer Praver & Sons. This endeavor would cost the district about \$45,000.⁴⁴ In a plea to the community to approve the purchase, board members Langford and Robert Barden wrote an open letter in the *Jackson County Advocate*, describing the reasons the district needed the land:

1. The Citizen's Committee recommends two schools be built in any area with 650 homes in construction.
2. We need 81 more rooms by 1959 in order to accommodate 1st through 8th graders.

⁴⁰ The Baptists founded United Chemicals Company in 1913, which primarily produced different kinds of soap and disinfectants. See "J.M. Baptiste," Kansas City Centennial Souvenir Program, 1950, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, MO.

⁴¹ "J.M. Baptiste," 13; Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 92.

⁴² "Baptiste Gives Portion of Estate for School Construction," *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 22, July 18, 1957, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ The irony of receiving a gift of land valued at \$45,000 and then wanting to purchase more land valued at \$45,000 was not lost on residents who did not appreciate the rapid expansion of the district and what they perceived as uncontrolled construction. "Vote for Big Land Deal in Face of Heavy Opposition," *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 43, December 12, 1957, 1, 3.

3. At Johnson Elementary we have 300 students, which is too many. Burke has 311, also too many students.
4. The overflow from Johnson and Burke is enough for a new school.⁴⁵

The paper gave some space to the opposition in the same article, by listing the two chief reasons to not support the land purchase: “the land costs too much and other, more affordable spaces are available for purchase and development in the district.”⁴⁶ In the face of some opposition, the land was approved for purchase and the district began making preparations for the construction of another elementary school in Ruskin Heights to relieve pressure from Johnson (which was just opened in 1957) and Burke. The building would not be finished until 1959 and would be named Symington elementary, after US Senator Stuart Symington, who had been instrumental in obtaining federal disaster funds for the school district after the 1957 tornado.⁴⁷

By the beginning of the 1958-59 school year, there were eight elementary schools in the district. The original one-room schools, Union Point, Holmes Park, Rockford, and Hickman, had undergone small expansions and were operating as first-grade centers. Larger elementary schools like Burke (1954), Truman (1956), Westridge (1956), and Johnson (1957) were handling the bulk of the Hickman Mills students, with Symington soon to be added to the ranks in 1959.⁴⁸ Most of these newer schools were built near the Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills neighborhoods. Ruskin High, the new high school replacing that destroyed in the tornado, was completed quickly, with Baptiste Junior High anticipated to open by the following school year. The school system’s facilities, like the physical elements of the community surrounding it, had effectively recovered from the devastation of the tornado.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 90; “Ruskin Gives Distribution of Classes for Symington School Pupils,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 68th year, no. 24, July 24, 1958, 1.

⁴⁸ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 85.

Raising Money

While the tornado was not a distant memory for the Hickman Mills community, life was returning to normal in the southland, which meant that the district was still dealing with overcrowding and how to build more schools without making residents feel overtaxed. The superintendent and the school board in Hickman Mills again began their monumental efforts to pass bond issues and fund the construction of more schools to accommodate the steadily increasing growth in the district's neighborhoods. As before, school leaders deployed their Citizen's Committee, put full-page ads in the newspaper, and largely promised voters that they would not see significant increases on their property taxes. The first major goal for the school board was to build Symington Elementary, as the district had already purchased the land for the school. The board asked the public to vote late in January 1958 on a \$500,000 bond to construct the school, which would also provide within-district kindergarten for the first time.⁴⁹ The board promised that no taxes would increase, as the funding for the bond would come from a new influx of money, primarily tax dollars from the renovated Truman Corners shopping plaza.⁵⁰ The strategy worked, and Hickman Mills School District handily won the two-thirds majority vote needed to pass the bond issue, with 1124 voting for it and 218 against.⁵¹ Hickman Mills was now the most financially secure it had ever been, largely thanks to relief funds that allowed for school construction and reconstruction without assuming further debt. Additionally, public sympathy for the schools in the wake of the tornado meant that bond issues, for a time at least, were not as difficult to pass.⁵² Unfortunately, the pro-schooling public sentiment was not going

⁴⁹ "Half Million Bond Election to Ruskin District Voters," *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 49, January 16, 1958, 1, 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; "The Future of Our Children...Must Come First!" Full-Page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 50, January 23, 1958, 6.

⁵¹ "Ruskin Board Happy Over Bond Election," *Jackson County Advocate*, 67th year, no. 51, January 30, 1958, 1.

⁵² Spearman, Baker, Hamilton, and Wade, interviews with author.

to last long, as a district-wide controversy came to light within two weeks of the successful January bond issue.

School Board Squabbles

After success in constructing more school buildings and expanding the educational facilities within the district, there was opportunity for self-congratulation and even celebration among Hickman Mills's school leaders. However, on February 3, 1959, during an executive session (closed to the public) of the school board, Superintendent Carl Wagner announced his resignation, having served in the office for two years.⁵³ Wagner was not subtle in describing why he was asking for an early termination of his contract, stating that evening to the board:

I knew that there was this problem on the board within thirty days after I arrived in Hickman Mills...constant badgering at board meetings and by interference with administration in matters of personnel and in placement problems...no able administrator would stay under the circumstances.⁵⁴

Wagner's abrupt resignation brought to light frequent disagreements between himself and three members of the school board, in particular with Marvin Langford, whom Wagner accused of overstepping his role in "the hiring of an incompetent teacher" against the superintendent's own wishes.⁵⁵ The teacher was most likely a chemistry teacher at the high school, as Wagner did not want to renew his contract, but the board, at Langford's insistence, did so.⁵⁶ Eventually, this accusation of misuse of authority became more serious as Wagner's story became public and the *Jackson County Advocate* began investigating discord among the school board.⁵⁷

⁵³ "Dr. Wagner Resigns as Head of Hickman Mills School District," *Jackson County Advocate*, 68th year, no. 52, February 5, 1959, 1, 10. After moving from Flint, Michigan, he began working in the district on February 1, 1957 on a twenty-nine month contract, as discussed by "Select New Ruskin District Superintendent," *Jackson County Advocate*, 66th year, no. 47, January 2, 1957, 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Dr. Wagner Resigns," 1.

⁵⁶ "Report on Probe of Hickman Mills School," *Nevada Daily Mail*, February 2, 1960, 3.

⁵⁷ The situation surrounding Wagner's resignation became clearer after the NEA did a nine-month study and reported on the practices of the Hickman Mills School Board, which resulted in Langford's resignation, as will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

Combined pressure from the local newspaper and citizen's groups led the school board to be more frank in addressing the nature of its troubles. As members of the board began sharing their notes from past meetings, it became apparent that there was a steady build-up of tensions between Wagner and Langford, which culminated in an argument about the planning, construction, and staffing of Symington Elementary school. The initial fight between the two men occurred while the district was looking to purchase land for the construction of a new elementary school. The board had found land on the eastern edges of the district, so Wagner negotiated with the developer. The Superintendent wanted the school site to be bounded on all four sides by roads, but the developer was not willing to build that many streets and cancelled contract negotiations. Langford accused Wagner of purposefully sabotaging construction so that the district would purchase land in Ruskin Heights, which supposedly benefited Wagner, as he lived in the neighborhood.⁵⁸ Later inquiry found that there was no personal gain for Wagner in having the school located in a Ruskin neighborhood and also he had no ties to Praver & Sons, the developers for Ruskin. Additionally, the board discovered after the fact that it saved significantly on transportation costs by having the school located in Ruskin Heights.⁵⁹

When the school was built, Wagner and Langford then disagreed about who should run it. On November 4, 1958, Superintendent Wagner presented to the board his recommendations for new hires, focusing on Symington Elementary, which was to open in the fall of 1959. Langford, with the immediate support of board members Robert Barden and Wallace Pinkepank, overruled Wagner's suggestion of hiring Virginia Brown as principal of the new Symington Elementary, instead wishing to appoint Bruce Tucker who had been serving as principal at the four smaller

⁵⁸ *Hickman Mills, Missouri, A Study of Conflict Between Administrative and Policy-making Agencies in a School System; Report of an Investigation*, National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, Report to National Education Association of the United States and to Consolidated District #1, Hickman Mills (Washington D.C.: NEA Press, January 1960), 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* The district saved about \$1200 a month.

elementary schools.⁶⁰ Wagner was resistant, but eventually agreed to place Tucker as principal on a one-year trial basis, with Brown taking over as principal of Union Point, Rockford, Hickman, and Holmes Park.⁶¹ Brown subsequently wrote a letter to the board exclaiming her dismay and embarrassment at the board's actions, particularly about the discussion of her potential position at board meetings with neither her knowledge nor her presence.⁶² Wagner later complained that the "trial period" never went into effect and that the board, led by Langford, essentially hired a school principal against the superintendent's wishes.⁶³

While disagreements existed before this event, animosity between the superintendent and the school board (chiefly three members of the school board) increased significantly, with each side was engaging in name-calling and accusations of impropriety, sometimes to the point of absurdity. For example, Langford, who taught Sociology at Southeast High in the Kansas City Missouri School District, accused Wagner of pressuring KCMSD Superintendent James Hazlett to fire him.⁶⁴ Wagner and some of the board members also brought up Langford's previous role as educator and principal in the Hickman Mills district, claiming that he was trying to assume more leadership and power than what was appropriate for a board member.⁶⁵ On a more personal level, Wagner and his supporters also accused Langford of nepotism, as his wife worked as a librarian at the high school.⁶⁶

Unease between Wagner and three of the school board members escalated in the first part of 1959 when "Langford & Co." (the nickname given to Langford, Barden, and Pinkepank by

⁶⁰ "Joint Statement by Gerred, Wall, & Stewart," *Jackson County Advocate*, 69th year, no. 2, February 19, 1959, 5, 10; "Report on Probe of Hickman Mills School," 3; "A School Split Holds Hickman Mills," *Kansas City Star*, November 21, 1958, 5.

⁶¹ *A Study of Conflict*, 14; "A School Split," 5.

⁶² "Joint Statement," 10.

⁶³ *A Study of Conflict*, 15.

⁶⁴ "Joint Statement," 1; "The Moving Finger," *Jackson County Advocate*, 68th year, no. 39, November 6, 1959, 1, 10.

⁶⁵ "Dr. Wagner Resigns," 10; *A Study of Conflict*, 26-27.

⁶⁶ "Joint Statement," 1.

their detractors) expressed their formal opposition to the superintendent and were unwilling to renew his contract, with the vote to renew a tie at 3-3.⁶⁷ In cases such as this, the Jackson County superintendent would normally then mediate and make an ultimate decision, but he refused to do so until after the April school board elections for Hickman Mills, in case a change in the school board would result in a change in the contract vote.⁶⁸ Wagner decided he had enough; rather than waiting, he found a position in Oklahoma and asked for an early termination of his contract.⁶⁹

But Wagner did not just resign and leave. Within a short period of time the superintendent was making suggestions to the public as to how a school board should operate, saying, "...the board should be strictly a policy making body. If any board member ignores this, the citizens should insist that he remove himself from office."⁷⁰ Wagner continued, stating, "if a board member has consistently given erroneous reports to the board, he should remove himself from the board."⁷¹ While refraining from using his name, it was clear that Wagner was referring specifically to Langford in his public accusations. The members of the board themselves divided into two camps: those supporting Langford (Langford, Barden, Pinkepank) and those supporting Wagner (Glen Gerred, Bill T. Wall, Barney Stewart). Other board members also began issuing public statements. Gerred made an immediate and scathing pronouncement to the newspaper after Wagner's resignation:

As long as the board of education usurps the powers of the superintendent they destroy his effectiveness...three members of the board were determined to undermine his [Wagner's] position as superintendent by making administrative decisions on personnel...As long as this condition on the Board exists, we will not be able to get and

⁶⁷ "Dr. Wagner Resigns," 1. Several newspapers employed the phrase "Langford & Co." in their reporting on the incident.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

retain a competent superintendent. The three members... must keep their hands off administration and make policy as everyone knows is the duty of a board.⁷²

Not to be outdone, Stewart added a shorter, yet fierier statement, placing blame for Hickman Mills's non-accreditation status with the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools directly towards Langford & Co.:

Well, Mr. Langford and Mr. Barden have finally succeeded in their efforts to get rid of another superintendent of schools. The job of finding a replacement will not be easy. No competent administrator will consider coming into a system that is not accredited because school teachers on the Board of Education insist on telling them how to do their job.⁷³

The last Wagner supporter, Bill Wall, gave a similar statement as the other two men, adding his congratulations to Wagner for finding "a more responsible position."⁷⁴ Robert Barden, the board president, remained more cautious in his wording, referring to the fact that the board voted unanimously to accept Wagner's resignation and adding, "I don't agree that the school board practices nepotism, which is actually voting to hire relatives to work for the district."⁷⁵ Neither Pinkepank nor Langford made immediate statements to the public.

Almost simultaneously with the board statements, members of the community began to speak out against certain board members. F. Russell Millin, a former board member, went on record to declare that Barden and Langford would always remain an obstacle to having a strong superintendent.⁷⁶ Local evangelist, Reverend Paul Lambert, suggested that since the superintendent had resigned, the entire board should also step down so a special election could be held by the county superintendent to create a new board.⁷⁷ While claiming that this would prove to the citizens of the district that the board wanted "to act in good faith," it was also self-

⁷² "Dr. Wagner Resigns," 1.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. This seems a particularly odd statement, as the charges of nepotism seem pretty clear. Perhaps he was asserting that the fights the board and the superintendent were having were not associated with hiring relatives.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

servicing in the sense that Lambert was running for school board in the April election, and if the entire board resigned, he would be much more likely to win a seat in the election.⁷⁸

Adding to the tensions within the school board was Hickman Mills's status as an accredited institution. It was classified as an "AA" school by the Missouri State Department of Education, missing its triple A rating mostly because of student to teacher ratios, which the district was trying to improve by building or expanding so frequently.⁷⁹ However, it was not accredited at all by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (usually called North Central Association), by virtue of justifications similar to those of the state department of education, but also because board practices were not in line with North Central policies.⁸⁰ This became one of the main points creating animosity between board members, as Langford & Co. strongly disagreed with the other three board members over the extent of authority a board should exert in areas of staffing.⁸¹ Langford felt that the North Central Association was being too restrictive in its description of what a school board member is allowed to do and argued that he had a right to exert more authority over the daily operation of the district's schools.⁸²

Reverend Lambert's call for the board to resign resonated with a segment of the citizens of Hickman Mills and a petition began to circulate, demanding that the entire board step down.⁸³ Within two weeks it had gained 2,578 signatures and the board began to have a serious conversation about what it should do to deal with the debacle.⁸⁴ President Barden publicly stated that he saw no legal imperative to his stepping down, but Barney Stewart succumbed to pressure

⁷⁸ "Dr. Wagner Resigns," 10.

⁷⁹ Ibid.; "Joint Statement," 1.

⁸⁰ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 85; "Joint Statement," 1.

⁸¹ *A Study of Conflict*, 13.

⁸² "Joint Statement," 1.

⁸³ "Wagner Supporters Offer to Resign from Ruskin Board," *Jackson County Advocate*, 69th year, no. 1, February 12, 1959, 1, 4.

⁸⁴ "Rebuff Petitioners Again in Efforts to Secure Resignations," *Jackson County Advocate*, 69th year, no. 3, February 26, 1959, 1, 10.

and handed in his resignation, only to rescind it two days later, arguing that his leaving would give an upper hand to Langford, Barden, and Pinkepank.⁸⁵ “The way I see it, it is my duty and the duty of the whole board to resign,” stated Stewart, “but it would do no more than give immediate control of the board to Marvin Langford, three to two, if I handed in my resignation.”⁸⁶ Both Stewart and Glen Gerred were finishing their terms in April and were not seeking re-election; instead they expressed support for two specific candidates, Don Newkirk and Reverend Lambert, who had declared their allegiance to Superintendent Wagner.⁸⁷

Relations between board members had become acrimonious enough that people in the community began to call for investigations into the board itself. Six prominent pastors from the local Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Community Christian churches wrote an open letter to the Hickman Mills Citizens Committee asking for an official investigation into the school board.⁸⁸ The letter pointed out that the arguments between the board and administration “caused unfavorable publicity for our school district” and were “not in the best interests of our school district and our children.”⁸⁹ As part of their recommendation to investigate the school board, the clergymen requested that the Citizens Committee specifically look into the “ethics and conduct of the School Board and the Administration,” and that they involve “the State Department of Education and the Missouri State Teachers Association.”⁹⁰ For an organization whose original purpose was to help school leaders convince the community to pass bond issues, the Citizens Committee was thrust into a position of considerable power.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10; “Wagner Supporters,” 4.

⁸⁶ “Rebuff Petitioners,” 10.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “The Moving Finger,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 69th year, no. 2, February 19, 1959, 1, 4. The Citizens Committee was a collection of different community leaders whose chief purpose was to assist the board in winning bond elections, but, in 1959, the group was being called upon almost as a secondary school board.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Six lawyers, including former board member, F. Russell Millin, issued a separate call to action, one that ultimately resulted in more change for the board. Deploring the lack of accreditation for the district by the North Central Association and the infighting on the board, the lawyers appealed to the National Education Association and asked for an official investigation into the board, the school administrative staff, and school policies.⁹¹ Within two weeks of the initial public accusations made by Wagner and the outcry that followed, Langford, Barden, and Pinkepank made official statements in the local paper.⁹² Langford explained to residents the difference between state accreditation and accreditation by the North Central Association, stating that while being recognized by the NCA was a good goal, it was most important to be recognized by the state, which Hickman Mills was.⁹³ Langford assured that the district wanted to have an AAA rating, but needed more kindergarten classes to do so, rather than changes to board policies.⁹⁴ Langford then went on the attack, pointing out that Wagner had worked in nine different districts over the last sixteen years, insinuating that he was not capable of remaining a superintendent in any district.⁹⁵

As for nepotism, Langford again defended himself by pointing out that his wife had worked in the district since 1943, while he became a board member in 1951. Additionally, Langford stated that he consistently abstained from voting whenever her contract renewal was submitted to the board for review.⁹⁶ He then ended his statement with, “it is more important to know what is right rather than who is right.”⁹⁷ Both Barden and Pinkepank took similar stances in their own statements, mostly attempting to address rumors of nepotism in the district and

⁹¹ “Wagner Supporters,” 4; Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 85.

⁹² “Langford, Barden, Pinkepank Statements,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 69th year, no. 2, February 19, 1959, 1, 5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

factionalism on the board.⁹⁸ Pinkepank specifically attacked accusations of factionalism, claiming that there were very few 3-3 votes and that he was not part of a bloc.⁹⁹ All three men claimed they would support an investigation done by the NEA, which was echoed in statements issued by the board members who supported Wagner.¹⁰⁰ All six of the board members made public declarations that were taken on the same day of a special board meeting, during which the members unanimously voted to invite a delegation from the NEA to interview the board, staff members, former superintendents, and principals, as part of an official investigation.¹⁰¹

Hickman Mills Under Scrutiny

The individuals who would eventually conduct the investigation of Hickman Mills belonged to a special committee created by the National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, an organization formed in 1941 under the NEA, whose chief purpose was to “investigate controversies involving teachers and schools.”¹⁰² Oscar E. Thompson, professor of education at Iowa State Teachers College, headed the committee with six other members—a county superintendent of schools, a school superintendent, two school board members, and two teachers. Two of the members of the investigative body were Kansans and the rest were from throughout the Midwest.¹⁰³ After the Hickman Mills school board approved the request for an investigation, the measure was then passed to the district teachers, who voted in March 1959, ninety-two in favor and seventy-four against.¹⁰⁴ Staff members came to Kansas City and conducted preliminary interviews on April 5th and 6th, with the committee

⁹⁸ Ibid., 1, 5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; “Joint Statement,” 1, 10.

¹⁰¹ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 85; *A Study of Conflict*, 7.

¹⁰² Another chief purpose of the body was to “investigate alleged subversive teaching and to expose any teacher whose actions are found to be inimical to the best interests of our country,” thus illustrating that this was a group highly tied to the Cold War and anti-communism. *A Study of Conflict*, 2.

¹⁰³ *A Study of Conflict*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

itself arriving in May to do in-depth interviews with board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, and residents.¹⁰⁵ The committee also sent questionnaires to ninety-three community members.¹⁰⁶

When the interviews and surveys were finished, the committee left and then came back in February 1960 to present its findings to the district. The public meeting was held at Ruskin High in order to have enough for all the interested parties to attend. Even so, the room was packed.¹⁰⁷ The committee began the meeting by declaring that the perception of the primary issue facing Hickman Mills was just a conflict of personalities was “an oversimplification of a situation which proved to be complex in nature and influenced by many factors.”¹⁰⁸ It found that there were essentially two factions of board members, that one member in particular—the most senior member (an indirect naming of Marvin Langford)—was leading one faction and had too much influence. Ultimately, the entire board was at fault because it had not written a solid and explicit set of policies for members to follow.¹⁰⁹ As for the action towards Wagner, the committee determined that the superintendent had failed in creating a positive relationship with the board, the community, and the staff. According to the NEA commission, Wagner was autocratic and antagonistic and was not a simple victim of the board.¹¹⁰

The committee’s finding did not exonerate the board or Langford for Wagner’s treatment, as the committee chided the board for being antagonistic and unprofessional in demeanor, especially at board meetings. Additionally, the NEA investigators discovered that members of the board conducted secret meetings and “repeated vicious rumors” about the previous school

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰⁷ Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 85; “NEA Presents Ruskin Findings,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 70th year, no. 1, February 11, 1960, 1.

¹⁰⁸ *A Study of Conflict*, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 28-29.

leader, Superintendent Schultz (1952-1956), and in essence, forced him to resign.¹¹¹ The investigation found that the members of the board were unprofessional, unethical, and “became sidetracked from the goal of all school boards, that of providing as good a school system as possible for the school district.”¹¹² These were strong words considering the expansion the board helped foster for Hickman Mills’s schools.¹¹³

The committee ended its report with recommendations for the board, superintendent, teachers, and community members, with most advice dedicated to how boards of education should operate. Its suggestions focused on how the board needed to re-create itself as a policy-making unit and urged the group to create a handbook of school policies for board members to abide by.¹¹⁴ The committee report also urged school board members to make a formal apology to Lewis Schultz for making a decision that was “unduly influenced by rumor and unfounded charges” and that they should institute a policy to ensure a similar action would never happen again.¹¹⁵ Finally, the board was instructed to “expect and accept the resignation or retirement forthwith of the senior member of the Board of Education.”¹¹⁶ The committee found his actions towards superintendents unethical and concluded that he had taken advantage of the board’s lack of written policies.¹¹⁷ Marvin Langford was out.

Aftermath

Some changes were already underway at the board level before the NEA special commission made its report. In April 1959, the district had a board election, which resulted in

¹¹¹ Ibid., 27. I have been unable to determine what the “vicious rumors” were, but the commission’s findings help explain why Schultz suddenly resigned and took another posting as a superintendent in rural Missouri.

¹¹² Ibid., 26.

¹¹³ To be fair, the committee meted out blame to almost everyone involved with the school board issue—the board members, the superintendents, teachers, administrative staff, even community members. No one was innocent in this situation.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 33-34.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

the greatest voter turnout in the history of the district, most likely due to the public controversy related to the school board's actions against the superintendent. Don Newkirk and Art McElroy won seats, replacing Glen Gerred and Barney Stewart. This did not immediately change the status quo of the board, as Langford was still heading his faction, but he did not gain any supporters in the election of Newkirk or McElroy, which meant the board remained split.¹¹⁸ Additionally, the community passed a tax levy increase for school funding, raising the district tax to \$3.75 on one hundred dollars of assessed valuation of property, which became the highest levy in Jackson County.¹¹⁹ This money meant teacher salaries would rise and the district could afford to hire more teachers and specialist instructors.¹²⁰ On the leadership side, in May 1959 following the April election, the school board began writing out set policies for board members to follow, many months before being instructed to do so by the NEA commission. It also hired a new superintendent, Tom Foraker, who would prove to be Hickman Mills's longest serving district leader, from 1959 to 1976.¹²¹

The board continued to refine its written policies and changed its relationship with the superintendent, as counseled by the NEA report. This, coupled with some crucial factors, resulted in Hickman Mills receiving "AAA" status by the state of Missouri and gaining accreditation by the North Central Association in 1960.¹²² It is worth noting the changes the district made in order to gain accreditation. First, the board demonstrated that it followed the written policies it had finally created and had fostered a more professional atmosphere in board meetings. Second, the opening of Symington Elementary in the fall of 1959 meant that pressure on the four smaller elementary schools in the district was greatly relieved and superintendent

¹¹⁸ "Newkirk and McElroy Are with Heavy Vote Margins," *Jackson County Advocate*, 69th year, no. 9, April 9, 1959, 1-2.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *A Study of Conflict*, 26-27; Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 85-86.

¹²² Parkison, *Journey to Our Future*, 86.

Foraker decided to have the small schools offer Kindergarten and first grade only. In the fall of 1959, for the first time in the district, Kindergarten was offered for all students. Third, the levy increase in April 1959 translated to higher pay for teachers, which helped attract qualified persons to a district that was needing to fill their schools with personnel as quickly as it needed to construct more buildings. The levy increase allowed the district to hire more specialized and non-specialized staff, which also made Kindergarten possible. As stated earlier in this chapter, the two great obstacles for Hickman Mills to receive AAA status (the highest) in Missouri and accreditation with the North Central Association were the availability of Kindergarten and professionalism of the school board. By the end of 1960, Hickman Mills changed leadership and added enough qualified staff and buildings to declare that the small but growing school district to the south of Kansas City was a quality institution for parents and children.

The Sun Will Come Out...

Hickman Mills experienced two tragedies, one out of its control and one of its own making. Yet, the aftermath of the tornado and the school board drama led to a stronger community with newer housing, shopping, and schools. By 1960, Hickman Mills was a viable suburban community for those wishing to escape the congestion and perceived crime in Kansas City. As the southern lands were easily accessible via Highway 71, residents had shopping plazas, affordably spacious homes, and accredited schools housed in new facilities. Hence, the population growth in Hickman Mills continued to climb through the 1960s, as more families relocated and enrolled their children in school. This meant that the school district would once again address overpopulation and more buildings would need to be built, much like the 1950s. However, because the community itself was growing to such a great degree, citizens began to

want better services than what the county could provide, particularly water, sewer, electricity, and fire and police protection.

At the same time, since this was a community with a growing population and increasing business activity, the potential for a strong tax base was appealing to Kansas City leaders. City commissioners were additionally nervous about having city boundaries “boxed in” similar to what happened to St. Louis.¹²³ When considered together, these factors help explain why Hickman Mills became a desirable area for Kansas City, Missouri to annex, and at the same time, helps indicate why citizens in the area south of the city saw some advantages in joining with the municipality. In chapter three, I will address the annexation of Hickman Mills, including attempts by Kansas City and Grandview to annex the school district. Suburban growth and the eventual joining with the larger urban center in the north led to significant changes within the borders of the Hickman Mills school district, some of which were welcome, while others brought unforeseen consequences that prompted longtime residents of Hickman Mills to regret not retaining their independence from Kansas City, Missouri.

¹²³ William H. Lucy and David L. Phillips, “Suburbs and the Census: Patterns of Growth and Decline,” report of the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2001), 18-19.

Chapter 3: Mixed Feelings

Urbanization, Modernization, and the Fight to Stay Independent and Self-Sufficient, 1959-1970

By 1960, the unincorporated village of Hickman Mills had transformed into a suburb of Kansas City. Even though areas by Longview Lake to the east and the western edge by Blue River Road were more rural and sparse, housing developments in the center and northern areas of the school district were growing and expanding at a very rapid pace. For all intents and purposes, Hickman Mills had become a collection of suburban neighborhoods as the 1950s became the 1960s. Technically, the village was part of an urban community as it was annexed by Kansas City in 1961, and thus ceased to be a village and instead became part of the city, with the moniker “South Kansas City.” Even so, the appearance of the area remained “classically” suburban, primarily due to the housing developments built by Praver & Sons, as well as the fact that the population of Hickman Mills was almost entirely composed of white blue collar/lower middle-class families. The school district reflected the area’s suburban character in its struggles to grow quickly enough to accommodate the increasing number of children living within the school boundaries.

This chapter addresses how Hickman Mills’s identity shifted from its foundation as a separate community to becoming part of a metropolitan center. Essentially, Hickman Mills ceased to exist as a geographical designation except within the borders of the school district, which the community determined would stay separate from Kansas City. Even though Hickman Mills lost its independence as a village or individual community, it retained its identity as Hickman Mills because the school district remained autonomous. Exploring efforts to annex the school district to Kansas City reveals the central issue in Hickman Mills’s history—the community wished to remain independent but was not always willing to pay the economic costs

needed to be self-sufficient. The change from being a small but growing suburb south of Kansas City to being a part of the larger municipality, the community's refusal to join the Kansas City Missouri School District, and serious funding issues and tax battles laid the foundation for the eventual decline of Hickman Mills as a school district.

No Longer a Village: Hickman Mills Becomes Part of Kansas City, Missouri

On March 1, 1959, the residents of Kansas City, Missouri voted on a resolution to expand the city southward, annexing unincorporated lands that included the neighborhoods comprising the Hickman Mills School District.¹ This move was but one manifestation of Kansas City's expansion efforts, as it was in some danger of being locked in by other municipalities and not being able to grow. Kansas City's geographic location limited its expansion, as it was bounded on the west side by the state border with Kansas, bordered by growing suburban cities like Grandview to the south, Raytown and Lee's Summit to the southeast, and Gladstone and North Kansas City to the north.² The longtime city manager for Kansas City, Missouri, L.P. Cookingham (in office 1940-1959), made plans to enlarge Kansas City, chiefly to the north and the south in his conception for expansion. While the manager had been forced out of his position by the time the residents of Kansas City voted to annex Hickman Mills, the acquisition was a result of Cookingham's work.³ After a citywide vote, Hickman Mills was to become South Kansas City on January 1, 1961.⁴

¹ "Feelings Mixed on Nearing Annexation," *Kansas City Star*, February 1, 1960, 1A.

² James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822-2011* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 103, map 48.

³ Ibid.; Stanley T. Gabis, "Leadership in a Large Manager City: The Case of Kansas City," in *City Bosses and Political Machines*, ed. Lee Seifert Greene, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 353 (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1964), 58.

⁴ "Feelings Mixed," 1A.

Decreased costs and increased services made the plan to join Kansas City more palatable among residents of Hickman Mills, even if they did not have a say in the matter.⁵ The only organized group to officially and vocally protest the annexation was the local chapter of the Chamber of Commerce, whose members had vested interests in seeing the community become a small city of its own.⁶ Kansas City officials kept reminding residents of Hickman Mills the benefits they would receive, particularly in decreased taxes.⁷ R.D. Rogers, the acting city manager for Kansas City (after Cookingham's removal), asserted that residents would see their water and electricity bills as well as their fire insurance decrease by two-thirds.⁸ At the time, Hickman Mills residents were paying special water and fire levies to Jackson County, which would disappear when the community joined Kansas City.⁹ Property taxes would also be a third of Jackson County rates, although residents would still have to pay state and school taxes.¹⁰ As annexation came closer, residents learned that police and fire services were going to be greatly improved for the community of Hickman Mills, as the city would take over those services either at noon on the thirty-first of December, or at midnight on January 1st, 1961.¹¹

While incorporation/annexation into Kansas City would result in expanded services, residents expressed doubt about becoming Kansas Citians. Many preferred to keep their community small and worried about immediate changes like larger roads and increased traffic.

⁵ Carla Baker, interview with author, August 14, 2012; Gloria Cardona, interview with author, August 30, 2012; Colleen Hamilton, interview with author, August 14, 2012; James Hill, interview with author, August 30, 2012; Lilly Husman, interview with author, August 25, 2012.

⁶ "Against City Move," *Kansas City Star*, February 17, 1960, 3; South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, "History: From Chamber of Commerce of Consolidated School District #1 to South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, 1931-2007" (unpublished document, 2012), 2. For most of its existence (1931 to present day), the Chamber of Commerce in Hickman Mills claimed association with the school district. Only in the 1970s did the group rename itself the "South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce."

⁷ "Annexation Area Costs May Be Less," *Kansas City Times*, October 19, 1960, 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "City Ready to Take Over Fire Runs in Annexed Area," *Jackson County Advocate*, 70th year, no. 47, December 29, 1960, 1, 5.

The region especially needed more traffic lights, mostly along Bannister, Longview, and Blue Ridge Roads, which were the major thoroughfares in the community and where most businesses were located.¹² However, even with the increased congestion and the shift from a quieter community to a more bustling center of commerce, there was very little visible protest against the annexation on the part of “Ruskinites.” Some longtime residents interviewed suggested that people at the time were resigned to their fate—the move was out of their control and thus it needed to be endured.¹³ There is a certain irony that so much of the growth of Hickman Mills came from people who chose to leave Kansas City, Missouri in the first place and move out to the country, only to have the result of the migration be a transformation of the original space. In a sense, the city was claiming these people back. While residents were not completely opposed to the measure (though they would be a few years later when the school board suggested merging school districts), some expressed a sense of loss in becoming part of the city. One resident of Ruskin Heights wrote a letter in the local paper lamenting a loss in civic pride and local identity that resulted from becoming part of the big city, saying, “we have street lights, several parks with playground equipment...but we all scream taxes, taxes, taxes. We aren’t the small, civic community we used to be.”¹⁴ Her comments capture the sense of defeat in the community, that residents had lost their civic identity in the annexation and were looking for a way to stay connected as a small community. All residents had left was their school district identity, which they clung to.

¹² “New Traffic Control Lights Planned for HM Area,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 72nd year, no. 36, October 11, 1962, 1.

¹³ Baker, Cardona, Hamilton, Hill, and Husman, interviews with author. As Baker was a child at the time of annexation, she was remembering her parent’s views on Kansas City.

¹⁴ “Ruskin Review,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 4, February 28, 1963, 4.

School as Community Identity, School Growth

Before annexation, Hickman Mills existed as an unincorporated village and had no centralized governing body, but did have a Chamber of Commerce and a school district named for the village. After annexation, the name “Hickman Mills” only accurately applied to the school district, yet people in the neighborhoods of then South Kansas City primarily identified themselves as residents of Hickman Mills.¹⁵ Hence, the school district had become the only unifying entity for the area that was now a newly minted part of Kansas City. Shortly after municipal annexation, residents of Hickman Mills experienced a minor threat that would have meant losing a piece of the district to neighboring Grandview, and a major threat made by the Hickman Mills school board itself to join the Kansas City Missouri School District (KCMSD) and dissolve the Hickman Mills district. As evidenced by the community’s visceral reaction to these perceived threats, the thought of losing an independent school district was much more unappealing to residents than losing their identity as a village. More likely, the loss of the school district would signal the end of Hickman Mills as a separate space apart from Kansas City and residents would no longer live in a suburb. The history of the proposed merger with Kansas City’s school district shows that while the community opposed the measure, it was Hickman Mills’s own school board who proposed it, for financial reasons. The suggestion made by the school leadership came about because the school district continued to struggle accommodating the annual increase in students and attempted to raise needed funds, but the community was reticent to pay more taxes.

In 1961, the school board continued actions that it had been engaged in for over a decade, namely seeking to pass bonds to fund school expansion and the construction of new facilities. The members of the board met at the end of December 1960 to discuss a new bond issue of

¹⁵ It was also common to refer to oneself as a Ruskin resident, as per the local high school.

\$555,000 in order to build a twelve-room elementary school (Warford Elementary), to add six more rooms to the high school, and to purchase land for another elementary school in the future.¹⁶ The high school expansion was becoming necessary as enrollment had increased to over a thousand students, with nearly fifteen-hundred expected students for the following school year. Additionally, the board sought to raise the school levy by ten cents to \$3.75, in order to continue to fund the schools and keep a low interest rate on debt.¹⁷ The board was optimistic this would pass in January, but members were nervous about municipal anti-annexation sentiment among Hickmanites; that somehow residents would confuse the two issues.¹⁸ In fact, the board decided to cancel the levy increase and focus instead on the bond issue, supposing that requesting for both would be too much for the community to support.

Superintendent Tom Foraker expressed the importance of the bond issue, arguing that growth in the school district “means that we have to build a new school the size of Baptiste junior high building every year!”¹⁹ The district had grown at this point to having over seven thousand students and school leaders (along with housing developers) assumed the student body would continue to increase within the district.²⁰ Good news came for district leadership, as the bond passed in January with just over a thousand votes for the issue and 352 against.²¹ Foraker and the board were pleased that the bond passed the necessary two-thirds majority vote by a clear margin, but noted that this was the closest bond election since 1956, before the tornado. The leadership attributed the anti-bond votes as linked to anxiety over annexation with Kansas City,

¹⁶ “Ruskin Board Approves Program for Bond Issue,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 70th year, no. 46, December 22, 1960, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Ruskin Ready for Bond Vote at Five Schools This Saturday,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 70th year, no. 50, January 19, 1961, 1, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “HM Voters Grant \$555,000 School Bond Issue,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 70th year, no. 51, January 26, 1961, 1, 8. Based on the estimated number of adults living in the neighborhoods comprising Hickman Mills according to the 1960 census (16,261), turnout was about eight percent.

thinking that some residents were confusing the school district bond with a municipality measure.²² School construction began and the district leadership was engaged in a now normal routine of building, planning, and determining how to finance the next needed facility. Residents in Hickman Mills were then surprised, just weeks after the bond vote, when the school board was threatened with a loss of part of the district to a neighboring city.

In February 1961, the city of Grandview proposed annexing the neighborhoods around the Truman Corners shopping plaza to their own school district. This was a blatant effort to gain tax revenue from the center, which was understandable considering the plaza and the neighborhood touched upon and even crossed into Grandview's borders. Not wanting to lose the funding that came with that portion of the district, the Hickman Mills school board opposed the measure. Because Jackson County law required both school districts to hold a public vote when disputing boundaries, Hickman Mills held its at the beginning of April, this time combining it with a delayed levy increase vote.²³ The gamble of having citizens vote for a possible boundary change and a levy increase on the same ballot was bold, but the measure worked in favor of Hickman Mills. While Grandview residents voted to annex the neighborhoods into their own school district, a majority Ruskinites opposed it, and at the same time approved the levy increase by a comfortable margin—almost two thousand for the measure, with six hundred against. Over 2500 voters opposed the boundary change, with only forty-nine voting for it.²⁴ With a stalemate over Truman Corners, the Jackson County school board met to arbitrate. After deliberation, the Jackson County authorities decided to remain the boundaries intact. Hickman Mills got to keep Truman Corners and the funding that came with it and at the same time gained a levy increase on

²² Ibid.

²³ "Ruskin Voters Oppose South Boundary Change," *Jackson County Advocate*, 71st year, no. 9, April 6, 1961, 1-2.

²⁴ Ibid. This vote elicited a fifteen-percent turnout.

property taxes in the neighborhoods, which were growing in value due to rapid suburbanization.²⁵

With the border dispute settled, the superintendent and the school board returned to their primary activity, addressing district growth. As before, Foraker and the school district leadership continued to push for building expansion to address the growing numbers of new students. By the fall of 1962, Hickman Mills was enrolling a little over 8,500 students in the schools, with three hundred more high school students than the previous year.²⁶ Once again, the school board knew it had to raise more funds for further construction in order to accommodate the increase in students. At the end of 1962, the board set a new bond issue for election in January 1963 for \$450,000, to be used to build a new elementary school (Dobbs) and another junior high (Ervin).²⁷ As in the past, the board turned to community groups to help support the bond and the Chamber of Commerce came forward endorsing the school plan.²⁸ The vote again overwhelmingly favored the bond, with only 163 persons opposing and 1,739 in favor.²⁹ Foraker was pleased, but he and the school board realized that each bond issue was essentially a stopgap measure that was temporarily ameliorating a problem that needed a larger and more permanent solution. Hickman Mills needed to raise taxes and not just pass bonds if it was to educate the new students in light of continued residential development and population growth in the area.

Hickman Mills Hits a Wall

Even with the expansions and repeated bond issues, the district was still in the unenviable position of being incapable to provide enough facilities for the continued growth of students

²⁵ “County Board Says No to School Line Change,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 71st year, no. 13, May 4, 1961, 1.

²⁶ “HM Enrollment Is up 873 at Opening,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 71st year, no. 31, September 6, 1962, 1.

²⁷ “Saturday 26th vote \$450,000 Bond to Build New,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 72nd year, no. 47, December 27, 1962, 1.

²⁸ “School Bonds Endorsed by Hickman Chamber of Commerce,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 72nd year, no. 51, January 24, 1962, 1.

²⁹ “HM Voters Give Big Bond Majority,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 72nd year, no. 52, January 31, 1963, 1.

living in and moving into the neighborhoods of Hickman Mills. This had essentially been the standard for growth and expansion in Hickman Mills, a pattern detailed in chapters 1 and 2. However, after ten years of consistent growth and expansion with very little in the way of raising the local levy in order to adequately fund school construction and operations, the school board and the superintendent saw they were facing a crisis. In 1963, they decided to take strong action to address it. Board president Bill Wall presented a speech in a closed meeting to a group of 150 business and community leaders in February of 1963, outlining his concern with the rapid increase in the number of school-aged children:

About five years ago, or the year following the tornado, it became apparent that this district would have to build the equivalent of thirty teaching stations, or classrooms, per year to keep up with the pupil growth pattern... We have had a ten percent growth per year in student population over the past five years. Seven percent of this increase is from a higher or increasing birth rate in the district. Three percent of this increase has been from children who have moved into the district... I wish I could say that the situation will get better but it is going to get much worse.”³⁰

Wall explained to the group what the district was planning for construction and expansion to meet the growth, as well as concerns over the potential loss of accreditation from the state of Missouri and from the North Central Association should class sizes become too large.³¹ Adding to Wall’s concerns, the district was not able to simply increase its bond indebtedness in order to finance school construction. As outlined by state law, each school district was allowed to issue bonds up to nineteen percent of their assessed valuation (property value) and, each year since 1953, Hickman Mills had always voted for bonds up to its legal limit.³² As Wall succinctly stated, “it simply is not enough to do the job.”³³

³⁰ “Warn of Coming School Crisis,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 4, February 28, 1963, 1, 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

The school board president then offered three options to the community leaders: continue with bonds and have the schools eventually operate on a half-day schedule, with students attending in shifts; join the Kansas City, Missouri district; or vote for a dollar levy lasting for four years, on top of the regular levy of \$3.75.³⁴ Wall was vying for the last option, as he asserted that sending students to shorter school days would deprive them of a quality education and joining the Kansas City school district might lower tax rates, but would bring about uncertainty and lack of local control.³⁵ Passing a long-term, but temporary levy would raise sufficient funds to construct and operate more buildings. Wall provided his audience with specific finances:

By collecting this dollar special levy...it is estimated that we would have available some \$3,707,000. It is estimated that our building needs for the next four years total \$3,791,665.³⁶

The funds would not completely cover district expenses, but the special bond would raise enough money to make expansion work. Wall ended his presentation with an excerpt from the locally venerated poet John Ruskin, for whom the high school was named, urging the community to think of the future and “that men will say as they look upon the labor and wrought substance of them, ‘see! This our fathers did for us.’”³⁷

The Great Levy Campaign of 1963

The 150 community members at the gathering agreed to form a committee on school finance and began having meetings in the Ruskin High cafeteria in order to discuss the future of the district. Within two weeks, the committee came to a decision to support the effort to raise a

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

four-year levy.³⁸ The measure would be put on the general school board election set for April 2, 1963.³⁹ The committee then immediately voted to change themselves from a finance committee to a public relations one, ostensibly so it could participate in the levy campaign.⁴⁰ This was a demanding undertaking, exceeding previous bond and levy elections with a goal of bringing 3.7 million dollars into the district over four years. Committee members began a letter-writing campaign, placed full-page ads in the newspaper, held public meetings, and convinced the editor of the *Jackson County Advocate* to officially and vocally support the measure.⁴¹ The committee promised the citizens of Hickman Mills that the levy would be re-evaluated if state or federal funding increased over the next years.⁴² Presenting an official statement from the school board, Bill Wall attempted to assure voters that “the board has exhausted every possible resource in its exploration,” that for the best education of the children of the district, “there is no other choice but to submit this proposition to the voters.”⁴³

Opposition to this very large levy was formidable, even if it was not as publicly vocal as the efforts put forward by the school board and the public relations committee.⁴⁴ When the April 2nd election came, the levy increase was overwhelmingly defeated and three board members, including president Wall, lost their seats. Each was replaced by men who promised to not raise levies unless completely necessary.⁴⁵ Over five thousand people voted in the election, a record

³⁸ “School Group Urges Increase in Hickman Mills Tax Levy,” *Jackson County Advocate*, 73rd year, no. 5, March 7, 1963, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “School Board Proposes 4 year \$1 Tax Levy Increase,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 6, March 14, 1963, 1, 4; “The Moving Finger,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 6, March 14, 1963, 3; “VOTE YES! FOR OUR FUTURE!,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 6, March 14, 1963, 5.

⁴² “School Board Proposes,” 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ While there were full-page ads in the paper in favor of the special levy, there were no groups advertising in opposition to the vote. This would come later with the resurgence of a citizen’s group in Hickman Mills that would combat any and all tax increases.

⁴⁵ “Defeat \$1 HM Levy—Oust 3 Incumbent Board Members in Record Avalanche of School Votes,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 9, April 4, 1963, 1.

for the district, with the vote totaling three to one against the special levy.⁴⁶ However, the basic \$3.75 levy was renewed, so support for the schools was not completely revoked.⁴⁷ But the message from residents of the district was clear for the school board and for Superintendent Foraker: address the problem of overcrowding, but do it without raising taxes.

Dealing with Defeat

Foraker and the school board had been thoroughly defeated and now had to find other measures to cope with large increases in student enrollment and fewer spaces to put them. The main problem facing district leadership was that in order to maintain the AAA rating with Missouri, as well as accreditation with the North Central Association, class sizes had to remain relatively low; the district could not simply crowd students into the school buildings. Not without losing accreditation with the North Central Association.⁴⁸

The board's next strategy to address school growth and funding was to return to the previous pattern of passing bonds and smaller levies piecemeal. In January 1964, the board started with a \$450,000 bond with a promise of no immediate raise in taxes.⁴⁹ However, the bond failed to pass. The community goodwill and overwhelming support given to the school district after the tornado in 1957 had been spent and district leadership now found itself in a very uncomfortable position. Previous board president Wall's warning from the year before still held true in 1964; the district either had to find a way to raise more money, divide its student body in half and teach them in shifts, or look to annex themselves to Kansas City to the north. While teaching in shifts would occur in the district a decade later, the board was reticent to take drastic measures, so it

⁴⁶ Even with a record turnout of five thousand voters, this amounted to thirty percent of the eligible electorate (persons aged twenty or over living in the school district boundaries) who voted. U.S. Census of the Population, 1960.

⁴⁷ "Defeat \$1 HM Levy," 1.

⁴⁸ "Public Committees to Study School Classroom Shortage," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 14, May 9, 1963, 1.

⁴⁹ "Everyone Has a Share" *Jackson County Advocate*, Full-page Advertisement, vol. 73, no. 4, January 16, 1964, B1.

began to look at its third option, joining the Kansas City School District. This made sense at the time, as the KCMSD was accredited, had more facilities and a larger operating budget, and had a good, albeit short-lived, reputation. The “downfall” of KCMSD, which has made the district so infamous today, was going to come later, precipitating Hickman Mills’s own “decline.” However, the strong opposition that would come from the suggestion to join KCMSD signaled that suburban residents did not want to lose their final piece of identity separate from the city, namely their suburban school district.

Flirtation with the Kansas City Missouri School District

New board president A.A. McElroy and Superintendent Tom Foraker quietly petitioned the state board of education for permission to look into and vote upon annexation with the Kansas City Missouri School District in January 1964; by February, they received word from the state body that they allowed were to proceed.⁵⁰ McElroy wrote the issue onto the agenda for the February 5th meeting which attracted enough attention from the community that two groups, the Ruskin Committee for Annexation (CfA) and the Patrons for Education Progress (PEP) each sent a representative to present statements to the board about annexation.⁵¹ There was some intrigue, as McElroy did not want to let them speak, justifying his refusal by stating that they were not on the agenda and that he was not interested in listening to “any political speeches.”⁵² Some of the other board members disagreed and motioned to allow the presentations. A vote was taken and only two board members, McElroy and Don Newkirk (both among the longest serving members of the board at the time), voted against allowing the representatives to give a speech.⁵³

⁵⁰ “HM School Board Sets Annexation Vote Date,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 73, no. 52, February 6, 1964, 1, 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

After deliberating on when to hold the annexation election and a possible upcoming levy vote, the board then dedicated time in its schedule for public presentations. Murray Melliker, from the Committee for Annexation, read a statement requesting for a vote as soon as possible and in as many polling places as feasible to allow for maximum voter turnout, as well as a litany of suggested regulations to ensure that voters have “their basic right to a secret ballot and a fair election.”⁵⁴ Considering that the school board created this committee, some members present assumed they were going to hear a supportive statement from the CfA. Instead they got a veneer of support for annexation and heavy criticism for voting issues. The statement surprised some board members and several commented that they felt insulted at even a hint of perceived unfairness in elections.⁵⁵

The statement prepared by Milton Duncan, president of Patrons for Education Progress (PEP), was much more succinct and accusatory. Duncan shared that he headed a committee that met the night before to plan its opposition to annexation:

We repeated our conviction that this district can support its own educational system and maintain local control without taking the irretrievable step of annexation.⁵⁶

This was the start of a six-week campaign between two equally vocal and passionate groups—one for annexation and one against. With the election occurring on March 14th, there was not much time for either side to make their case to the public, so the battle that ensued was relatively brief but loud. The fight over an effort to join Kansas City schools, which ultimately failed, had greater prominence and significance for the community than the discussion about joining the actual city itself. However, unlike the annexation of 1961, this time residents of Hickman Mills had the power to decide their own fate.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

For the first time, the *Jackson County Advocate* was replete with full-page ads for and against the annexation proposal, an unusual circumstance as normally the paper only ran ads placed by the school board or the public awareness committee. Additionally, while letters to the editor were historically sparse in the local paper, during this period, each issue (weekly) had two or three letters, all addressing the annexation question. The majority of the writers employed the language of local control—a desire to retain decision making powers over the schools and a fear that those powers would be lost in joining the larger entity of the city school district to the north. If the annexation measure had succeeded, KCMSD would have become a district with an island extension, as Hickman Mills’s district border was separated from Kansas City by a piece of the Center and Raytown school districts.⁵⁷ Residents of Hickman Mills also expressed a fear of the unknown, arguing that becoming part of the larger city school district would mean being subject to rules that work for Kansas City, but not necessarily for Hickman Mills. The letters in the paper never explained what that statement meant, but it seems to relate to a sense of loss of control.⁵⁸ Writers complained of dirty tactics and smear campaigns waged by both the CfA and the PEP, some claiming slanderous flyers were inserted into the local paper shortly after it was delivered and others stating that leaders in each group received threatening phone calls at home.⁵⁹ For a short period of time, tensions mounted over whether to completely merge with Kansas City school district or not.

PEP employed ads in the newspaper and sent flyers as well as mailers to people’s homes declaring the dangers of becoming part of Kansas City’s school system. Typical arguments included concerns that the district would ignore the suburban area and that the smaller population

⁵⁷ This geographic condition became significant for Hickman Mills in later years, as state and national court rulings exempted non-contiguous districts from being subject to desegregation (primarily busing) efforts on the part of urban school districts such as KCMSD.

⁵⁸ “Letters to the Editor,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 2, February 20, 1964, B2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

of the south would not be sufficient to allow residents to make a difference in citywide elections, or that the Hickman Mills School District is special and should continue being its own entity.⁶⁰ However, some residents also expressed concerns toward joining a school district that served a large minority population. One position repeated by the PEP was that the merger would mean children would be bussed into the city and would attend schools far away from home, which bears resemblance to a common reason given by white, suburban parents for fighting desegregation.⁶¹ Another argument used stronger language, stating that Kansas City had “31,000 culturally deprived children that require a special program.”⁶² The language was code for “poor, non-white students,” originating from a popular educational text at the time by Frank Riessman, *The Culturally Deprived Child*.⁶³ This was another argument that would be used to reject desegregation efforts throughout the Kansas City metro area and among other metropolitan centers throughout the country. Suburbanites were concerned that their children’s education would suffer from exposure to “culturally deprived” children. PEP focused on the argument in one of its flyers, positing that the cost of educating “culturally deprived children” was high and that “our relatively homogenous district does not have this costly problem. The grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence.”⁶⁴

For its part, the CfA placed ads and flyers attempting to squash rumors that children would be put on buses and sent to the city to go to school. The committee’s argument was much

⁶⁰ “What People Are Saying About Annexation of School District No. 1 To Kansas City” Full-page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, February 20, 1964, 6.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Frank Riessman, *The Culturally Deprived Child* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). For scholarship dealing with the use of language from the 1960s forward that was used to describe poor minority students who typically attend urban schools, see Sylvia L.M. Martinez and John L. Rury, “From ‘Culturally Deprived’ to ‘At Risk’: The Politics of Popular Expression and Educational Inequality in the United States, 1960-1985,” *Teachers College Record* 114, no. 6 (2012): 1-31.

⁶⁴ “STOP—Consider What Annexation Means” Full-page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 4, March 5, 1964, 3.

less impassioned than PEP's, but very straightforward. The CfA explained the reality that educating the growing number of children within the district was becoming increasingly expensive; that the community itself did not have the resources to finance the burden, but Kansas City did.⁶⁵ The group presented data showing that in 1964, the local tax base gave the school district about five thousand dollars per student, down seven hundred dollars from 1960.⁶⁶ Kansas City, Missouri, however, was paying almost eleven thousand dollars per student. The inclusion of Hickman Mills would lower the average, to about ten thousand dollars, but doubling what the district could provide on its own.⁶⁷

The two groups continued to publicly argue with each, with the CfA accusing the PEP of fear mongering and the PEP questioning the CfA's calculations.⁶⁸ The CfA argued that the district leadership endorsed joining Kansas City and the PEP rejoined that the teachers overwhelmingly rejected it.⁶⁹ The League of Women Voters sponsored an official debate on March 3rd in the high school cafeteria, with about three hundred fifty persons attending.⁷⁰ Two members of each organization stood in front of the crowd and engaged each other with direction from a moderator, including timed statements and rebuttals. The arguments posed by both sides largely repeated what had been shared in print—questions over funding, local control, and busing.⁷¹ However, at the end of the prepared statements and back and forth arguments, the debate was opened to written questions supplied by the audience.

One question posed to a member of the Committee for Annexation stands out because it directly addressed integration: "Isn't it the policy of Kansas City to have a Negro teacher in each

⁶⁵ "Tell Me, Committee For Annexation" Full-page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 2, February 20, 1964, 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Annex Issue Discussed at Ruskin High Debate," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 4, March 5, 1964, 1-2.

⁶⁹ "What People are Saying," "Tell Me, Committee," and "Annex Issue Discussed."

⁷⁰ "Annex Issue Discussed."

⁷¹ Ibid.

school?”⁷² The immediate answer given is indicative of the sentiments and outlook among Hickman Mills’s suburbanites at the time, as the representative from the CfA (again the supporters of joining with Kansas City):

Kansas City is in the business of education, not segregation. Their policy is a policy of neighborhood schools. Not one student is transported out of his school, unless he requests it for reasons of curriculum.⁷³

In a manner, the answer dodged the question, but essentially the CfA member was making the point that children would attend their local schools and thus would be unaffected by the makeup of the schools to the north. When the question was posed to a representative from PEP, she answered that Superintendent Hazlett in Kansas City has an official policy of “total integration.”⁷⁴

The issue of race continued after the debate as well, as the CfA released a list of counterarguments to each chief complaint about annexation raised by PEP. Near the top of the list, the CfA included the statement “The Negroes Are Coming,” explaining that PEP had been conducting “a blatant appeal to bigotry and prejudice” in insinuating that students from Kansas City would be attending schools in Hickman Mills, or vice-versa.⁷⁵ The CfA countered, showing that of the eighty-two elementary schools in Kansas City, only five have pupils from other areas due to overcrowding.⁷⁶ The statement called the “PEP’s thinly-veiled threat of forced integration” both ridiculous and contemptuous, while also assuring readers that integration was not going to occur because of the annexation.⁷⁷

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “A Guide to Annexation Workers” Full-page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 4, March 5, 1964, 3.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

On March 14th when district residents attended their polling stations to cast their votes, tensions continued to be high, to the point that Foraker requested and was granted two police officers at each polling place to quell any fears of violence.⁷⁸ The schools that served as voting centers that day were crowded and noisy, and when the votes were counted, the Patrons for Educational Progress won. Annexation was strongly denied, with 5,569 votes against the measure and 2,956 in favor. Over eight thousand people took part in the election, far surpassing the previous record of five thousand.⁷⁹

Aftermath

With the rejection of annexation, the board had to return to pursuing stopgap measures by passing bonds and attempting smaller levies. This automatic return to previous patterns raises the question as to whether Foraker, Wall, McElroy, or other board members actually wanted to annex to Kansas City. After all, Foraker would most likely have lost his job and not all the board members would have retained seats on the Kansas City board. They either decided to pursue annexation because they truly saw no other means to accommodate the needs of the children in the district, or perhaps they hoped that the threat of annexation would alert the community to the dire financial situation the district was in, convincing them to raise a higher levy.⁸⁰ Either way, in not being passed, the annexation question proved to be a complete failure for Hickman Mills's schools. District leadership still had to address the financial and construction problems it encountered. In addition, the demise of the annexation bid did not succeed in awakening any greater sense of responsibility toward the school district amongst the voters, as they voted against annexation, but also voted against a seventy-five cent temporary tax levy in the same

⁷⁸ "Nearly 2 to 1 Against Annexing School District," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 6, March 19, 1964, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ My suggestion at other possible motivations to putting annexation to a vote is speculation on my part. No one I interviewed was particularly familiar with this event in Hickman Mills's history and the principal figures involved are no longer living.

election.⁸¹ Support for the school district was waning and the rest of the 1960s were largely dominated by bond and levy votes that could not reach the two-thirds majority needed, a great source of frustration for Foraker and the school board.

Within a few weeks of the annexation vote, Superintendent Foraker began to make speeches to the public again about overcrowding in the schools, this time arguing that it was happening throughout the district and at all grade levels.⁸² A special seventy-five cent levy increase election was suggested for the end of April in order to build a third junior high, another high school, and find land for yet another elementary building.⁸³ The levy failed, so the school board immediately set a new date, May 12, 1964, for the same levy, hoping the extra time would provide more opportunities to convince the public of the needed work in the district.⁸⁴ High school principal Blaine Steck told the newspaper that the North Central Association had put the school on advisement because twenty-five of the high school teachers taught one hundred seventy students in a day.⁸⁵ If the district could not lower the student-teacher ratio, it ran the risk of losing accreditation.⁸⁶ Foraker added to the bad news, sharing that by the fall of 1965, the district would probably have to use the kindergarten classrooms to house half of the first-graders, which would also jeopardize accreditation.⁸⁷

With the election in May, the school board found a somewhat surprising ally—the Patrons for Educational Progress. President Duncan and the board of directors of PEP published an open letter, placed an ad in the newspaper, and sent flyers to homes asking voters to support the special levy, particularly if those same voters chose to keep Hickman Mills school district

⁸¹ “Nearly 2 to 1 Against Annexation.”

⁸² “Williams, Johanningmeir to HM Board,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 9, April 9, 1964, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ “New Vote on Tax Levy Set May 12 in Hickman,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 11, April 23, 1964, 1.

⁸⁵ By 170 students a day, the district meant the total number of students a teacher instructs in a day. A teacher who taught six classes and saw 170 kids had an average of twenty-eight students in each class.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

independent of Kansas City.⁸⁸ Duncan explained to reluctant voters, “the four-year 75 cent special building fund levy is not intended to produce a luxury-class education; it is necessary to keep the district abreast of its growth problems.”⁸⁹ Both PEP and the school board warned the public that not raising more money would lead to split-session schooling, fewer kindergarten classes, transportation issues, and, most likely, a loss of accreditation.⁹⁰ Everybody involved in the effort knew that the most difficult aspect of the levy election would be obtaining a two-thirds majority, considering the same special levy had failed twice previously, once during the annexation vote and again in April.

May 12th proved to be disappointing, as while a majority of community members (sixty-one percent) voted for the special levy, the results did not reach the necessary two-thirds.⁹¹ Although the board was gratified that a clear majority of the populace favored some increase in school funding, not meeting the required amount of votes meant that while it could try to pass a levy again, cuts were going to have to be made. Board president A.A. McElroy announced at the end of May that kindergarten parents would now have to pay six dollars a month to send their children to school. The previous fee was ten dollars a year.⁹² McElroy was blunt in his reasoning:

We made no bones about it that if the special building levy didn't pass we'd have to take economy measures. I feel the kindergarten should start to pay for itself this year.⁹³

The increased fee did not stop people from enrolling their children in kindergarten; in fact, enrollment across the district for the fall of 1964 reached over ten thousand, a staggering number when considering how small the district began.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ “Letter to the Editor,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 13, May 7, 1964, 3, B3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ “New Vote,” “Letter to the Editor,” and “Before You Vote on May 12 consider the Alternatives,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 14, no. 13, May 7, 1964, 3.

⁹¹ “61% Favor Levy Increase in Record Voter Turnout,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 14, May 14, 1964, 1.

⁹² “Kindergarten Fee Hike in HM District,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 16, May 28, 1964, 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Between April 1964 and May 1965, the school district attempted five times to pass a special levy, usually between seventy-five cents and a dollar. Finally, in May of 1965, a special one-year levy of ninety-six cents was passed by the two-thirds majority, which enabled the district to spend an additional \$450,000 in building a new elementary school and expanding on Warford and Dobbs elementary.⁹⁵

Costly Expansions

In the face of financial difficulties and the inability to pass permanent tax hikes that would bring in sufficient funding for full district construction, the school leadership did what it could to continue to educate the students who kept coming. Part of the elementary boom from the late fifties was now causing problems for the two junior high buildings and the high school, and expansions were going to be necessary, even if funding was uneven. During 1966 and 1967, the school district began work to build one more junior high (Smith-Hale) and another high school (Hickman Mills High School), fighting for levies and bonds to fund the construction.⁹⁶ As also occurred in the 1950s, the school board was surprised in 1967 to receive notice that it was going to get additional federal funds for being a school district in a defense-impacted zone.⁹⁷ With some families working at the Bendix plant to the west and others as part of the Richards-Gebaur air base to the south, Hickman Mills was granted \$597,305 dollars as a one-time grant to offset the cost of educating children of defense workers. Foraker was thrilled, as it helped alleviate construction woes caused by lack of sufficient funds to build the new junior high.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ "Record Enrollment for Area Public Schools," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 30, September 3, 1964, 1.

⁹⁵ "Hickman School Officials Start Drive for Levy Hike," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 74, no. 52, February 4, 1965, 1; "Citizens Urge New Levy Vote," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 75, no. 11, April 22, 1965, 1; "OK School Levy by 68% Majority," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 75, no. 14, May 13, 1965, 1.

⁹⁶ "School Buys 30 Acres for Building," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 76, no. 23, July 14, 1966, 1; "Name New Local High School," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 77, no. 25, June 27, 1967, 1.

⁹⁷ "New Smith-Hale Money," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 77, no. 28, August 17, 1967, 1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

As exciting as the new money was, reality struck when parents enrolled their children for school in the fall of 1967 and the district realized it still had too many children for the space available. Enrollment increased to 13,512 students, with Foraker exclaiming that there were as many children in the school district as citizens in the neighboring town of Grandview.⁹⁹ The following year, enrollment increased, but not by as much as the years past, with 14,170 coming to school.¹⁰⁰ Foraker expressed the hope that this meant the district was beginning to “level off, possibly enough to give us a breathing spell in the future!”¹⁰¹ The new junior high, Smith-Hale, opened in the fall of 1968, which did provide some relief. Construction on the new high school building was going slowly, as it was less than halfway complete by the fall of 1968. The board was not sure how much money to request in a bond election to finish the building.¹⁰² More specifically, it was not confident that it could get the amount needed to complete the construction.¹⁰³

A failed combined bond and levy election in early 1969 left the district reeling, as the levy temporarily decreased from \$3.75 to \$1.25, a situation that if not remedied, would have meant that the schools would only receive enough money to operate for two months.¹⁰⁴ The school board set the exact same levy for re-election in April, which also lost, this time by a one percent margin.¹⁰⁵ At this point, in early 1969, the board decided to return to its previously failed attempt to significantly raise the school levy after the annexation vote in 1964. The board sought to return to the \$3.75 levy that had been in place for years to fund current school

⁹⁹ “School Enrollment Soars,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 77, no. 31, September 7, 1967, 1. Stating that the number of children in Hickman Mills equaled the number of residents of Grandview was probably accurate. In 1960, the population of Grandview was 10,432. U.S. Census of the Population, 1960.

¹⁰⁰ “First Day Enrollment Up,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 26, September 5, 1968, 1.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² “Bond Election Date Set,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 38, October 24, 1968, 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ “Defeat Two School Plans,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 6, March 13, 1969, 1.

¹⁰⁵ “Slim Defeat for Hickman Levy,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 12, April 24, 1969, 1.

construction and maintenance, setting the date for May 13.¹⁰⁶ The school board hoped that a large, well-organized campaign might result in enough votes to pass the giant levy.¹⁰⁷ Somehow, this time it worked and the vote on the thirteenth was roughly two to one for the levy.¹⁰⁸ Foraker was not incredibly celebratory in his remarks that evening, as he expressed that the school district was late in getting the funds it needed, construction for the high school in particular was proving problematic, ninety teachers had resigned, and property taxes were not going to be enough to continue to finance the schools.¹⁰⁹

As unoptimistic as Foraker's sentiments were in light of a huge win for the district, his warnings proved to be correct. School construction, even with the levy increase, had been financed in such a piece-meal fashion that uneven payments left the construction crew so frustrated that it went on strike in May.¹¹⁰ The high school did not open until 1973 and, even then, it remained unfinished for another year.¹¹¹ Additionally, Foraker and the school board's warning that the district would have to use split-school sessions to accommodate a surge of students came true in 1970.

A New Decade, Things Only Get Harder

1970 was a very difficult year for Hickman Mills's leadership, marking one of the last major battles between an organized anti-tax league and the school district's superintendent and board of education. This was an exhausting year for the district leadership as well as for the residents of Hickman Mills, with eight levy elections, a teacher strike, a lawsuit, and split sessions at the high school, which all took place in the calendar year. By the end of 1970, the

¹⁰⁶ "Massive Levy Effort," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 14, May 8, 1969, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "Plan Spare Discussion," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 16, May 22, 1969, 1; "Gird for 1970 Split Sessions" *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 34, September 25, 1969, 1.

¹¹¹ Jami Parkison, *The Journey to Our Future: The History of Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 1902-2002* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 2002), 99.

district finally passed a levy to continue funding the schools, but, in the process, the anti-tax movement in South Kansas City became strongly entrenched and school leadership's power (or perhaps courage) to pass levies was greatly diminished.

Although maintaining school construction was still a concern for the district, a new financial problem manifested, this time related to school operation. The district was not going to afford continued transportation, maintenance for the buildings, and teacher salaries with the \$3.75 levy in place. The staffing element became a problem at this point for the district, as Hickman Mills was not going to be able to pay its teachers a competitive wage in comparison with surrounding school districts.¹¹² On March 11, representatives from the Community Teachers Association (CTA, teachers' union) presented to the board a statement outlining that the teachers would be going on strike for one day, Monday, March 16, due to insufficient pay.¹¹³ Officially designated as a day in which all teachers in the district held a "withdrawal of services," the CTA gave a list of demands to the board, including improved pay and benefits for district teachers. The primary request was to raise the base pay from \$6,200 to \$6,900.¹¹⁴

While the teachers' grievances were real and the union was in truth seeking to improve their pay and benefits, the timing of the strike may indicate ulterior motives at play, as the one-day strike also came a week after the year's first failed attempt at raising the school levy. Some speculated at the time that the teachers were trying to make a statement about the funding of the district. One former teacher, who was new at that time, commented, "we thought we could wake up the parents a little bit, get them to understand the situation we were all in. The school needed

¹¹² "Set New Levy Vote Date," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 8, March 26, 1970, 1.

¹¹³ "School Shut-Down is Short," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 7, March 19, 1970, 1, 5. The Community Teachers Association was a local chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

better funding!”¹¹⁵ The teachers picketed in front of the schools, carrying signs that said “We Care More.”¹¹⁶ The one-day strike accomplished nothing, as there was no raise and levy elections continued to fail for most of the year.

The Seven-Month Tax War

Levy elections in 1970 were set for March 11, May 12, May 28, June 18, July 7, August 11, September 1, and September 18, when a levy finally passed. Like the annexation battle, the struggle to pass a school levy to fund operations was largely fought between two groups: a committee created by the school board to encourage passing of the levies called “Put Children First” (PCF) and a group headed by a retired realtor called the “Committee of Concerned Citizens for Better Education” (CCBE) that opposed levy increases. A basic outline of the levies and the vote tallies for them as follows is helpful in understanding what happened during the 1970 fight over taxation and school funding.

¹¹⁵ Baker, interview with author.

¹¹⁶ See figure 2 in appendix I.

Table 1: School Levy Elections, March 11-September 18, 1970¹¹⁷

<i>Date of Vote</i>	<i>Levy Amount</i>	<i>Vote For</i>	<i>Vote Against</i>	<i>Percentage Voting "Yes"</i>	<i>Pass/Fail (need 2/3 majority)</i>	<i>Percentage of Residents Voting</i>
March 11	\$6.05	4,604	2,403	65.7%	Fail	26.67%
	+ .75 cent	4,618	2,387	65.9%	Fail	
May 12	\$6.05	2,968	2,198	57.45%	Fail	19.66%
	+ .75 HS	3,045	2,123	58.9%	Fail	
May 28	\$6.05	4,482	2,435	64.79%	Fail	26.33%
	+ .75 HS	4,490	2,427	64.91%	Fail	
June 18	\$6.05	4,987	2,542	66.23%	Fail	28.65%
	+ .75 HS	4,875	2,684	64.49%	Fail	
July 7	\$6.05	6,329	4,282	59.64%	Fail	40.38%
	+ .75 HS	6,229	4,380	58.71%	Fail	
August 11	\$5.86	6,951	4,066	63%	Fail	41.93%
	+ .75 HS	6,637	4,373	60.2%	Fail	
September 1	\$5.86	8,762	5,044	63.46%	Fail	52.55%
September 18	\$5.58	8,032	2,087	79.37%	Pass	38.51%

What must have been incredibly frustrating for Foraker and the school board, let alone the parents and community members who supported the levy, is that every vote tally demonstrated that the majority of voters were in favor of increasing school funding. However, because state law required a two-thirds majority to increase property taxes, the school either had

¹¹⁷ Table data taken from *Jackson County Advocate* issues for dates March 11, 1970 through September 18, 1970 and U.S. Census of the Population, 1970.

to rouse enough supporters to vote or compromise enough to convince recalcitrant citizens to agree to some taxation. The June 18 vote was particularly vexing for the district, as the total was roughly a half percentage point shy of passing the levy, equivalent to gaining twenty-eight more votes. The September 18 vote count is instructive in that it shows a steep decline in the number of persons who voted against the levy. The school board made a compromise with the CCBE in September in order to assure its support for the levy, a decision which angered a segment of the school funding supporters, as the board had agreed to a lower levy rate to secure the deal. Unfortunately, the board's attempts to placate the CCBE probably translated to people from both sides of the issue refraining from voting in the September 18th election.¹¹⁸

What made the levy increase so important for Hickman Mills was that there was also a statewide vote on increasing income taxes, with part of the revenue directed towards funding Missouri schools. The tax hike was defeated in April, which meant that the state was going to supply less money to the schools than had been anticipated.¹¹⁹ By May, Foraker warned the public that the district was in real trouble because it had not yet ordered supplies for the schools for the fall, neither had leadership given teachers contracts because the district was not sure what its budget was actually going to be.¹²⁰ Adding to the state funding issue, Foraker was facing the possibility of a teacher shortage. Some teachers were beginning to leave the district and work in neighboring schools in Grandview, Raytown, Center, or Kansas City, because those districts' operating budgets were set with levies already passed and contracts ready to be signed.¹²¹ By June, Foraker was increasingly blunt with his pronouncements, sharing that the school had eighty

¹¹⁸ "Accord on School Situation," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 32, September 10, 1970, 1, 4.

¹¹⁹ "Set \$6.05 Levy for Hickman," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 13, April 30, 1970, 1.

¹²⁰ "Levies Fail a Second Time," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 15, May 14, 1970, 1.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

teaching vacancies, with no candidates for hire.¹²² As in the past, the school turned to public supporters to help get the levy passed.

Many in Hickman Mills volunteered support, including the editorial board of the *Jackson County Advocate*, who ran continual editorials, cartoons, articles, and letters to the editor that overwhelmingly argued in favor of the levy.¹²³ Members of the public, particularly clergy, began to write letters to the paper and sent messages to homes urging the patrons of the district to support the local schools.¹²⁴ One preacher from St. Luke's United Methodist Church placed the words "you put children last, shame" on the lettered marquis in front of the church building for passersby and churchgoers to see.¹²⁵

For its part, the CCBE was working hard in trying to convince the public that the school district was mismanaging money and needed to find better ways to build and maintain schools without overly taxing the hardworking people of Hickman Mills.¹²⁶ One officer in the CCBE, Howard Finke, who would later unsuccessfully run for a Kansas City district 6 seat (representing Hickman Mills), wrote a letter to the paper in June declaring that the school board and superintendent Foraker have a "credibility gap" with the public. It originated from officials' claims that the schools were not going to be able to stay open for much longer without passing a levy, yet the schools continued to operate for three months.¹²⁷ He continued by proscribing how the district can save money through wise investments, contending that the teachers' union was to blame for the teacher shortage in the district, and postulating that Foraker was comfortable

¹²² "Set New Levy Election" *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 18, June 4, 1970, 1.

¹²³ For examples of editorial cartoons, see figures 3-6 in appendix I.

¹²⁴ See *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 14, May 7, 1970; *Consolidated School District No. 1 School Gazette*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 11, 1970; *Consolidated School District No. 1 School Gazette*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 2, 1970. Both issues of the *Consolidated School District No. 1 School Gazette* were published by the Put Children First Committee and delivered along with the *Jackson County Advocate* for those dates.

¹²⁵ See figure 7 in appendix I.

¹²⁶ "Oppose Levy Plans," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 21, June 25, 1970, 1.

¹²⁷ "Letter to the Editor," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 21, June 25, 1970, 11.

raising the levy because he does not live within district boundaries and would not have to pay the tax.¹²⁸ Finke ended his letter arguing:

There are other answers to our school problems. I happen to believe the answer doesn't always lie in voting in higher levies. Higher levies are only a stop-gap measure and do not get at the underlying problems...I think our leaders would do well to open their minds and do a little creative thinking about the problems and search for other solutions instead of a continual submission of a levy proposal that has been defeated three times.¹²⁹

Another anti-tax member of CCBE wrote to the paper explaining that having repeated elections for a tax levy when it had been defeated in the past was anti-democratic.¹³⁰ Claiming that the district was employing a policy of repeating the levy until it finally passes, the tax opponent finished with:

It appears to me that if they would have just told us this thing was going to be and that it didn't matter whether we want it or not that the result would be the same. That's how Russia would do it.¹³¹

While tax supporters were using moralistic and practically religious rhetoric to convince voters to support children and the schools they attend, the tax opponents wanted voters to think about personal rights and freedom from over-reaching institutions. But debates also became personal. The head of CCBE, G.P. Wooldridge, held a press conference in June to declare that Foraker should be removed from office for misusing school funds. Foraker then filed suit against Wooldridge charging him with defamation and slander.¹³²

Even with the animosity between the groups, by July, with the fifth defeat of the levy and fall approaching, the school board knew it had to work harder on compromising with the CCBE and began to set up meetings between itself, the CCBE, and the board's own pro-levy committee,

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² "Oppose Levy Plans"; "Hickman Mills Fight," *Kansas City Star*, July 8, 1970, 4.

the PCF.¹³³ But the rhetoric and the public arguments still continued, with school board members and Foraker making statements that without proper funding, the schools would simply not open in the fall. Members of the CCBE countered that Missouri law would not allow the schools to be closed, which prompted a Missouri state department of education official to make a statement clarifying that Missouri had “no law which can force a school district to open and operate when it has not passed an operating levy.”¹³⁴ With this, the threat escalated from dual sessions for the high school to not operating the schools at all.

The CCBE offered a compromise at this point in August, promising to support a \$5.30 levy to operate the schools.¹³⁵ However, it continued fighting against the levies as presented by the district, even going so far as to claim that the tax increase would provide unethical raises to the superintendent and the principals.¹³⁶ But when the CCBE and the board met together, the anti-taxers begged the district not to close the schools. Midge Greene, the secretary for the CCBE made a passionate statement:

Do not throw our children out on the streets because of your stubbornness and pride... We still maintain that a \$5.30 levy is sufficient to operate this district... by doing these things you will not only be serving this community but will also restore to your positions the integrity you deserve.¹³⁷

Brinksmanship continued through August and into September, as the district argued that it could not operate without a budget, which necessitated an operating levy, and the CCBE kept insisting that there had to be a way to run the schools without taxing more than \$5.30.¹³⁸

¹³³ “Fail 5th Time on Levies,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 23, July 9, 1970, 1.

¹³⁴ “State Official Blasts Rumor,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 20, August 6, 1970, 1, 6.

¹³⁵ “Why Vote—No?” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 27, August 6, 1970, 4.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ “Levy Fails for 6th Time,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 28, August 13, 1970, 1.

¹³⁸ “Letter to the Editor,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 30, August 27, 1970, 11, B4.

Negotiation

When the levy failed for the seventh time on September first, the district leadership finally admitted defeat, rescinded its threat of not opening the schools, and called for a meeting with the leaders of the CCBE.¹³⁹ The conference was primarily between the school board and the CCBE, represented chiefly by Howard Finke, but representatives from the teachers' union and from the Hickman Mills Chamber of Commerce also took part.¹⁴⁰ Board president McElroy offered to lower the proposed levy to \$5.58, with a promise that the schools would open. F. Neal Raupp of the CCBE countered with \$5.30 and Foraker's resignation, with full support from the CCBE. McElroy refused both.¹⁴¹ Board member Bill Wall, the previous board president who lost his seat in the 1963 annexation fight and had since regained it, asked Finke if there was any way the CCBE would accept \$5.50, to which Finke replied that the group would only support \$5.30.¹⁴² The chairwoman of the teacher's union then shared that the teachers would only support a levy that let them keep their \$6,300 base salary promised by the board.¹⁴³

McElroy pointed out that a \$5.30 levy would mean budget and staff cuts and that if the levy election failed before school started, the district would have to refund Missouri any state aid money it would receive until the community could pass a levy. This would have dire consequences for school funding, as the district would have to try to pass even higher levies to repay the state loan.¹⁴⁴ The meeting had started at 9 pm and at this point in the conversation it was 10:30 pm. Everyone took a break and then met together as a delegation for negotiation, with two representatives per group chosen from the CCBE, the PCF, and the teacher's union, along

¹³⁹ "Despite Levy Defeat, Board Votes to Start Classes," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 31, September 3, 1970, 1-2.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. The room was packed, mostly with supporters of the district and the school levy. When McElroy refused to remove Foraker, the audience stood and cheered.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ "Despite Levy Defeat," 1-2.

with Mary Smith from the Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Phillip Needles representing area ministers, and two students representing the high school.¹⁴⁵ Of the twelve members of the delegation, only two opposed the levy—the two members of the CCBE. After two hours of negotiation, the delegation convinced the CCBE to agree to a \$5.58 levy, with the condition that the levy be set for two years and that the district issue a promise in writing that it would open the schools even if the vote failed.¹⁴⁶ The representative for the teachers agreed to take a short-term contract in order to simplify budgeting; the PCF said it would back the levy if the CCBE showed public support as well; and Smith declared that the Chamber of Commerce would champion whatever compromise came out of the meeting.¹⁴⁷

After this discussion, one of the representatives from the teacher’s union stood up and loudly stated, “I have no confidence in Finke—he’s going to turn this around on us when tonight is done!”¹⁴⁸ Shouting broke out, chiefly between members of the CCBE, the PCF, and the teachers, so McElroy called for another break, which he used to talk to the members of the CCBE to try to dissuade them of requiring a two-year commitment.¹⁴⁹ When the break was over, the CCBE agreed to a one-year freeze on the levy of \$5.58, the board voted on the measure. It passed, with one abstention from member Paul Kamitsuka, who stated that he “cannot support any compromise and I cannot trust Finke.”¹⁵⁰ The meeting was adjourned at one in the morning.

With the agreement in place, the PCF and the CCBE started sending mailings and placing advertisements in the paper, only this time jointly. The CCBE included statements, with no apparent awareness of the irony of the situation, “Concerned Citizens for Better Education asks

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. A one-year freeze meant that the board agreed not to attempt to raise the levy any higher for a year. The CCBE wanted a two-year freeze, but settled for one.

you to VOTE YES this time!”¹⁵¹ The levy passed, with a turnout of ten thousand voters, a little lower than the previous vote, but still representative of over a third of the adult members of the community.¹⁵² However, even though the board honored its promise to open the schools, it did decide to divide the high school student body and teach in two shifts. Juniors and Seniors were to attend Ruskin High from 6 am until 12:15 pm, then the Sophomores would arrive at 12:30 pm and leave at 6:45 pm.¹⁵³ Extra-curricular activities would still be offered, but the high school would continue the split sessions for two school years.¹⁵⁴ Colleen Hamilton, who had a child in the high school at the time, remembers the difficulty of the split sessions:

They had been trying to pass bond issues, and my son had to attend school half-days—he was the afternoon session. That was a very unhappy time. We didn’t like it, he didn’t like it. Nobody liked it, the teachers were unhappy...that was not good.¹⁵⁵

Speaking of her own child’s experience and her observations of the community at the time, Hamilton expressed that, “I think the split sessions really hurt how the kids saw the school. I could see a definite resentment towards the school. It was not a fun place to be for two years.”¹⁵⁶ At the time, Mary Smith from the Chamber of Commerce wrote a letter to Hickman Mills congratulating the successful compromise, acknowledging that the fight was difficult and that it exposed a rift in the community, but her tone was more positive in asserting that Hickman Mills “may grow stronger for having done it [levy fight].”¹⁵⁷

Ultimately, Hamilton was more correct in her assessment of the relationship between the school and the community in the fallout of 1970. The CCBE quickly returned to demanding

¹⁵¹ “VOTE YES!” Two-page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 32, September 10, 1970, 12-13. See figure 8 in Appendix I.

¹⁵² “Joyful Return to Schools,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 34, September 24, 1970, 1.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “Welcome Split-Session End,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 19, June 8, 1972, B4; Hamilton, interview with author.

¹⁵⁵ Hamilton, interview with author.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ “Letter to the Editor,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 34, September 24, 1970, 9.

audits of the school district and accusing leaders of mismanagement of funds. Levy fights continued, but 1970 marked the end of any attempts to pass a large levy to fully fund school construction, maintenance, and staffing. The last elementary school was finished in 1973, shortly after the second high school was finally done. The school district at last faced more manageable enrollments, but a slow decline in students precipitated an eventual halving of the student body district-wide.

Long-Term Effects

The tax battles and school operation problems that plagued the history of the Hickman Mills School District established a pattern of reliance on a persistently low levy, a condition that would hinder the district's financial situation to this day. The municipal annexation to Kansas City but maintenance of a separate school district, in combination with tax and funding problems greatly affected Hickman Mills's trajectory through the end of the twentieth century. However, longtime residents of Hickman Mills expressed that joining Kansas City as a municipality was a benefit to the area. Lilly Husman, who had been a resident of Hickman Mills since 1954, explained that:

Ultimately, the annexation to Kansas City was a good thing, even if we weren't exactly sure at the time. Our sheriff was quite overstretched, and getting better and more police and fire protection was a blessing. Now not joining the school district, that was good too. We got to have our autonomy, and pride in our history.¹⁵⁸

This was a common sentiment among those interviewed who moved to or grew up in Hickman Mills before 1963. Interviewees expressed that growth was inevitable and the community was not able to handle protection, electricity, and water very well by itself.¹⁵⁹ However, each of those interviewed also related that the community was wise to not join the Kansas City school district, citing similar reasons as those expressed by Husman, namely preservation of local

¹⁵⁸ Husman, interview with author.

¹⁵⁹ Baker, Cardona, and Hill, interviews with author.

control and community identity. This raises some questions: what does it mean when a community is willing to join a municipality but not a school district? Why was the community so resistant to merging the schools? What fears or concerns propelled the community's struggle to remain independent?

For Hickman Mills, the irony of joining Kansas City but not the schools was that, ultimately, the dominant condition of the two school districts has become very similar. Hickman Mills does not exist as an independent community, it is part of southern Kansas City. However, Hickman Mills C-1 School District is distinct from the Kansas City Missouri School District. Yet, in the minds of longtime residents and the wider metropolitan area, this is mostly a *de jure* distinction, as the districts face similar challenges.¹⁶⁰ Both districts have been struggling with either losing or being granted provisional accreditation and serving primarily poor, minority students.

The rest of this study will demonstrate that 1961, 1964, and 1970 were linchpin years for Hickman Mills, as they marked the beginning of the period in which the region transformed from a small community of largely lower middle-class/blue-collar whites to an extension of the Kansas City "urban" space, with a majority non-white middle-class/blue-collar populace. This transformation was incredibly slow between 1970 and 1990, but greatly increased in the last decade of the twentieth century. The common pattern of "white flight," which helped Hickman Mills grow in the 1950s and 60s, happened within the district itself, but in the 1990s. Both chapters four and five will address this change in Hickman Mills, with chapter four looking at the district's fight against desegregation efforts, fair housing, and industrialization in light of gradual increase of black families moving into local neighborhoods during the 1970s and 1980s.

¹⁶⁰ Baker, Cardona, Hamilton, and Hill, interviews with author; Allison Wade, interview with author, September 8, 2012.

Chapter five will explain the perception of decline in Hickman Mills during the 1990s, when the community and the school became known as another dangerous part of Kansas City.

Chapter 4: Not In My Backyard

Race, Integration, and Opposition to Demographic Change, 1964-1990

Hickman Mills' leadership had largely been occupied with local battles over taxation, school construction, and overcrowding through the 1950s and much of the 1960s. Previous to 1964, residents in the all-white geographic area of the Hickman Mills school district were essentially oblivious to the 1954 and 1955 *Brown v. Board* decision. People in Hickman Mills only began to publicly address integration when confronted with the perceived threat of joining the Kansas City Missouri School District in 1964. Integration entered the public discussion again in 1969 when a statewide plan was proposed to reorganize school districts that would consolidate Hickman Mills, along with other southern suburban schools, together with Kansas City, Missouri. After this suggestion by part of the Missouri legislature, Hickman Mills became much more aware and protective of its status as a suburban enclave for white, lower middle-class and blue collar families.

Feeling threatened by being associated with Kansas City (although already officially part of the municipality), residents began to take measures to ensure that their neighborhoods and schools remained "safe" for their children. They adopted a "not in my backyard" approach in late 1960s through the 1970s, a period in which residents of Hickman Mills actively fought against Kansas City by opposing anything residents thought endangered their own status quo. The Hickman Mills community resisted several measures at once, with the same groups fighting against low-income housing and integrated schooling, or landfills and base closures. Their reaction to the Spainhower commission of 1968 and 1969 and desegregation efforts in Kansas City in the 1970s also epitomizes their blanket emphasis on halting any changes to their community, especially those that made suburban Hickman Mills more similar to urban Kansas

City. Again the irony of the history of Hickman Mills is that it grew substantially because of urbanization efforts made by Kansas City as well as an influx of Kansas Citians wishing to live an affordable suburban lifestyle. In a broader sense, the history of Hickman Mills is one of significant change. However, by the 1960s residents sought to halt any further development within school borders, particularly opposing racial or economic change within the neighborhoods.

This chapter will examine the community's efforts to oppose integration. Additionally, I will reveal how the residents of Hickman Mills saw desegregation of housing and schooling by Kansas City authorities as an intrusion into the peace and "normalcy" of the southland. As will be addressed, many of the actions taken by Ruskinites involved the schools themselves, whether as literal meeting places for opposition groups, or "neutral ground" for opposite sides to meet and discuss possible compromises. This chapter will explore how for all its concerns over "forced integration," Hickman Mills as a community began to racially integrate very slowly due to factors outside of white residents' control. Specifically, black families began to move in very small numbers to neighborhoods like Ruskin Heights, Ruskin Hills, and Kirkside. While not significant enough to constitute a threat to white hegemony, African American presence in south Kansas City would eventually grow. By the 1980s and 1990s many whites became nervous about property values, neighborhood safety, and school quality, causing them to move to more remote white enclaves like Lee's Summit, Raytown, Independence, and Liberty.¹ While the white flight from Hickman Mills will be covered in greater depth in chapter 5, the seeds of

¹ Heather Davis, interview with author, December 4, 2012; James Hill, interview with author, August 30, 2012; Lilly Husman, interview with author, August 25, 2012; Graham Martin, interview with author, September 8, 2012; Alicia Solum, interview with author, January 26, 2013; Robert Spearman, interview with author, August 25, 2012; Allison Wade, interview with author, September 8, 2012.

neighborhood demographic and economic change began during the events analyzed in this chapter.

Urban Perception

While residents did not complain vociferously against expanded highways and access to and from the city as a result of closer ties with Kansas City, they expressed discomfort with the more “undesirable” aspects of urbanization: multi-unit housing, landfills, and in the case of Kansas City’s and Hickman Mills’s relationship, the idea of large numbers of non-whites as residents. Some resistance to fair housing occurred in the 1960s, but the end of the decade specifically cemented feelings toward residential and educational integration among those who lived in Hickman Mills. Events in the 1970s and to a degree the 1980s served as a continuation of a bitter conflict in 1968 and 1969 in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Becoming part of Kansas City either coincided with or ushered in a period of great “urbanization,” depending upon the perspective of persons interviewed. White respondents used the term “urbanization” to describe the change in Hickman Mills underwent from the 1960s on through the present day. When pressed, those interviewed admitted that “urban” was code to suggest a demographic change in the community, namely when the area began to “turn black.”² African American respondents employed different language when the gradual change Hickman Mills underwent in shifting from a predominantly white community to a predominantly black one. Specifically, black Hickmanites applied the same terms white respondents used to explain how Hickman Mills transformed during its period of suburbanization.³ Black families moved south into Hickman Mills with the same motivations as their white counterparts: affordable

² Davis, interview with author; Husman, interview with author; Spearman, interview with author; Wade, interview with author.

³ Solum, interview with author; Martin, interview with author; Dell Jacobs, interview with author, December 4, 2012.

housing, greater space, and distance from congestion and perceived crime of the city.⁴ The difference between the two groups is that black families, for the most part, moved into the area thirty years later than whites. Hence, white residents of Hickman Mills expressed the change in the area as urbanization that resulted from the joining with Kansas City, Missouri, while black residents saw the two events as simultaneous and not directly linked.⁵ Race plays an important role in the perception among Hickmanites of what is urbanization and what is suburbanization.

Changes in the Land

Road expansion was a tangible example of Hickman Mills becoming more a part of Kansas City, not just in name. While Hickman Mills as a community underwent changes as it grew and merged with Kansas City, many of the effects of joining the larger metropolis did not begin to be felt among residents in the southland until the 1970s and 1980s, particularly with highway construction and expansion. The process of being linked to major roads began several decades earlier when Highway 71 opened up more convenient routes to Hickman Mills and Grandview, which helped spur residential and commercial development in both places during the 1950s. The Interstate Highway 435 (I-435) making a loop around Kansas City, also brought about change for Hickman Mills in the late 1960s and through the 1970s. Land was cleared in the northwest corner of the school district for I-435 to head south from Kansas City in the early 1960s, with the section of the road completed to the junction with highway 71, making a “V” shape in the northwest portion of the district.⁶ At the same time, another section of interstate was being constructed west on the south end of Overland Park, Kansas, with the idea that

⁴ Jacobs, Martin, and Solum, interviews with author.

⁵ Historians are generally not encouraged to play the speculative game of “what if?” However, if Hickman Mills had remained its own entity, grown from a village to a town, and perhaps even to small city, would it have remained a white, middle class community? Lee’s Summit to the east is predominantly white, but Grandview, to the south, is mixed. Raytown to the northeast is currently undergoing racial change and leaders have been looking to Hickman Mills’s school staff for advice. A study of the larger Jackson County area could result in a better understanding of economic and racial changes that accompany urban growth.

⁶ “435 Construction in Hickman Mills,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 77, no. 52, February 1, 1968, 6.

completion of the road would make for a “tremendous economic impact on South Jackson County,” opening the area for more residential and commercial growth.⁷ Missouri transportation officials were finally able to connect the two lengths of the interstate in 1970 and commuters or shoppers could travel through southern Kansas City faster than before.⁸

State transportation officials were correct in assuming that highway development would bring business to Hickman Mills, although it would take ten years for the area to fully develop. The Bannister Mall, a very large shopping plaza that encouraged economic growth throughout the “Bannister district” opened in 1980 between I-435 and Hillcrest and was an economic boon for the area as well as for the school district.⁹ Multiple restaurants, boutiques, chain stores, and service-oriented businesses such as auto repair centers followed the mall into the Bannister district during the 1980s, all increasing property values and bringing increased revenue to the school district.¹⁰ However, not all new developments in south Kansas City were welcome additions for local residents, who particularly opposed non-single family housing such as apartment complexes, low-income housing, and mobile homes.

Fighting Mobile Homes

Mobile homes tend to be unpopular regardless of where they are built, hence opposition by Ruskinites against a mobile home park proposed in the early 1970s was not unique.

However, the organization of South Kansas Citians against mobile homes involved the schools,

⁷ “Workers Forge Ahead on I-435 Land Clearance Job,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 77, no. 1, February 9, 1967, 1.

⁸ “Open I-435 Tuesday,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 36, October 8, 1970, 1. The interstate remains a vital “quick route” around Kansas City to this day. Only upon studying the roads and the area of Hickman Mills did I realize I had been driving through the school district for years without thinking about it, as a way to move from Kansas to Missouri quickly on my way eastward.

⁹ “Competitors looking over shoulders at Bannister Mall,” *Kansas City Star*, July 29, 1980, 5C; “Bannister Mall opens doors,” *Kansas City Star*, August 7, 1980, 10A; “Bannister Mall complex continues to add stores,” *Kansas City Star*, November 1, 1981, 7H. The story of the Bannister Mall will be explored in chapter 5.

¹⁰ Jami Parkison, *The Journey to Our Future: The History of Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 1902-2002* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 2002), 78.

with school leaders at the forefront. Opposition rallies were held at the local schools, a pattern that would continue as residents later fought against low-income housing in other parts of Hickman Mills.

Leading up to the fall of 1971, a developer named Tom Horner applied to Kansas City to build mobile home parks within Hickman Mills's school district borders, starting with a 467-unit park in the southwest corner of the district, off Martha Truman Road.¹¹ When the school board learned of this possible development, it and other community groups immediately began to protest the proposition. Public objection became visible and organized enough that Superintendent Foraker began holding meetings and debates at different school buildings for the public to learn about the issue and to encourage them to contact the city council asking not to have mobile houses in the area.¹² In October, Horner agreed to debate the issue with Foraker and another community member, Betty Clements.¹³ Clements presented the argument that the development would bring in over a thousand people in a small space, which would congest the roads.¹⁴ Foraker told the crowd that the schools would be hurt by the addition of mobile homes, as they would add a more children to the district, but not help financially because the land area is smaller than single-family homes, hence the property tax revenue would be less.¹⁵

Horner tried to assuage the group, telling them that new mobile homes in 1971 were much better, cleaner, and nicer than in the past, but his audience found the developer unconvincing. The community, along with the school district, petitioned the city council and with the help of their representative John Sharp (council member from district 6, Hickman Mills)

¹¹ "Debate Mobile Homes," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 39, October 28, 1971, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

succeeded in having Horner's application to the council denied.¹⁶ The avoidance of a possible blight was satisfying to residents in South Kansas City, but another fight was looming, this time with garbage.

Keeping the Trash Out

As stated earlier, one of the inevitable downsides of increasing urbanization with roads, services, and commercial centers is increased traffic and garbage. With Kansas City annexing Hickman Mills in 1961 and thus expanding southwards into undeveloped land, opportunities to find places for refuse storage made Hickman Mills a prime location for a landfill, which residents of the area greatly resented. In 1972, the city council presented a plan to Hickman Mills's residents for a landfill that would be built between the newly opened I-435 and Highway 71.¹⁷ Three hundred people appeared to protest the decision and Hickman Mills Community Council (essentially a larger neighborhood association) president Betty Clements assured residents in September that there would be no action on the landfill.¹⁸ She proved to be right, as popular protest against the dump convinced the city council to announce that it was shelving the matter in October.¹⁹ Hickmanites would not have to worry about landfill battles again until the 1990s.²⁰ By the end of 1972, residents of Hickman Mills had successfully kept a landfill and a mobile-home lot out of their territory. Their next challenge in preventing changes to their community would be holding on to an integral local institution.

Richards-Gebaur Air Base Decline

By early 1973, rumors began to circulate throughout Grandview and Hickman Mills that the United States Air Force was going to close Richards-Gebaur Air Base and move personnel to

¹⁶ "No Mobile Homes!," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 41, November 11, 1971, 1.

¹⁷ "Community Council Meets—Discuss Landfill Site," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 35, September 28, 1972, 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "Officials Stop Landfill Plans," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 36, October 5, 1972, 1.

²⁰ "Hickmanites" is a rare term, I did not see or hear it very often, but it seemed to pop up most in the 1970s and 80s.

other installations in the country.²¹ Although Stuart Symington, now a U.S. Senator representing Missouri, sought to assure people in southern Kansas City and Grandview that the base was not going anywhere, school leaders were concerned. Hickman Mills did not have as many students associated with the air base as other districts, including Grandview and Belton, but the district would still lose around 250 students from civil service families associated with the base, as well as 500 children of military personnel.²² If the base were to close, the district could handle the loss of the students, having constantly worried about overcrowding in the previous two decades. But previous defense funds that had come from the federal government, often during times of great financial need for the district, would be greatly diminished.²³ By March, US Senator Thomas Eagleton informed the public that the Secretary of the Air Force was considering large reductions for the base, if not outright closing it.²⁴

Progress on the base's fate was kept quiet until 1974 when the Air Force announced that it would be closing the base and sending troops to Scott Air Force Base in Belleville, Illinois.²⁵ The Kansas City Chamber of Commerce got involved and presented an argument to the Pentagon that the closing would prove to be devastating for those non-military personnel associated with the base. The group estimated that Grandview and Kansas City would lose around eight million dollars because of the move.²⁶ Others sought legal means to force the Air Force to leave the base intact. Robert Corbett, the president of the newly renamed Southern Kansas City Chamber of Commerce (formerly Hickman Mills CoC) formed a group called the "R-G Relief Fund," which was raising money to pay a legal team to sue the United States Air

²¹ "Concern for Base Rumors," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 83, no. 2, February 8, 1973, 1.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Hickman Mills would still receive some funding as a "defense impacted zone" because of its proximity to the Bannister Complex—a federal installation that housed several defense contractors.

²⁴ "Base 'Rumors' Correct," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 83, no. 5, March 1, 1973, 1.

²⁵ "Move a Base Problem," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 3, February 13, 1975, 1; "Richards-Gebaur Move Would Cripple Housing Market," *Kansas City Star*, October 3, 1976, 2-D.

²⁶ "Preview Base Arguments," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 84, no. 51, January 16, 1975, 1.

Force. Corbett sought to obtain a temporary injunction against the closure in order to conduct an environmental impact study on the closing of the base.²⁷ The suit worked to a degree and the military agreed to slow down the transfer by April of 1975.²⁸ The fight continued in state and federal courts for the rest of the year, with some national figures like then Senator Bob Dole becoming involved in asking Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger to reconsider the move.²⁹ Ultimately, the courts found that the Department of Defense had the right to move the Air Force troops and close the base.³⁰

The base closing directly impacted Grandview more so than it did Hickman Mills, except that the state of Missouri, which now owned the base, planned to convert part of it along with some land on the north end closer to Hickman Mills, into a correctional facility.³¹ Residents both in Hickman Mills and Grandview loudly protested this move, much in the same way that residents of Hickman Mills opposed the building of a landfill only a few years earlier. By September of 1976, Missouri Governor Bond agreed to cease any move to build a prison just south of Hickman Mills.³²

Regardless, the base, along with the economic boost it gave the entire county was gone. The air base also was a draw to the southlands and had been partially responsible for the growth that Hickman Mills experienced in the 1950s and 1960s, as shown in chapter 1.³³ While the closing of the base was not a primary reason for eventual decline in Hickman Mills, it did contribute.

²⁷ “Fight Base Move,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 9, March 27, 1975, 1.

²⁸ “To Review Base Move Plans,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 12, April 17, 1975, 1.

²⁹ “New Base Lawsuit Move,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 10, April 3, 1975, 1, 9.

³⁰ “Reveal Alternative Moves,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 36, October 2, 1975, 1, 5; “Appeals Court Upholds Air Force-Give Base Move Decision,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 88, no. 2, February 9, 1978, 1, 3.

³¹ “State Buys Land North of Base—To Locate Prison Here!” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 86, no. 31, August 26, 1976, 1, 3.

³² “Kills Prison Proposal,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 86, no. 32, September 2, 1976, 1.

³³ Husman, interview with author.

Fair Housing

Residents of Hickman Mills won and lost battles against outside influences affecting their status quo in the 1960s and 1970s, but the most difficult, longest lasting, and ultimately least successful conflict Hickman Mills had with Kansas City and the state of Missouri dealt with race, schools, and housing. Starting in the 1960s, with federal legislation on civil rights and the Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare looking into fair housing, residents and leaders in Hickman Mills began to consistently address race in the school district for the first time.

In 1964, a group of clergy across the Kansas City metropolitan area called the Greater Kansas City Council on Religion and Race began a campaign to fight housing restrictions. The program was called the “Good Neighborhood Pledge,” which encouraged homeowners to sign a petition decrying the practice of racial discrimination in buying and selling housing.³⁴ As the organization canvassed throughout the area, including Hickman Mills, opposition groups on both a national and local scale geared up attempts to stop fair housing, an issue that was beginning to be considered by the Kansas City council.³⁵ On the national level, the John Birch Society and the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) became involved in fighting fair housing movements across the country, while in Kansas City, more specialized groups like the Committee for the Preservation of Private Property and the K.C. Council for Civic Responsibility worked to curb a fair housing movement.³⁶

In 1966, representatives from the Council on Religion and Race started acquiring signatures for their Good Neighbor Pledge in Hickman Mills with a goal of one thousand

³⁴ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 124.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 124-25; “Suburbia for Everyone?,” *Album: Johnson County Museum* 21, no. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2008): 1, 5, 7.

signatures.³⁷ The Hickman Mills chairman, Dick Porterfield, was looking for more volunteers, as he had collected five hundred signatures and wanted another five hundred.³⁸ Porterfield was never able to collect the full 1000 signatures in Hickman Mills.³⁹ Opposition to Porterfield was intense in south Kansas City, as in the rest of the metropolitan area. Reverend Robert I. Hatch from the First Bible Presbyterian Church in Kansas City and a member of the John Birch Society formed a group called the Citizen's Committee, which worked with the John Birch Society and the local Committee for the Preservation of Private Property to also collect signatures, donations, and supporters opposing any fair housing attempts made by Kansas City.⁴⁰ Placing repeated ads in the *Jackson County Advocate*, Hatch and his supporters advised that the religious figures involved in the Good Neighbor Pledge were overstepping their bounds and endangering the public's "freedom of choice."⁴¹ The ad continued:

What has been unfair about our American system of housing? Nothing! What's wrong with choosing your own neighborhood on the basis of your racial ethnic as well as proximity to schools, churches, or shopping centers?⁴²

The ad also criticized the originators of the Good Neighbor Pledge, claiming that they themselves chose their own housing "on the basis of racial and ethnic surroundings."⁴³

The fight over fair housing was widespread throughout the metropolitan area, particularly because the Kansas City, Missouri city council passed a fair housing ordinance in 1967

³⁷ "Fair Housing Pledge Campaign at Half-way Point in Hickman Mills," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 76, no. 6, March 17, 1966, 1.

³⁸ Ibid; "Housing committee/Steering Committee of Hickman Mills/Ruskin Heights Letter from Dick Porterfield, March 5, 1966," Box 3, Folder 3, Greater Kansas City Council on Religion and Race Papers Collection, 1960-1993, Kansas Collection, RH MS 786, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence, KS.

³⁹ Dick Porterfield, "Hickman Mills report, July 18, 1966," Box 3, Folder 3, Greater Kansas City Council on Religion and Race Papers Collection, 1960-1993, Kansas Collection, RH MS 786, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.

⁴⁰ "Minister Ordered to Leave Meeting," *Kansas City Times*, October 23, 1963, 6; "Refuse to Sign," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 76, no. 4, March 3, 1966, A-6.

⁴¹ "Refuse to Sign," 6.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

outlawing racial discrimination in housing.⁴⁴ Opposition groups like the Citizen's Committee sought to overturn the ordinance with a public vote, after having collected enough signatures to petition the city council.⁴⁵ The city-wide referendum was to occur on April 30, 1968, but the city council avoided the vote by adopting the federal 1968 Civil Rights Act about two weeks before the referendum was to be decided, negating the local ordinance and hence the possible recall of it.⁴⁶

For the most part, after the adoption of the Civil Rights Act, residents of Hickman Mills seemed to stop focusing on fair housing for a time. However, in the late 1970s, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began working with Kansas City to build homes in Hickman Mills, efforts which local residents fought for thirty years. As will be discussed further, whites in Hickman Mills perceived fair housing ordinances and HUD efforts as immediate threats to their children's welfare and fought passionately against them, as they believed such alterations to the community's status quo would lead to "forced integrated" schooling. During the late 1960s, the Hickman Mills community joined many other suburban areas to vociferously oppose a measure proposed by a member of the Missouri legislature to reorganize school districts, which had the potential of creating districts that crossed color lines.

Spainhower Plan and District Reorganization

In 1967, Missouri Lt. Governor Thomas Eagleton asked state House of Representative member James Spainhower to head a commission to study and create a school reorganization plan.⁴⁷ The commission met in October of 1967, hired a consultant and a team of researchers

⁴⁴ Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 125.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Donna Gardner and John L. Rury, "Suburban Opposition to District Reorganization: The 1968 Spainhower Commission and Metropolitan Kansas City and St. Louis," *The Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education* (17 July 2013), doi: 10.1007/s11256-013-0255-4. James Spainhower was a member of the Missouri House of Representatives from 1963 to 1970 and then later was elected state treasurer from 1973 until 1981. He had an

from the University of Minnesota, and began working on the problem of school organization in Missouri through 1968.⁴⁸ While the group began presenting findings as early as March of 1968, it created a complete report in November, which outlined a plan to create twenty regional school units throughout the state, which would oversee teacher professional development, school construction, and school taxation.⁴⁹ As per this plan, the St. Louis and Kansas City metropolitan areas would become single districts.⁵⁰ Before exploring the reactions in Hickman Mills, it is important to first note that this plan was a complete failure as the Missouri legislature did not adopt its recommendations. In fact, association with the report was political suicide for legislators as it was wildly and completely unpopular in every part of the state, but particularly in the suburbs.⁵¹

Residents of Hickman Mills first became aware of the “secret school plan,” as denoted by the *Jackson County Advocate* in November 1968, and they were not pleased.⁵² The school board met on November twenty-first to discuss strategy, announcing that it was going to hold public meetings to get feedback from local members.⁵³ Superintendent Foraker made a statement for the newspaper expressing surprise:

I never dreamed the reorganization plan would be so sweeping. Dr. Mueller asked us last April to quell any fears about chopping up the Kansas City district and attaching parts of it to the suburban districts.⁵⁴

Foraker argued the state had larger problems to address in education, namely increasing the debt limit of school districts and how high local boards could set levies, two very prominent issues for

unsuccessful run for governor of Missouri in 1980. James Spainhower, interview with John L. Rury, March 8, 2012. Author was also present for this interview with Spainhower.

⁴⁸ Gardner and Rury, “Suburban Opposition.”

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid; Spainhower, interview with John L. Rury.

⁵² “Expose Secret School Plan,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 43, November 28, 1968, 1, 7.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Mueller was a professor of education at the University of Michigan who was part of the Spainhower Commission and had previously met with Foraker to discuss the study.

the Hickman Mills school board.⁵⁵ In the local paper, the editor argued that the reorganization plan was deeply flawed and that any supporters would be seen as “reactionary” and “integrationist.”⁵⁶ The editor also pointed out that the Spainhower plan would destroy suburban schools that “have become the pride of the nation” and that merging them to cities “would be a tragic disservice to the future of our country.”⁵⁷

However there were residents, such as Murray Mellicker, who were not threatened by the suggested change in district organization and also were willing to point out the latent (or obvious) racism in opposition to the Spainhower plan:

The truth is that as the Midtown Freeway gets going, the movement of the Negroes into our present districts, which has already started, will be accelerated. Hickman Mills, and later Grandview, will have hundreds of black American families within the next few years. Those who wish a lily-white school district can take their choice of rural Alabama or South Africa. Even wasting money to preserve obsolete district lines will not preserve segregation; the day of second-class citizenship for black Americans is approaching its end.⁵⁸

Mellicker represented a less antagonistic segment of Hickman Mills, but more citizens were opposed to the idea of merging all the schools in Jackson and Clay counties than were supportive of it.

In January 1969, state representatives held a public meeting at Raytown High School to discuss the plan and around 1,800 people attended, including a delegation from Hickman Mills led by Tom Foraker.⁵⁹ Foraker spoke at the meeting along with some of the state representatives, presenting the case that per-pupil costs would probably rise with creation of a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “The Moving Finger,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 48, December 31, 1968, 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Murray Mellicker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 46, December 19, 1968, 8. Mellicker voiced an opinion that was very different than most of his counterparts—he was also on the committee for annexation in 1964 and advocated for merging with the Kansas City Missouri School District. See “Annexation Controversy,” *Kansas City Times*, February 21, 1964, 4.

⁵⁹ “Roar Down School Change,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 49, January 9, 1969, 1.

“super-size” district—he received loud cheers from the audience for opposing the plan.⁶⁰ Tom Ryan, a democrat representing Jackson County seventh district in the state legislature, was particularly blunt in his warning about the Spainhower Plan:

What this is all about is not education. It is integration. They want to integrate us forcibly, and they want our money. You know what that means. If you want to go to Paseo high school now, you have to carry a ‘shiv’ that long.”⁶¹

Ryan was making his opposition to the plan clear, as did the other politicians present. Anybody attending the meeting came away knowing that their representatives were clearly against the plan, with one of the representatives commenting that he had not met anybody who was in favor of it.⁶² With such significant and determined opposition even before the meeting and the clear unpopularity of the Spainhower plan, why was a public meeting held in the first place? What purpose did it serve, other than rallying people around a common cause, in this case standing against “forced integration?”⁶³

Regardless, a second meeting was held on February fifth, this time at Smith-Hale Junior High in Hickman Mills. Missouri Senator Don Manford hosted the meeting and spent most of the time reassuring the four hundred people in attendance that he would oppose the Spainhower Plan, guarantees that were met with much applause and cheering.⁶⁴ School board member Bill Wall declared that the plan was “so loose in management it is doomed to failure.”⁶⁵ While the community present was vocally opposed to the consolidation, one person was brave enough to present another view. Kenneth Burkhart, a teacher at Ruskin High asked the representatives to at least consider the plan and its possible merit in addressing “the educational problems of the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ One Hickman Mills resident, Denzil L. Gibler, wrote a letter to the *Advocate* stating that Ryan was crude, and that the meeting as well as the paper were propagating racist fears. Denzil L. Gibler, “Letter to the Editor,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 51, January 23, 1969, 9.

⁶⁴ “Poised to Fight School ‘Grab,’” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 1, February 6, 1969, 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

state.”⁶⁶ Burkhart suggested that reorganization might improve teacher quality, as it would equalize teacher salaries throughout a region, and “teachers would go where they want to teach.”⁶⁷ The audience responded to his speech with stony silence, but Manford thanked the teacher for his input.⁶⁸

The next day, February sixth, the state legislature met to discuss the plan, with visitors from throughout Missouri attending to voice disapproval of the measure.⁶⁹ A large contingent of three hundred people from Raytown attended the hearing in Jefferson City, along with one hundred and fifty from Hickman Mills.⁷⁰ Foraker spoke to the assembly, expressing that the Spainhower commission assumed the suburbs were more affluent than other parts of the state: “they aren’t affluent. The people simply are willing to work harder, sacrifice more and impose greater taxes on themselves to improve their school systems.”⁷¹ Other superintendents in the state gave similar testimony, with one claiming the plan was foolhardy in combining districts as, “you can’t merge five poor men and make one rich man out of them!”⁷² James Spainhower announced during the hearing he was abandoning House Bill 437, the school reorganization plan. Attendees rejoiced.⁷³

Clear Victory, Continuing Struggle

Foraker, along with other school leaders in Hickman Mills, assumed a return to the routine, in a sense. Even so, the threat of a Spainhower-like plan still loomed and residents of south Kansas City were wary. A new “Spainhower Bill,” House Bill 714, which also never

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “Spainhower Plan is Dead,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 4, February 7, 1969, 1, 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. Apparently, things got a little raucous at the hearing as the chairman had to repeatedly call to order in response to the laughter, shouting, or groans given by those in attendance.

⁷³ Ibid. See figure 9 in Appendix I for a picture of the hearing.

succeeded, called for a reorganization of school districts on county levels.⁷⁴ However, learning of the measure made Foraker and the school board nervous because it contained a provision calling for districts to be as economically, racially, and ethnically diverse as possible, as well as a requirement that the total assessed valuation of property in each district be as equal as conceivable.⁷⁵ For the residents of Hickman Mills, this bill seemed to be a re-attempt at forced integration, where Jackson County might be given the authority to divide up the Hickman Mills, Raytown, Center, Kansas City, and Grandview districts to create “pie-shaped districts that extend to an apex on the Missouri river north of the downtown area.”⁷⁶ The editor of the *Jackson County Advocate* warned its readers to contact their legislators because “James I. Spainhower didn’t lose the war two weeks ago; he just lost a battle.”⁷⁷

Once again, the bill failed to gain support in the state legislature, but Hickman Mills was staying vigilant, wary of actions the state made towards education. Because of their diligence, district leaders, along with the editorial board at the *Jackson County Advocate*, became aware of a study done by two former members of the Spainhower Commission, Clifford Hooker and Van D. Mueller. The study, entitled, *Equal Treatment to Equals: A New Structure for Public Schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis Metropolitan Areas*, declared:

Public education in the Kansas City and St. Louis metropolitan areas hurts. Its pain is caused in part by a district structure which was created to serve a previous era...A major reorganization of school districts is called for.⁷⁸

The study was thorough in its comparison of levies, assessed valuation, graduation rates, and enrollment by race and ethnicity for both the Kansas City and St. Louis areas.

⁷⁴ 75th General Assembly of Missouri State Legislature, *House Bill No. 714*, March 8, 1969, cited in “New Spainhower Plan,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 6, March 13, 1969, 1, 5.

⁷⁵ “The Moving Finger,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 6, March 13, 1969, 1, B3.

⁷⁶ “The Moving Finger,” March 13, 1969, 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Clifford P. Hooker and Van D. Mueller, “Equal Treatment to Equals: A New Structure for Public Schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis Metropolitan Areas” (Jefferson City, MO: Missouri School District Reorganization Commission, June 1969), 1.

As pertaining to Hickman Mills, the authors suggested combining it with Grandview, Lee's Summit, and Lone Jack to create a *Jackson No. 2* school district.⁷⁹ This re-organization, for Hickman Mills at least, did not involve combining with any district that was racially or economically very different than Hickman Mills was in 1969. Yet, residents were concerned that they would be forced to join with an undesirable element and that their own tax dollars would be used to fund someone else's education. Once again, the editor of the *Jackson County Advocate* summed up common sentiment:

...more money for the deprived students would be just lovely. But I fear that extracting it from the suburban districts would jeopardize that one essential ingredient [sic] that is responsible for the spectacular rise in educational quality—the enthusiasm of the local residents for making sacrifices to improve their schools. Once the local residents see their tax money being siphoned off to support something other than their own children's education their enthusiasm for the cause of public education is going to dive like a sounding whale.⁸⁰

Residents needed not worry about whales and siphons. The report was given to Spainhower, he presented it to the governor and the state legislature, and then it was essentially shelved. No further action was taken. Still, the Spainhower commission's efforts and Hickman Mills's reaction led to hyper-vigilance in south Kansas City over becoming part of a “racial experiment.”⁸¹ Bad feelings towards Spainhower persisted in the community for some time; when the representative ran for nomination as state treasurer from the Democratic Party, a group of educators in the Kansas City area formed an opposition group to his campaign, with one of the founding members being A.A. McElroy, a member and former president of the Hickman Mills

⁷⁹ Hooker and Mueller, 53. See figure 10 in appendix I for suggested district map.

⁸⁰ “The Moving Finger,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 23, July 10, 1969, 1.

⁸¹ Hill, interview with author; Spearman, interview with author. Spearman and Hill were the only Hickman Mills residents I interviewed who were living in the district during the Spainhower saga and who also remembered it. Neither one could tell me much about the controversy, but both used the phrase “racial experiment” when referring to state attempts to re-organize the district.

school board.⁸² In an open letter, the group referred to Spainhower's attempt to remove local control from the school districts and that Spainhower as treasurer would have "considerable influence...to promote his views from a position of power."⁸³ While claiming that the group was not campaigning for anyone in particular, it did suggest voters choose either the other Democratic nominee, or a Republican.⁸⁴ Luckily for Spainhower, he did obtain his party's nomination and won the position in general election. He did not get many votes from Hickman Mills or Raytown.⁸⁵

Local Control, Suburban Solidarity, and Fighting Desegregation

In the wake of the Spainhower Plan and stirrings of metropolitan consolidation, suburban districts united to oppose alterations to the school funding structure and desegregation efforts in the 1970s. The threat of the Spainhower Commission in 1968 and 1969 motivated Hickman Mills to unite with other suburban school districts in assuring that the state would not remove nor change its own individual ability to control levies and school boundaries. Hickman Mills joined several other suburban school districts like Raytown, Independence, Center, and Lee's Summit in creating The Cooperating School Districts of the Suburban Kansas City, Missouri, Metropolitan Area in 1971. This was an officially organized body of suburban school districts with the superintendents of each district meeting as representatives for their respective schools.⁸⁶ Any district "wholly or partially within the corporate limits of Kansas City, Missouri" or

⁸² "Unleash on Spainhower," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 29, August 17, 1972, 1. Other members represented Grain Valley, Fairfax, Raytown, and Blue Springs school districts.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Spainhower, interview with John L. Rury.

⁸⁶ "Operating Rules for the Cooperating School Districts of the Suburban Kansas City, Missouri Metropolitan Area," unpublished document, May 10, 1971, Arthur Benson Papers (1975), Box KC 250, Folder 319, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center, University of Missouri-Kansas City University Archives, Kansas City, MO.

contiguous with any member district could join the council, except for Kansas City itself.⁸⁷ This would prove to be an important and powerful organization in that the suburban school districts created a support system they would later use to successfully oppose desegregation efforts.

In October 1972, Raytown held a conference for the suburban school districts in order to discuss recent lower-court rulings questioning the constitutionality of funding schools with local property taxes.⁸⁸ The courts were suggesting instead that states provide the school funding completely as an equalization measure and that local school boards focus on other duties, but not on passing levies.⁸⁹ Missouri Department of Education representatives attended to inform the school district leaders, but the meeting essentially ended with local leaders expressing distrust toward state authorities. Charles Berry, then mayor of Lone Jack, expressed what the group was thinking in linking the meeting with previous discussions with the state board:

It goes back to the fact we don't trust the state school board. They agreed with everything we said, threw it all in the trash, and we were given the Spainhower Bill.⁹⁰

Foraker supported Berry's statement, adding that the frustrating reality with the state board of education is that the governor appointed them:

Maybe the state board should be named by the legislature. At least then, if you don't like what the state board is doing, you can get to it through your elected representatives.⁹¹

Foraker was probably referring to how districts across the state were able to express their opposition to the Spainhower plan to their own representatives, effectively killing the measure.

Cessation of local school levies never occurred, so the suburban districts were not long occupied

⁸⁷ Ibid. The Kansas City Missouri School District did join the council in 1976, which brought a name change, among other things. The group is now called the "Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City." See <http://www.csdgkc.org>.

⁸⁸ "State-Wide Mini Conference—To Discuss School Changes," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 38, October 5, 1972, 1; "Schools Meet Tonight," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 38, October 19, 1972, 1, 11; "May Cut District Powers—Into School Change Ideas," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 39, October 26, 1972, 1, 11.

⁸⁹ "May Cut District Powers", 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 11.

⁹¹ Ibid.

with this problem, but they continued to hold regular meetings in order to discuss their own concerns.

Another issue with Kansas City arose in 1975, when the KCMSD began a public discussion on its own dissolution and subsequent partitioning out to surrounding school districts.⁹² The neighboring districts, like Hickman Mills, completely opposed the idea and sought legal counsel to fight the possibility of busing.⁹³ This time, Bill T. Wall, once again acting as school board president, vocalized resistance and argued that racial mixing was happening in a more organic, natural way that bussing would ruin:

Minority people are moving gradually into the district, and they are being assimilated very nicely. There's no disruption of any kind—it's a gradual sort of thing... That type of integration is working. But to jump in and create a situation where children have to be bussed all around to achieve someone's idea of proper racial balances is going to waste a tremendous amount of money that should be spent on educating the kids.⁹⁴

As shall be discussed later, black families were moving into Hickman Mills and sending their children to school, but the numbers were small and not threatening to white dominance, unlike bussing children from the Kansas City's school district. The suburban districts all began to make statements opposing Kansas City's dissolution and then started hiring lawyers to work on a lawsuit if necessary.⁹⁵

This fight between the suburbs and the city revolved around desegregation, which the suburban districts opposed, even if they employed language that tried to mask their reticence to taking in large numbers of black students. Kansas City school authorities were planning on dissolving the school district and creating a metropolitan district or, barring that, dividing up the old school district and apportioning out pieces to surrounding suburbs. The suburban school

⁹² Kevin Fox Gotham, "Missed Opportunities, Enduring Legacies: School Segregation and Desegregation in Kansas City, Missouri," *American Studies* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 25.

⁹³ Ibid. "HM Board to Meet, Get Bussing Advice," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 32, September 4, 1975, 5.

⁹⁴ "HM Board to Meet," 5.

⁹⁵ "Oppose KC Racial Move—Gird for School Battle," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 26, July 24, 1975, 1, 3; Gotham, "Missed Opportunities," 25-26.

districts were not pleased, but they did know that recent legal events gave advantage to the outlying districts. The Supreme Court's 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* decision effectively denied Detroit's attempt to create a metropolitan district in order to accomplish the desegregation order inherent in *Brown v. Board I and II*.⁹⁶ Bill Wall spoke about Detroit in public addresses, particularly how the court decided that suburban districts around the city were not actively promoting segregation, in order to show that Hickman Mills was safe from any lawsuit.⁹⁷ However confident Wall felt, Foraker promised his district that the school leadership would oppose the move by Kansas City—"we'll take it all the way to the Supreme Court if necessary."⁹⁸

Apart from hiring lawyers and working with other suburban school districts for a possible fight with Kansas City, members of the Hickman Mills community found other ways to try to stop desegregation. Representative John Sharp and state Senator Don Manford, the former from Hickman Mills and the latter from east Jackson County, led a campaign to adopt a state constitutional amendment "to abolish any threat of using bussing to insure integrated public education."⁹⁹ The effort to change the constitution failed, but ultimately, Hickman Mills and the other suburban districts were able to escape any ties with Kansas City's desegregation efforts.

The Kansas City Missouri School District officially approved a metropolitan desegregation plan in May of 1977 and filed lawsuits against the surrounding school districts

⁹⁶ Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton, eds., *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 10-11; Harvey Kantor and Barbara Brenzel, "Urban Education and the 'Truly Disadvantaged': The Historical Roots of the Contemporary Crisis, 1945-1990," in *The Underclass Debate: Views From History*, ed. Michael Katz (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 366-402; "District Poised for Battle—Await KC School Suits," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 28, August 7, 1975, 1, 3.

⁹⁷ "District Poised for Battle," 1.

⁹⁸ "School Districts to Challenge KC—Solid Front for Battle," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 27, July 31, 1975, 1.

⁹⁹ "Seek Amendment on Bussing," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 32, September 4, 1975, 1, 5.

both in Missouri and Kansas.¹⁰⁰ For several years, the legal team representing the KCMSD conducted interviews and searched through records in the suburban school districts, finally presenting its case in court in October 1983.¹⁰¹ Judge Russell Clark reversed the suit in March of 1984, dismissing the suburban districts listed as defendants, including Hickman Mills, instead labeling KCMSD, along with the state of Missouri, as the defendants and the children of the city school district as the plaintiffs, and thus *Jenkins v. Missouri* was born.¹⁰² Hickman Mills, like its other suburban counterparts, observed the long legal battle from a safe distance as the case traveled through the justice system until it ended with the Supreme Court.¹⁰³ While Clark's decision did not keep residents of Hickman Mills from feeling the pressures of desegregation and thus needing to stay hyper-vigilant against any integrative actions, removing the suburban districts from the court case did give residents of South Kansas City a little more time to deal with coming change.

Fighting HUD

While the school district was occupied resisting desegregation efforts by Kansas City and Missouri, the Hickman Mills community at large fought against desegregation of housing. Opposition to low-income housing began somewhat in the 1960s with fair housing laws, but became much more pronounced during the 1970s when the department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began planning housing and apartment complexes within district borders. While it was largely the community and not school leadership who organized opposition to

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Benson, "School Segregation and Desegregation in Kansas City" (unpublished manuscript, Spring 1995), http://www.bensonlaw.com/kcmsd/deseg_history.htm; Gotham, "Missed Opportunities," 26-27; "Suburbs Oppose School Suit," *Kansas City Times*, April 19, 1977, 5.

¹⁰¹ Benson, "School Segregation."

¹⁰² Ibid; Gotham, "Missed Opportunities," 26.

¹⁰³ The story of how *Jenkins v Missouri* became *Missouri v Jenkins* and the general desegregation battle in Kansas City, Missouri is long and complex. The suits lasted from 1977 through 1995 and covered metropolitan desegregation, teacher pay, and magnet schools, among a host of other issues. See Joshua M. Dunn, *Complex Justice: The Case of Missouri V. Jenkins* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

HUD, there was a pattern of using Hickman Mills's school buildings as centers of operations, including meetings and rallies. The proposed complexes that will be addressed in this section were all located near schools, and opposition to those complexes came together at those same schools.

In 1978, a proposal to build a subsidized housing complex was met with a visceral rejection from the community. On a May evening, six hundred people crammed themselves into Warford Elementary to oppose the construction of fifty separate one to three-room apartment units a few blocks from Warford in Terrace Lake, just south of Red Bridge Road.¹⁰⁴ The apartments would charge forty percent of the residents the full rent, about \$400, while sixty percent would pay a reduced rental rate. The residents in Terrace Lake were furious. Members of the community had learned of the apartments a week before the public meeting and immediately went to work sending out flyers, calling city and state representatives, as well as telling neighbors about the approaching danger.¹⁰⁵ Kansas City councilman Arthur Asel, representing Hickman Mills, even compared the proposed buildings to the 1957 tornado.¹⁰⁶ Asel continued, calling the development “a project of fuzzy-minded social thinkers in Washington.”¹⁰⁷ In case he did not make himself clear enough in who the community was trying to block from moving in, Asel explained that the residents present at the meeting would “support subsidized housing for the elderly.”¹⁰⁸ This statement affirms an embracing of older citizens, but seems to hint that the community would not welcome poorer residents, and probably persons of color.

¹⁰⁴ “Residents Kill HUD Project,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 88, no. 18, June 1, 1978, 1, 4, 11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

When the date for the official public meeting came, the developer John Auld had no idea what was in store. After ninety minutes of various members of the public speaking out against the HUD apartments and the crowd shouting at the man, Auld took the microphone and exclaimed, "I am therefore going to withdraw this project from HUD" and transformed an angry crowd into a cheering group of suburbanites.¹⁰⁹ He announced that he had never built any project without community support, so he had decided to withdraw.¹¹⁰

This was the first time since the proposal for mobile houses in 1971 that residents fought against housing in the area. The controversy marked the beginning of a long, protracted battle between Hickman Mills and the Kansas City HUD office, as HUD officials worked to provide cheaper housing for people who wanted to live in the suburbs, but could not necessarily afford it. In particular, the Housing Authority of Kansas City (HAKC), which worked in conjunction with HUD, was under pressure to build low-income housing in suburban areas so as not to continue concentrating poor black families in closed neighborhoods as the city had been doing in the past.¹¹¹ The HAKC and HUD worked to build in the surrounding suburban communities for twenty years, but met heavy resistance from local authorities as well as community residents.¹¹² The advantage to placing housing in Hickman Mills was that the community already belonged to Kansas City and while resistance would be as strong as in other suburbs, the area had less political clout to fight HUD. Hence the HAKC and HUD made repeated efforts to place low-income housing in several neighborhoods in Hickman Mills. While at first each of these

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Kevin Fox Gotham, "Suburbia Under Siege: Low-Income Housing and Racial Conflict in Metropolitan Kansas City, 1970-1990," *Sociological Spectrum* 18 (1998): 459; Alison Morantz, "Money and Choice in Kansas City: Major Investments With Modest Returns," in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, eds. Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton (New York: The New Press, 1996), 245.

¹¹² Ibid.

attempts was unsuccessful, eventually housing authorities won out and had complexes built throughout South Kansas City.

Residents in the Terrace Lake area were feeling content with their victory, but HUD officials were not done. Within a week of the meeting at Warford, residents learned that while Auld had removed himself as a developer for the housing project, HUD was determined to continue and build fifty low-income units.¹¹³ A relatively new group was formed among the Ruskinites, calling themselves the Southern Community Coalition (SCC), whose chief purpose was to oppose HUD housing.¹¹⁴ This group began a letter-writing campaign to city councilmen and joined the South Kansas City Chamber of Commerce in hosting public meetings and making proclamations against HUD housing.¹¹⁵ The SCC and its allies won, not because they got city officials to agree not to develop the area near Warford, but because they made the notion so unpopular in the region that no developers wanted to take the contract to build the HUD housing.¹¹⁶ Even though HUD and HAKC kept the option open to build low-income housing near Red Bridge Road, it never materialized.

If representatives from HUD and HAKC found it difficult to build in the Terrace Lake area, then attempting another low-income complex closer to the more upscale neighborhood of Ruskin Hills proved to be disastrous. Several months after the failed Terrace Lake attempt, residents learned about HUD's proposition to build Greenwood Manor, a collection of fifty-seven low-rent units. The community rallied and held a public meeting at Johnson Elementary, blocks away from the proposed site.¹¹⁷ Only a few days before the March 12, 1979 meeting,

¹¹³ "Local Battle on HUD Project," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 88, no. 19, June 8, 1978, 1, 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* The SCC was founded in 1977, supposedly to improve real estate values, but its chief concern was fighting HUD.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ "HUD Plans Still at Issue," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 88, no. 22, June 15, 1978, 1, 3.

¹¹⁷ "More HUD Resistance," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 89, no. 7, March 22, 1979, 1.

Ruskinites formed another opposition group to join the SCC, called the Hickman Mills Community Development Association (HMCDA).¹¹⁸

The meeting at Johnson lasted two and a half hours, during which representatives from HUD explained the benefits of creating housing in the area and the neighborhood groups outlined why they opposed it.¹¹⁹ Again, like the Terrace Lake project, the public meeting was held at a school, with school officials present. Additionally, the meeting was packed with upwards of six hundred local residents attending.¹²⁰ Several Kansas City council members were also at the school and in their meeting the next day, the city council passed a resolution to order HUD to stop financing construction of the Greenwood project.¹²¹ Like the previous development at Red Bridge, HUD remained adamant it was going to keep the option to build low-income housing in Ruskin Hills, even if nobody was actively developing the land. The president of the HMCDA called this “a wait-and-see attitude” and warned residents to stay vigilant.¹²²

Hickman Mills’s residents continued organizing themselves and fighting against what they saw as an intrusion into their peaceful neighborhoods. At the end of 1979, the HMCDA and the SCC successfully fended off a low-income apartment complex at 103rd and Hillcrest, just a few blocks from Baptiste Junior High.¹²³ The pattern remained the same: opponents used Baptiste as a staging ground, public meetings were held, developers backed out, and HUD stalled. In 1980, residents of Kirkside, a neighborhood in the southeast corner of the district close to Longview Lake, noticed that HUD proposed Longview Garden Apartments, a 130 unit

¹¹⁸ Ibid.; “Move on HUD Project,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 89, no. 9, April 5, 1979, 3.

¹¹⁹ “More HUD Resistance,” 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Move on HUD Project,” 3.

¹²³ “Hickman Mills Residents Fight Hillcrest HUD Plan,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 89, no. 33, September 27, 1979, 1.

low-income complex at 116th and Stark Road close to Smith-Hale Junior High.¹²⁴ The pattern of resistance held true, except it expanded to a degree in that not only did SCC and the Kirkside Homes Association intervene, but also representatives from Ruskin Heights, Ruskin Hills, and Crossgates Home Associations got involved in protesting the proposed complex.¹²⁵

Statements made by opposition and neighborhood leaders reveal the motive behind the antipathy toward low-income housing. Residents worried the proliferation of non-single family units would destabilize the area socially and economically as well as lead to increased crime and depressed property values. Sidney Whitfield, a board member of the Kirkside Homes Association, kept his fellow homeowners abreast of HUD's actions through a regular column in the local paper. Whitfield made his own antagonism to HUD clear, arguing that perhaps "HUD was dispersing crime instead of low-income families" and that even if that were not true, the main issue with HUD's actions was that the organization was "placing low-income housing where it isn't wanted by the people who own property there."¹²⁶ When HUD and developers were working on plans for the Longview Garden apartment complex, Whitfield shared that one of the developers admitted that housing values were continuing to rise in the area, and would still do so with single-family houses, but would not do so with the construction of apartment complexes.¹²⁷ Whitfield then expressed what must have been a common sentiment among Hickmanites, considering their outright opposition to any HUD projects:

We want the National government agencies and the City to stop trying to force something on us we don't want. In this area of interference in neighborhoods leave us alone in Kansas City. I have no problem with the concept that 'every citizen has a right to a decent place to live' neither do I have a problem with 'the neighborhood has a right to direct its environment.'¹²⁸

¹²⁴ "Kirkside Newsletter," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 90, no. 6, March 20, 1980, B-1.

¹²⁵ "Meet Tonight on HUD Project," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 90, no. 7, March 27, 1980, 1.

¹²⁶ "Kirkside Newsletter," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 89, no. 51, January 31, 1980, 4.

¹²⁷ "Kirkside Newsletter," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 90, no. 8, April 3, 1980, 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

This statement encapsulates the interaction between Hickman Mills and the rest of Kansas City—residents of the suburb wanted the services and lower taxes the city provided by way of urbanization, but they did not want any part in housing equalization programs, whether for race or class. Opposition in Kirkside was strong enough to block the development, just as was done three times previously in less than three years. HUD, as usual, promised to try again in the future.¹²⁹

Unlike the Terrace Lake, Hillcrest, and Longview projects, a change in the pattern of opposition and defeat eventually occurred in a HUD project in Ruskin Hills, although it took them a decade for success to come to fruition. In 1988, HUD granted a development plan to McCormack Baron Salazar and Associates, a St. Louis-based developer who specialized in low-income housing across the country.¹³⁰ McCormack named the complex “Bridgeport Apartments,” which is still operating today and has grown to 232 units.¹³¹ Opposition to the 1988 construction was seemingly non-existent as no articles on the action appeared in *The Jackson County Advocate* and none of the residents interviewed remembered how Bridgeport Apartments appeared within district boundaries. HUD victory in 1988 seemed to mark the beginning of a slow process in which HUD was able to successfully introduce more low-income housing units into Hickman Mills.¹³²

While HUD was eventually able to provide low-income housing in South Kansas City, Ruskinites staged winning campaigns against the efforts of city authorities, using the schools as central points of organization and opposition. Again, it is instructive to remember that Hickman Mills did not exist as a political entity at this point, the area was officially part of Kansas City.

¹²⁹ “No to Longview Gardens,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 90, no. 10, April 17, 1980, 1.

¹³⁰ “McCormack Baron Salazar: Sustainable Communities,” *St. Louis Business Journal*, October 38, 2011, 12.

¹³¹ See Bridgeport Apartments, www.rentbridgeport.com

¹³² Husman, interview with author.

The identity neighborhood residents wanted to maintain was intertwined with the schools their children attended.

Bonds, Enrollment, and the End of an Era

In the midst of community (and school) fights against outside intrusion by Kansas City and Missouri officials, against landfills, mobile-home parks, apartment complexes, bussing and desegregation, the Hickman Mills school district continued educating the local children and had to concern itself with the more mundane issues of funding and school operation. The tenor of bonds, levies, and operating budgets for Hickman Mills drastically changed during the 1970s, largely because the local population stopped expanding rapidly and single-family housing development slowed. While school leaders felt they were finally entering a point where the district was “leveling off” student-wise, in reality the 1970s marked the beginning of decline.¹³³ Strong disagreements over school funding would continue, but there began to be a clear change in the pattern of bond and levy elections in the district. Arguments about taxation for schools were focused upon how to fund daily operations rather than school expansion.

With all the discord that occurred in 1970 over an extended effort to pass a school levy, Superintendent Foraker and the school board were more cautious afterward in their financing and mostly did not raise levies at all. In fact, from 1970 on, Hickman Mills would experience a gradual decreasing of its levy, which would not rise again until after 2000. In January 1972, the community voted on and passed a \$1,175,000 bond to build Santa Fe Elementary, which would become the last school building constructed in the district. The bond came with a lowering of the levy, as a thirty-one cent levy expired in December of 1971, and the board saw no real need to renew it.¹³⁴ School leaders felt justified in their decision because there had been some further

¹³³ “Enrollment Down in HM,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 31, August 31, 1972, 1.

¹³⁴ “New School Bond Election,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 81, no. 48, December 30, 1971, 1.

expansion of housing in Hickman Mills and the additional property taxes were adequate to replace any funding loss in the levy amount.¹³⁵ The board continued for the rest of the 1970s into the 1980s occasionally asking for elections on bond issues without raising property taxes, as can be seen in table 1.

Table 1: Bond Issues, 1973-1980¹³⁶

	<i>Bond</i>	<i>Use</i>	<i>Votes For/Against</i>	<i>Turnout as Percentage of Adult Population</i>
January 1973	\$1 Million	Santa Fe, High School Gym	2,543 to 292	10.79%
January 1974	\$1 Million	Santa Fe and High School	2,042 to 299	8.90%
January 1975	\$825,000	High School Lab, Library at Westridge, Cafeteria at Baptiste	1,439 to 297	6.60%
January 1976	\$1.4 Million	Elementary improvements and repair	1,831 to 469	8.75%
January 1978	\$600,000	New roof for Dobbs	1341 to 333	5.90%
January 1979	\$700,000	Administrative Center near Santa Fe	996 to 286	4.50%
March 1980	\$350,000	General Repair and improvement	1088 to 342	5.02%

The school district continued to request funding to operate the schools, but no longer asked for tax raises. Additionally, voter turnout had greatly diminished when compared to the Levy War of 1970. Foraker stated in 1974 that “the bond issue in a sense is the end of an era,” explaining that with little to no residential construction, the schools as they existed would be sufficient for

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “Good Margin for Bonds,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 89, no. 2, February 8, 1979, 1; “Hickman Bonds Pass,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 90, no. 8, April 3, 1980, 1; U.S. Census of the Population, 1970 and 1980.

the population in Hickman Mills.¹³⁷ In June of 1975, the school board voted to decrease the school levy from \$5.68 to \$5.63 because the district was beginning to pay off debts and board members were not planning new buildings.¹³⁸ Except for the administrative center that was built in 1979 and opened in 1980, the rest of the bonds passed in the latter 1970s were for building maintenance. As Foraker pointed out, the long period of expansion, with its accompanying tension between school supporters and anti-tax proponents, was over and has not returned yet. Instead, the district has been on a steady decline in population and status ever since.

By the fall of 1972, there were signs of a leveling off, even a decrease, in school enrollments, to the great relief of district leaders. The drop was not particularly large, going from over fourteen thousand students in 1971-72 school year to just under fourteen thousand in 1972-73, a difference of 270 students.¹³⁹ The next school year, there were one hundred students less than in 1972-73, with most significant of the decrease coming from kindergarten and elementary grades.¹⁴⁰ For the next four years, the district continued to see a slow decline in the number of children enrolling in school, to the point that in 1977, the district was able to contain all kindergartners in the elementary buildings for the first time, which meant it could stop renting space from the Ruskin Heights United Presbyterian Church near Ruskin High School.¹⁴¹ While district leaders were initially excited about the chance that there might finally be enough space in the school buildings to accommodate enrollments, they began to become concerned. In 1978, acting Superintendent Joe Nesbit worried that declining enrollments were due to the closing of Richards Gebaur Air Base, and that some families were moving to “2nd or 3rd tier suburbs” like

¹³⁷ “School Bond Success,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 84, no. 1, January 31, 1974, 1.

¹³⁸ “In Hickman District School Taxes Down,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 85, no. 22, June 26, 1975, 1.

¹³⁹ “Enrollment Down in HM,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 82, no. 31, August 31, 1972, 1.

¹⁴⁰ “Easy School Opening,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 83, no. 31, August 30, 1973, 1.

¹⁴¹ “HM Board Names Committee—Study Kindergarten Closing,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 86, no. 47, December 23, 1976, 1.

Lee's Summit.¹⁴² Hickman Mills C-1 School District was undergoing a new change, transforming from a rapidly expanding school district to a slowly shrinking one, which altered how the district approached funding.

Additionally, leadership changes would occur within the district, beginning with an event the over which the school board had no control. Early in the morning on June 17, 1976, Superintendent Tom Foraker died of complications from a heart attack.¹⁴³ The man had been leader of the school district since July 1959, making him the longest serving superintendent in Hickman Mills's history. The board scrambled to find a replacement, first appointing Joe Nesbit as acting superintendent, as he had been before when Lewis Schultz was removed in 1959.¹⁴⁴ Board member Bill Wall awkwardly commented on the difficulty in replacing Foraker, "it wasn't planned, it just happened that way!"¹⁴⁵ Although the board set a goal to hire a new leader by July 1977, it was unable to recruit anyone to be superintendent until 1978 and the succeeding superintendents did not serve nearly as long as Foraker's seventeen-year tenure, with the next long-term superintendent being Marjorie Williams from 2000 to 2012.

If the 1970s marked a period of organizational transition for Hickman Mills, then a brief examination of its operations in the 1980s is indicative of a new focus and reality. Table 2 compares Hickman Mills to Kansas City, Missouri school district as well as several other suburban school districts surrounding Kansas City. It demonstrates some important qualities for the district in the 1980s, mostly revealing that Hickman Mills was somewhat mediocre when compared to its neighbors.

¹⁴² "Class Decline Hits Districts," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 88, no. 31, August 31, 1978, 1, 3.

¹⁴³ "Heart Attack Fatal to School Leader—Tom Foraker Dies," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 86, no. 21, June 17, 1976, 1, 3.

¹⁴⁴ "In Hickman District—Long Search for Successor," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 86, no. 22, June 24, 1976, 1.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Table 2: Hickman Mills and Surrounding Districts, 1984-85¹⁴⁶

	<i>Avg Income</i>	<i>Levy</i>	<i>Per Pupil Expense</i>	<i>Avg Teacher Salary</i>	<i>Dropout 8-12 grade</i>	<i>Low SES</i>	<i>%8th Grade Passing Best</i>
Hickman Mills	\$23,168	\$4.21	\$2,801	\$23,556	7.5%	.3%	75.2%
Kansas City	21,599	3.26	3,328	22,344	12.2	26.8	58.4
Center	23,442	4.49	3,617	26,720	5.9	.6	82.2
Independence	22,047	3.61	2,422	23,360	7.1	5.7	83.7
Grandview	24,196	4.55	2,939	22,814	5.4	2	92
Raytown	23,931	4.30	3,041	26,363	4.9	1.2	81.9
Lee's Summit	26,725	4.93	2,598	21,381	3.6	1.4	84.8
Blue Springs	27,143	4.42	2,092	21,046	4	.5	84.6
State Average	20,978	3.34	2,834	20,452	32.9	9.7	N/A

(Red numbers, lowest value in category. Blue numbers, highest value. State Average is excluded, for comparison purposes only)

By the 1984-85 school year, Hickman Mills was a middling school district, not faring significantly better or worse than other suburban districts, except in test scores. While its average salary is on par with most other districts in the area, Mills's levy in 1984 was only higher than that of Kansas City and Independence. Hickman Mills performed much better than Kansas City on test scores, Mills was not comparing well with the other suburban eighth graders on Missouri's Basic Essentials Skills Test (BEST), a statewide test adopted in 1979.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, the school district's dropout rate, while better than Kansas City, was worse than the other suburbs, except Independence. By the 1980s, in light of objective measures, it is difficult to see Hickman Mills as a top tier school district in the Kansas City area. To be fair, Hickman Mills was never the "best" district in the metropolitan area, it never had the best test scores or graduation rates and as shown earlier, it struggled to gain accreditation mostly because of overcrowding from insufficient facilities. However, by the 1980s, the district was established,

¹⁴⁶ Data from Missouri Department of Education, cited in "The Dollars Coming and Going," *Kansas City Times*, June 3, 1986, A1-2.

¹⁴⁷ "Missouri's Statewide BEST Test Helps Shape 'Basics' Curriculum," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 23, 1985, 14.

was no longer focused on expanding, and had the lowest grouping of poor students in the Kansas City, Missouri area. It should have been doing better.

Color In South Kansas City

In addition to demonstrating that the Hickman Mills school district was underperforming in comparison to surrounding suburban communities, table 2 also indicates how small Hickman Mills's low SES category was. Even though the language used to express opposition to low-income housing in Hickman Mills pointed the finger at issues of race and class as justification for preventing construction, the black families who were moving into the area were largely middle-class, on par with the whites who came during the 1950s and 60s, which can be seen in school and census data. The next section will address the migration pattern of middle-class black families and the realities of race and class in Hickman Mills during the 1980s.

Much has been written on the patterns of racial housing in Kansas City, almost always with an emphasis on the city center itself and Troost Street as the boundary between white and black citizens.¹⁴⁸ A map of the greater Kansas City metropolitan area shows how African-Americans moved south over time in search of better housing (figures 11-15, Appendix I), much as whites did only a few decades earlier. Hickman Mills was on this "path," as evidenced by the map and by residents' opposition to HUD and HAKC. While the 1980s were a period in which more black families were migrating into the neighborhoods and the school district, they were not poor. White middle class and blue collar families who moved into Hickman Mills in the 1950s and 1960s now saw their black counterparts coming in the 1980s. Table 3 compares the average salary for the census tracts containing major Hickman Mills neighborhoods by race.

¹⁴⁸ See Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 91-119.

Table 3: Hickman Neighborhoods, Race and Family Income (2012 dollars)¹⁴⁹

	<i>% White 1980</i>	<i>% Black 1980</i>	<i>Avg. White Family Income, 1980</i>	<i>Avg. Black Family Income, 1980</i>	<i>% White 1990</i>	<i>% Black 1990</i>	<i>Avg. White Family Income, 1990</i>	<i>Avg. Black Family Income, 1990</i>
Hidden Valley/Oakwood	94.1%	4.2%	\$56,576	\$21,213	85%	13.1%	\$50,503	\$63,611
St. Catherine Gardens/Royal Acres	90.2%	8.7%	104,832	93,526	84.1%	13.4%	87,663	100,557
Terrace Lake Gardens	95.1%	3.2%	75,708	92,136	87.7%	10.8%	67,492	59,174
Bannister Acres	94.4%	4.2%	81,762	76,133	83.6%	13.8%	75,523	98,171
Fairway	92.7%	6%	82,235	95,680	89.5%	8.7%	66,754	61,169
Robandee	92.7	6%	82,235	95,680	82.3%	15.9%	84,230	89,814
Bannister	98.9%	0%	56,081	-	96%	0%	40,498	-
Loma Vista	80.9%	16%	66,858	71,846	65.2%	32.3%	51,051	51,547
Fairlane	91.2%	7.7%	78,253	86,465	79.4%	18.7%	66,078	76,187
Hickman Mills	86.7%	11.6%	77,650	98,508	75.1%	23.2%	65,556	67,988
Kirkside	67.2%	31.6%	79,585	82,267	40.3%	58.1%	72,761	71,419
Ruskin Heights	95.5%	2.8%	69,764	69,272	86.4%	10.8%	57,803	40,864
Ruskin Hills	95.5%	2.8%	69,764	69,272	78.4%	19.7%	64,508	67,761
Robandee South/White Oak	91.1%	7.3%	93,043	50,556	82.5%	15.8%	76,681	78,929

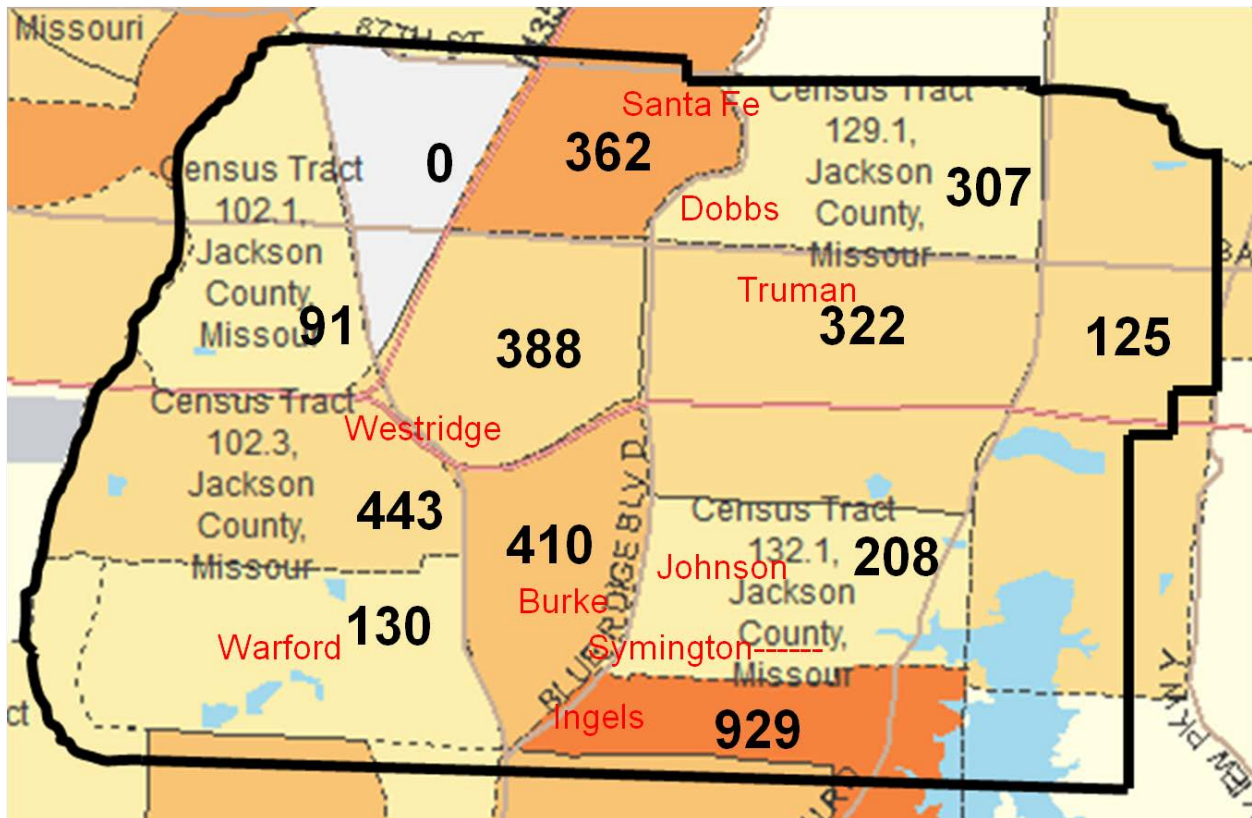
(Red numbers indicate higher average income between white and black category. Blue indicates when black percentage residents outnumber whites.)

It is telling that the average black family income was either on par with or above whites in neighborhoods in 1980 and especially 1990. Economically, black families moving into South Kansas City were very similar to their white counterparts. Additionally, by 1980, most neighborhoods in Hickman Mills were overwhelmingly white as concentrations of black families in single-family housing were limited except in Kirkside, where nearly a third of residents were

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Census of the Population, 1980 and 1990.

black in 1980 and half in 1990. The following map of the school district, divided into census tracts, helps visualize the growth of Hickman Mills’s black community in the 1970s.

Map 1: Black Population in Hickman Mills in 1980¹⁵⁰



(Numbers in bold=# black persons living in tract. Elementary school locations written in red.)

The outline in bold demarcates the district boundaries for Hickman Mills, with the smaller divisions being the census tracts from 1980. The shading of each tract on the map above demonstrates the percentage of black persons within each tract, with the north central and southeast tracts having the highest concentrations of African American families. The Loma Vista neighborhood, the tract with 362 black people, was 16% black, and Kirkside and Crossgates neighborhoods in the southeast had 929 black people and were 31.5% black.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Census of the Population, 1980. Census map and shading courtesy of Social Explorer.

¹⁵¹ U.S. Census of the Population, 1980.

When comparing map 1 with the metropolitan maps in the appendix, one can see that Hickman Mills was on the southern end of what was a fifty-year slow southern migration. Some areas were skipped over and did not have a significant black population, most likely due to the highway system that made areas like Kirkside very accessible to and from Kansas City. The neighborhood change is also reflected in the makeup of elementary students attending the schools within the district, as table 4 demonstrates.

Table 4: Black Student Enrollment in Hickman Mills Elementary Schools, 1968-1982¹⁵²

School	1968		1970		1972		1974	
	# Enrolled	Percent	# Enrolled	Percent	# Enrolled	Percent	# Enrolled	Percent
Dobbs	5	1	9	1	20	2	17	3
Burke	2	0	3	0	9	1	34	5
Ingels	1	0	2	0	27	3	98	15
Johnson	2	0	4	0	8	1	6	1
Symington	0	0	5	1	8	1	9	61
Santa Fe	-	-	2	0	13	3	57	9
Truman	3	0	3	0	13	2	27	4
Warford	0	0	4	0	13	2	45	7
Westridge	0	0	3	0	11	2	6	1
School	1976		1978		1980		1982	
	# Enrolled	Percent	# Enrolled	Percent	# Enrolled	Percent	# Enrolled	Percent
Dobbs	28	4	41	7	34	6	61	9
Burke	42	7	67	12	88	17	102	17
Ingels	137	21	224	36	270	44	299	45
Johnson	19	3	29	5	26	4	-	-
Symington	11	2	7	1	15	3	33	5
Santa Fe	61	10	97	18	112	20	120	19
Truman	28	5	48	8	57	9	54	8
Warford	60	9	78	13	79	13	88	13
Westridge	23	6	27	8	47	10	-	-

Ingels and Santa Fe elementary schools had the highest number and percentage of black students through the 1970s and 80s because they were situated in the neighborhoods where black families were growing the fastest. This does raise a question of why African American families settled in Kirkside and Crossgates in larger numbers than in Ruskin Heights or Ruskin Hills, one for which

¹⁵² *Percent Black Enrollment of Elementary Schools In Hickman Mills C-1, 1968-1982*, Clerk U.S. District Court, Exhibit 1865A, Case No. 77-0420-CV-W-4, Arthur Benson Papers, Box KC 250, Folder 17, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center, University of Missouri-Kansas City University Archives, Kansas City, MO.

I have not been able to find a satisfactory answer, other than the black community spread in the southland by loose kinship ties. As families purchased houses in Kirkside, they encouraged friends and acquaintances to move close by, often for mutual support.¹⁵³ Another explanation is that the concentration of black families in the southeast area of Hickman Mills in the 1970s and 80s shows the early white flight from the district that would intensify throughout the district, particularly in Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills in the late 1990s through the present day.¹⁵⁴

Moving South, Redux

As discussed earlier in this chapter, when the school leadership fought against the Spainhower Plan and then the metropolitan desegregation suit, they claimed that racial integration should be solved in a “natural” way, like what was happening in Hickman Mills itself. Thus, there was no need for “forced integration.” While migration towards South Kansas City was most definitely not “natural” because of color lines and housing discrimination, when African Americans settled in Hickman Mills in more significant numbers white residents felt the move was urbanization at its worst. Eventually, black presence in South Kansas City made the community no longer a suburb, but instead urban in the minds of Ruskinites, so many left.

By the 1970s and 80s, this quality was more pronounced even if Hickman Mills was much more developed and urbanized than it had been in the 1950s. Highways 470, 435, and 71 made travel to and from Hickman Mills extraordinarily easy. Shopping was booming in the 1980s with the growth of Truman’s Corners, a new Wal-Mart, and an extensive shopping mall near Bannister Road and Highway 71.¹⁵⁵ Housing was affordable and the schools were seen as

¹⁵³ Jacobs, Martin, and Solum interviews with author.

¹⁵⁴ This is a likely argument, as similar patterns have been found in other black middle class communities. See Bruce D. Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁵ James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822-2011* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 153; “Open New Wal-Mart,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 90, no. 19, June 19, 1980, 1, 3; “Bannister Mall opens doors,” 10-A.

better than Kansas City's, if not as good as other suburbs. Hickman Mills was inviting in many ways, but even so, some black residents interviewed expressed their own trepidation at moving southward.

Stories of Daniel Mass and Alicia Solum exemplify the patterns inherent in black migration to Hickman Mills, as their families came for affordable houses and quieter neighborhoods, but encountered opposition and a hostile environment. Daniel Mass, who moved into the Kirkside neighborhood in 1975 from central Kansas City, shared that he grew up learning to avoid going west of Troost and south of 39th.¹⁵⁶ Mass added, "My father told me 'watch your own back when going south.' South Kansas City was not a safe place to be in the early 1970s."¹⁵⁷ This was in particular a reference to Raytown, which had a reputation for harassing black residents or passersby.¹⁵⁸ Mass recalled not having any significant problems moving into the community and not meeting outright racism, but he did feel cautious about living in the area at first. When asked why he moved to Hickman Mills if concerned with white attitudes, Mass replied:

I got a great house and a yard, for what I was paying for an apartment in the city—it was a no-brainer. I came out the same way they [whites] did earlier, I came for the house, the space, and the quiet.¹⁵⁹

Mass moved into Kirkside with his wife, sent his two daughters to Ingels, then Smith-Hale Junior High and then to Hickman Mills High School. He also saw his neighborhood and school district change from predominantly white to predominantly black in two decades. "It was not a problem at first, some of us got along. But with HUD and section 8 housing, especially after the

¹⁵⁶ Daniel Mass, interview with author, August 14, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Shortridge, *Kansas City*, 153; Mass, interview with author; Solum, interview with author.

¹⁵⁹ Mass, interview with author.

90s, things got uglier.”¹⁶⁰ Mass explained that the proliferation of section 8 housing brought property values down, and introduced housing speculation to the Ruskin and Kirkside neighborhoods.¹⁶¹ The rise of section 8 housing in Hickman Mills and the white flight that followed will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Alicia Solum moved into Ruskin Heights from central Kansas City a little later than Daniel Mass, taking her two children to a suburban home after getting out of a bad marriage. She also returned to college in 1983. “It was a tough time, and I thought that moving south would be better for my kids, which in a way it was, but our neighbors didn’t always make it easy.”¹⁶² Some months after moving in, Alicia’s house was vandalized—somebody pelted a wall with eggs and painted “get out, nigger.”¹⁶³ The culprit was never discovered. In recalling the event, Alicia pointed out that there were neighbors who became friends, and not everyone was openly hostile, but the attack still occurred and Alicia still wonders if one of her neighbors knew who was responsible and wasn’t sharing.¹⁶⁴ Like Daniel, Alicia stayed in Hickman Mills, even as many of her neighbors left in the late 1990s.¹⁶⁵ She has since become a respected member of the community and is involved in school and residential organizations.

While black families started coming to Hickman Mills in the 1960s in small numbers, African-American presence grew slowly but steadily in the 1970s and 1980s, then sharply increased in the 1990s. Chapter five explores how the southland changed demographically from a predominantly white area to a primarily black one. A secondary transformation occurred during the 1990s as whites decided to leave Hickman Mills as a reputation of poverty and crime took hold, even if that reputation was not necessarily deserved. Because of this, the community

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Solum, interview with author.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

became known throughout the metropolitan area as an extension of the Kansas City core, and not as a suburb of the city. The schools also began to experience a tarnished reputation because of violent events that occurred in 1990, which prompted outsiders to think of the area as poor, violent, and black. Like other areas of the United States, middle-class black families moved to the suburbs of Kansas City to enjoy the good life their white counterparts sought twenty to thirty years earlier, only to find that their very presence led others to see the neighborhoods as urban, simply because they became black.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces*, 188-189; Emily Strauss, “The Making of the American School Crisis: Compton, California and the Death of the Suburban Dream” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2006), 212-13.

Chapter 5: Death of a Suburb

The Economics of Race and the Power of Perception

With expansion of roads and highways, explosive residential growth and the influx of large and small businesses, from 1950 on Hickman Mills was becoming increasingly urban in the sense that the area was more populated and even more economically prosperous. However, during the last decade of the twentieth century developments influenced Kansas Citian's perception of the community and the school district as having negative aspects of urbanization. Residents and outsiders worried about congestion and crime in Hickman Mills much in the same way 1950s suburbanites worried about central Kansas City. It was in the 1990s then that Hickman Mills C-1 School District transformed from a suburban school district to an urban one. This chapter examines how a combination of factors including school violence, economic setbacks, revolving school leadership, and fears toward an increasingly growing black community led to the perception of Hickman Mills as an "urban" school, both in the literal and the pejorative sense. Middle-class whites came to Hickman Mills to live a suburban life and left because, in their minds, the community became urban.

In one sense, the change Hickman Mills underwent in the 1990s was a result of a power struggle residents had with Kansas City, dating back to annexation in 1961. Ruskinites had no power to stop annexation, but they continuously exercised their ability to resist any changes to Hickman Mills perceived as detrimental for the community. From 1964 on, residents refused to join with the Kansas City Missouri School District, they stridently opposed a metropolitan desegregation plan and they repeatedly resisted efforts in building low-income housing in the area. In the 1970s and 1980s, many residents joined together and formed committees and neighborhood organizations to fight against what they saw as continued outside intrusions by

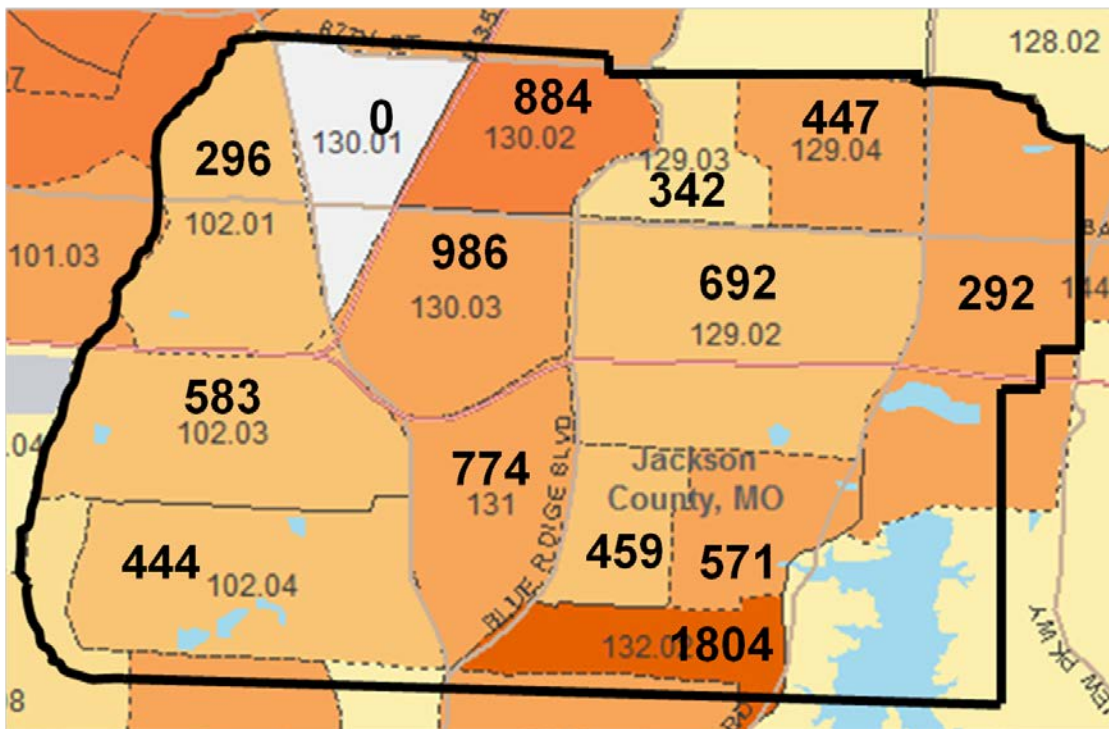
Kansas City. Ruskinites feared threats to the status quo of having “quiet” neighborhoods and a “simple” suburban life that resulted from incursions from a powerful municipal force.

However, white residents could not stop the racial change that was occurring in the community, even though some may have wanted to. Ruskinites had no real power to block middle-class black families from moving into local neighborhoods, so the alternative for numerous whites at the time was to move to another suburb, which many did. The reality is that as whites left in large numbers in the late 1990s through the 2000s, the community did decline economically. What began as just perception on the part of middle-class whites became reality for both the white and black families who remained in Hickman Mills. And by extension, the school district suffered.

Demographic Change, 1990-2000

A key element of the transition in the public’s perception of Hickman Mills likely derives from changes in the racial composition of the families living in the Hickman Mills neighborhoods. In the previous chapter, I explored the idea that for many whites in Hickman Mills, the arrival of large numbers of black families meant the neighborhood was becoming “urbanized.” This is a problematic sentiment, as families who entered the district were largely blue-collar/middle class regardless of race, yet fears of non-whites and apprehension about their moving to the area exacerbated and in some cases led to economic setbacks in Hickman Mills. As explained in chapter 4, the neighborhoods comprising Hickman Mills C-1 School District were shifting in color. By 1980, the Kirkside neighborhood in particular had a strong black presence, made up of middle-class families looking to the suburbs for the same reasons their white counterparts did ten to twenty years earlier. By 2000, the residents of the southern region of Kansas City looked increasingly different than in 1950, as shown in maps 1 and 2:

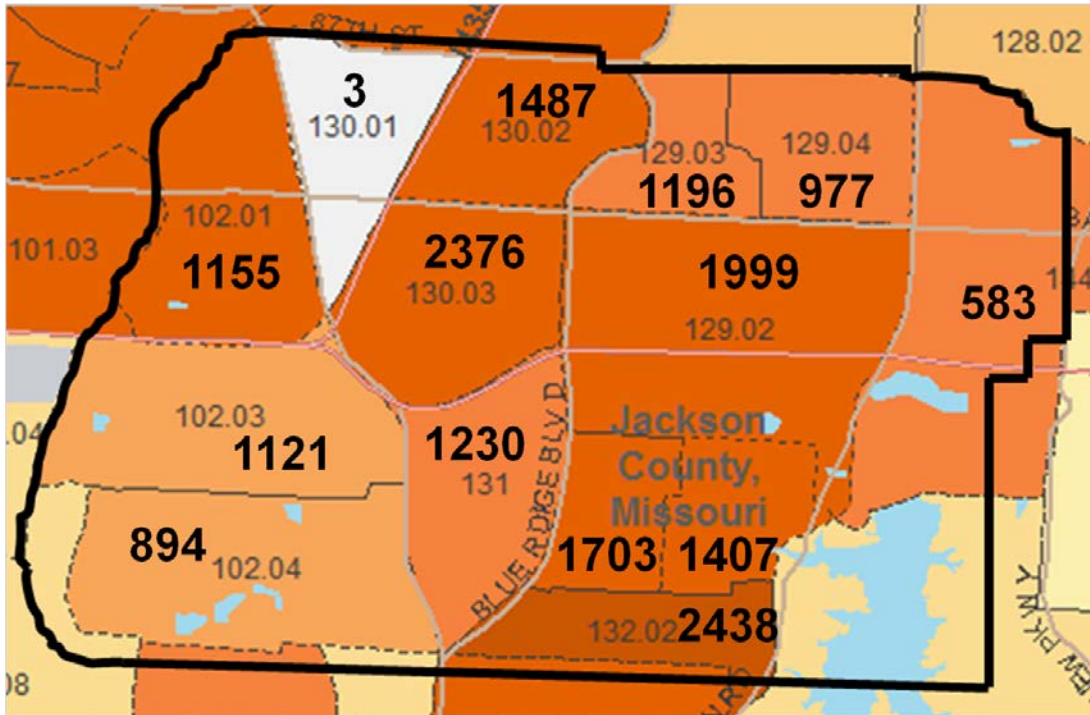
Map 1: African American Population in Hickman Mills, 1990¹



(Shading=population density of black population; darker orange=higher density. Numbers of actual black persons written for each census tract)

¹ U.S. Census of the Population, 1990.

Map 2: African American Population in Hickman Mills, 2000²



(Shading=population density of black population; darker orange=higher density. Numbers of actual black persons written for each census tract)

The concentration of black families in 1990 looks similar to that in 1980 (chapter 4), with the highest concentration of African-American residents living in the southeast section of the district, primarily made up of the Kirkside and Crossgates neighborhoods. However, by 2000, only the southwest corner of the district remained less than 40% black. This area was made up of smaller and more spread-out neighborhoods, with much of the vicinity comprised of public land and historical sites.³

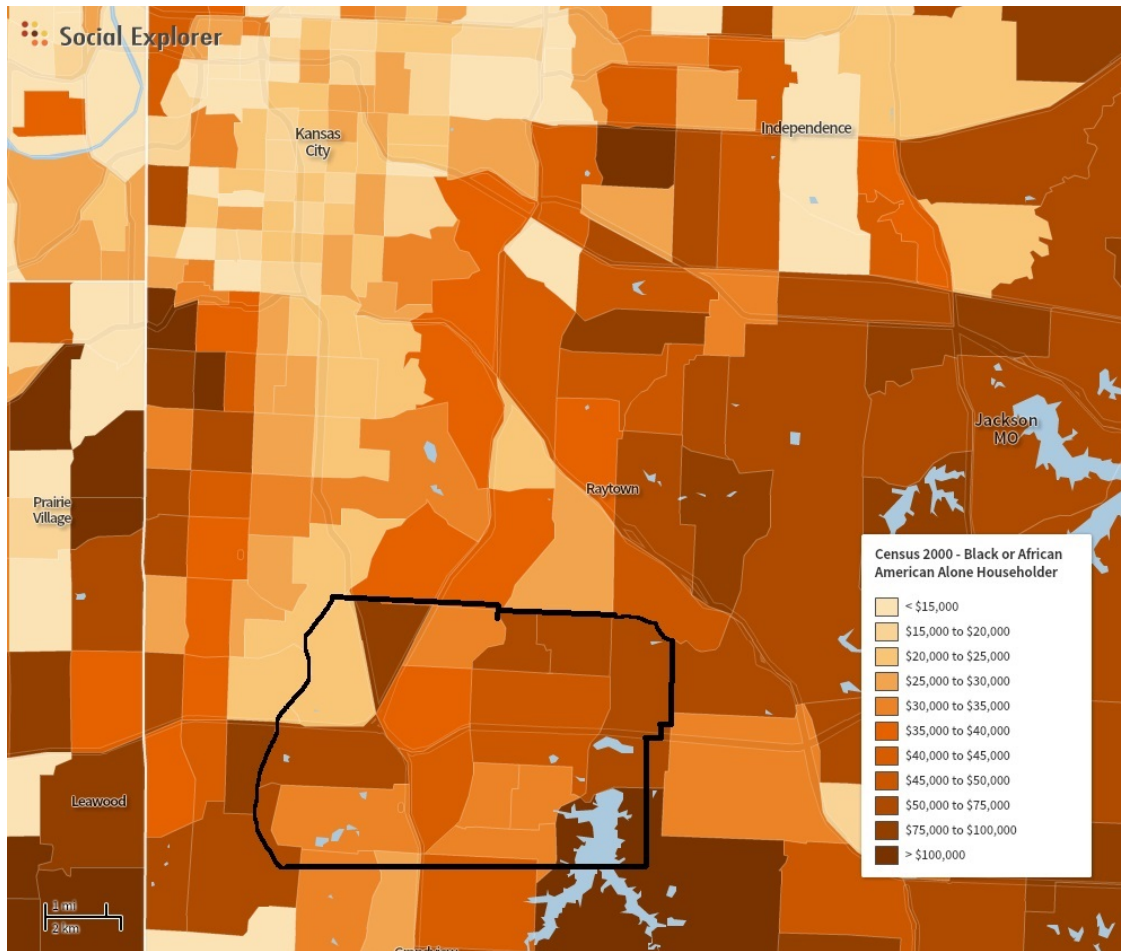
While some white residents saw this demographic change in their neighborhoods as a sign of economic downturn for the community, African-American families moving south were blue collar/lower-middle class, just as the whites. Table 3 in chapter four demonstrates how income groups in Hickman Mills were largely similar, regardless of race. Additionally, map 3 as

² U.S. Census of the Population, 2000.

³ The southwest corner of the school district includes a tract of land where Harry Truman lived as a child.

follows distinguishes between African-American families in Hickman Mills as opposed to their counterparts in central Kansas City, Missouri:

Map 3: African American Population in Kansas City Missouri Metro by Income, 2000⁴



(Black outline for census tracts in Hickman Mills C-1 School District)

In terms of socio-economics, the patterns of suburbanization remained the same by 2000 as they did during the 1950s and 1960s in Hickman Mills. The influx of new African-American residents to the southland were on average as solidly blue collar/middle-class as their white counterparts. Additionally, as map 3 shows, African-American families living in neighborhoods in South Kansas City on average displayed higher incomes than their counterparts in central Kansas City. Hickman Mills was not transforming into a poor urban space.

⁴ U.S. Census of the Population, 2000.

Because of sudden and dramatic periods of change in neighborhood composition, by 2000 the school district served a majority black student body. High school enrollments reveal these rapid changes to the district's student population. In 1988, 224 of Hickman Mills High School's 1,284 students were black, about 17%.⁵ At Ruskin High, 393 of its 1,157 students were black, about 34%.⁶ In 1999, the numbers of African-American students climbed. Hickman Mills had 246 white students out of 946 overall, or 26%; Ruskin had 178 white students in its total student body of 850, or 21%.⁷ For both Ruskin and Hickman Mills, the "flip" occurred within only two years, as both schools had a majority white student body in 1997.⁸ This rapid switch at the end of the 1990s came as a result of a slow, steady trickle of African-American families to Hickman Mills combined with an out-migration of white families.

Thus, what occurred in Hickman Mills during the 1990s was an extension of white flight, a phenomenon that is almost always associated with movement out of city centers in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹ In this case, the trend continued in South Kansas City as whites preferred living near other whites and avoided residing near significant black populations. Events that will be analyzed in this chapter, namely the rise in violence, media coverage of violence in and near

⁵ Data taken from pictures of student body in Hickman Mills *Pride* yearbook for 1988 to 1989. Hickman Mills High School, *Pride* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, July 1989), yearbook collection, Midwest Genealogy Center, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, MO.

⁶ Data taken from pictures of student body in Hickman Mills *Mirage* yearbook for 1988 to 1989. Ruskin High School, *Mirage* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, July 1989), yearbook collection, Midwest Genealogy Center, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, MO.

⁷ Data taken from pictures of student body in Hickman Mills *Pride* and *Mirage* yearbooks for 1989 to 1999. Hickman Mills High School, *Pride* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, July 1999), yearbook collection, Midwest Genealogy Center, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, MO; Ruskin High School, *Mirage* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, July 1999), yearbook collection, Midwest Genealogy Center, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, MO.

⁸ Data taken from pictures of student body in Hickman Mills *Pride* and *Mirage* yearbooks for 1996 to 1997. Hickman Mills High School, *Pride* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, July 1997), yearbook collection, Midwest Genealogy Center, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, MO; Ruskin High School, *Mirage* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, July 1997), yearbook collection, Midwest Genealogy Center, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, MO.

⁹ Leah Platt Boustan, "Was Postwar Suburbanization 'White Flight'? Evidence from the Black Migration," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125, no. 1 (February 2010): 441; Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 247-48.

schools, and economic decline, are all heavily interconnected with race as more non-whites moved into Hickman Mills. Thus, the presence of black families came to be synonymous with violence in the minds of many white Hickmanites.

Violence

Violent incidents made local news headlines in 1990, received a great deal of media attention, and served as a source for the shift in the perception of the district as urban rather than suburban. The new decade began with a disturbing climb in the amount of criminal activity in the neighborhoods of Ruskin Heights, Ruskin Hills, and Kirkside. By March 1990, documented rapes in South Kansas City had nearly doubled while robberies, assaults, and thefts increased over the previous year.¹⁰ These crimes were disconcerting to residents of the area, but what ultimately hurt the reputation of the school district (as well as the community) to a greater degree were three high-profile gun cases, with two ending in a high school student's death. For the first time the Hickman Mills School District became comparable with the Kansas City Missouri School District to the north in gaining damaging amounts of negative publicity in a short period of time. People reading or watching the news in the greater metropolitan area were surely wondering what was going on in South Kansas City in 1990.

In May, a seventeen year-old student was killed in a drive-by shooting while walking by Ruskin Way Park, a mere six blocks from Ruskin High.¹¹ Adding to the school's woes, in October a gun was found in a student's locker, the owner of which had been into an altercation the morning with another student. By the end of the day, one student was in jail, another was

¹⁰ "South Area Attacks Rise—New Rape Report," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 5, March 1, 1990, 1. "Crime Up for South Patrol," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 11, March 12, 1990, 1. By March, southern Kansas City had 23 robberies, 110 assaults, 386 thefts, and 55 stolen vehicles. Totalling 702 incidences, crime had increased from the previous year's first quarter of 628 incidences.

¹¹ "Youth Shot In Ruskin," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 15, May 10, 1990, 1.

sent to juvenile detention, with a third was suspended and sent home.¹² School authorities hoping to end the year without any further violence were disappointed in December when a fifteen-year-old Ruskin High student was involved in a shootout in Longview Park which ended in his death.¹³ While walking by the park, Shannon Hawley was accosted by two older boys. During the fight, Shannon showed his gun, as did one of the two other boys, resulting in both parties firing their weapons at each other. Shannon was shot in the head and died, one of the boys ran away, and the third was shot in the leg and then arrested.¹⁴

These three incidents occurring within seven months fed a public perception of Hickman Mills as a dangerous urban space. The school district itself responded to the shootings and the threat of guns in the schools by working on installing metal detectors and placing off-duty police officers in the two high schools and the junior high buildings.¹⁵ While increased safety for the children was important to the district, adding these measures made the schools look unsafe and unsettling. In essence, the Hickman Mills C-1 School District took on the appearance of an “urban” district in metropolitan Kansas City with “urban” problems.

Residents experienced both the fear and loss that the violent acts from 1990 brought about, but also felt the sting of being associated with a sub-par community. Longtime resident Allison Wade remorsefully articulated, “the media broke our area.”¹⁶ She elaborated:

...because of the things that were happening that year, and then the shifts in the neighborhoods, people started to have misperceptions of our district. Started moving out to Lee’s Summit and Independence, they left because of their fear. People thought we had gangs.¹⁷

¹² “Gun Found in Locker—Ruckus at Ruskin,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no 37, October 18, 1990, 1.

¹³ “Shoot-out on Longview: Ruskin High Youth Dies,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 46, December 20, 1990, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “CSD 1 Hiring Officers,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 103, no. 41, November 11, 1993, 1, 3.

¹⁶ Allison Wade, interview with author, September 8, 2012.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Wade's lamentation was a common sentiment expressed by those interviewed who have stayed within the district.¹⁸ Violence around and among the youth of the community did not change Hickman Mills, as violent actions had occasionally occurred before 1990 as part of Hickman Mills's history. However, previously, no one declared South Kansas City an unsafe place to live or an unfit location to send children, but the shootings of 1990 and the media reports of the violence contributed to unease among established whites (as well as some black families) towards the district and the neighborhoods.¹⁹

Landfill

While the school district was dealing with the deaths of students, threats of violence, and a rising perception of the area as bearing stark similarities to Kansas City, neighborhood communities once again fought against the threat of what they perceived to be urbanization. Residents staged a bitter but winning campaign against adding a landfill to the Bannister Mall development. They also struggled against the city itself by attempting to block the growth of low-income housing. Once again, it was community groups like the Southern Community Coalition (SCC) that spearheaded efforts to block incursions by Kansas City that were viewed as potentially damaging to property values and community identity.

The SCC first learned of the desire on the part of Norcal Waste Systems, Inc., a San-Francisco-based waste and recycling company, to build a landfill near Bannister Mall in March of 1990. Mayor Richard Berkley and the city council placed Proposition 1, allowing Norcal to build the landfill, for public vote. The SCC helped form a new neighborhood group, the "Neighborhoods for Responsible Solid Waste Management," collected donations, and began an

¹⁸ Heather Davis, interview with author, December 4, 2012; Lilly Husman, interview with author, August 25, 2012; Robert Spearman, interview with author, August 25, 2012.

¹⁹ Daniel Mass, interview with author, August 14, 2012.

anti-landfill campaign.²⁰ This new organization, working in conjunction with the SCC, ran full-page advertisements in newspapers declaring that the addition of a second landfill would lead to decreased property values and would effectively “stifle economic growth around Bannister Mall.”²¹ The connection with Hickman Mills School District became clearer as the SCC began holding meetings at Ruskin High from April through May, then convinced the school board to join in protesting the Norcal plan.²² In the past, the school board and the SCC had a somewhat tenuous relationship in that sometimes the community organization supported the board in attempting to pass bond issues, and at other times opposed those measures, largely depending upon whether bonds would raise taxes or not. By the 1990s, however, even though their alliance was short lived, they became staunch comrades in fighting the building of a landfill within district boundaries. This alliance was born out of a mutual desire to keep Bannister Mall from being associated with garbage, which seems to have been a logical move for Ruskinites.

The SCC, as in the past, began a letter-writing campaign with the mayor as the target. Hickman Mills’s superintendent Kirby Hall joined the vocal opposition, produced a unanimous declaration against the proposition from the school board, and encouraged parents and their children to join the campaign.²³ The board and the SCC together presented a rousing argument that the landfill would “threaten the quality of our lives” and promised “we will work diligently for its defeat.”²⁴ For the rest of the year, Hickman Mills’s neighborhood residents continued to meet, write letters, and plan actions to combat Proposition 1. They turned to long-time resident

²⁰ “Landfill Is Pro-Con Topic of Coalition,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 9, March 29, 1990, 1; “Set Landfill Meeting,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 14, May 3, 1990, 1.

²¹ “Vote No—Proposition 1! Landfill Alert!,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 9, March 29, 1990, 2.

²² “Set Landfill Meeting,” 1; “Big Crowd at Forum on Bannister Trash Dump,” *Jackson County Advocate* vol. 101, no. 17, May 24, 1990, 1, 3.

²³ “Big Crowd,” 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

and Kansas City council representative John Sharp as their public and council voice against the landfill, who astutely observed that:

even if the proposed landfill were a model of efficiency it would still give a negative perception to onlookers. Investors and businesses from out of town would be wary of further investment here.²⁵

Popular protest and attempts at raising awareness on the part of the SCC worked, and Proposition 1 failed.

However, the issue was not settled as Norcal brought forward an idea to the city council that would allow them to change their development plan in order to include a landfill, without needing a public vote.²⁶ The council was to vote on the measure in December, so the SCC continued to protest, holding regular meetings and encouraging letter-writing campaigns. In September of 1990, Mayor Berkley visited the SCC at Ruskin High to address concerns over public housing and the proposed landfill, in which he attempted to reassure the present crowd that if the council were to vote on the issue the next day, it would fail. He reiterated that the city did not know where to put the landfill, “but it was needed somewhere.”²⁷ Before its vote in December, the city council held a hearing to share information about the proposal and to hear concerns from citizens. The SCC provided busses that brought over one hundred opponents to the meeting.²⁸ As before, protest was successful and the measure to allow Norcal to build a landfill on land adjacent to Bannister Mall failed to pass.²⁹ The SCC won the battle against the city over the creation of the landfill, but almost immediately found a new threat to the safety and

²⁵ “Over 1,000 at Ruskin High---Massive Landfill Turnout,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 45, Dec. 13, 1990, 1, 3.

²⁶ “No Mall Landfill,” *Kansas City Star*, December 18, 1990, B5.

²⁷ “KC Mayor Addresses SCC—Berkley Eases Fears on Housing and Landfill,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 33, September 30, 1990, 1, 5.

²⁸ “Throng of Opponents at City Hearing on Landfill,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 41, November 22, 1990, 1.

²⁹ “No Landfill,” *Kansas City Star*, December 18, 1990, B4.

quiet of southern Kansas City. The SCC's new mission became one of keeping low-income families out of southern Kansas City.

Low-income Housing

Like their fight against the city landfill, residents who sought to resist the presence of low-income housing complexes were clearly working to maintain a suburban status and to repel “urban” influences. Popular opinion expressed that housing for the poor was a project for inner cities, hence the moniker “projects.”³⁰ For Ruskinites at the time, the eventual arrival of low-income housing signaled the end of Hickman Mills's status as a suburban community. Many long-time residents of South Kansas City today believe that economic change in Hickman Mills occurred primarily because of the increased presence of low-income housing that followed the closing of a major low-income project named Wayne Miner in downtown Kansas City.³¹ To a certain degree, their perception matches reality. The housing project, a large ten-story apartment complex named Wayne Miner Court (opened November 18, 1960), was demolished on February 28, 1987 and its residents were helped into section eight housing throughout the metro area, including neighborhoods in South Kansas City.³²

Wayne Miner was planned and created at a time when Kansas City, Missouri was attempting to address poverty, low-income housing, and the negative perception of “slum” neighborhoods. Even so, city leaders also had a vested interest in keeping housing racially

³⁰ Spearman, interview with author.

³¹ Carla Baker, interview with author, August 14, 2012; Gloria Cardona, interview with author, August 30, 2012; Davis, interview with author; Colleen Hamilton, interview with author, August 14, 2012; Hill, interview with author, August 30, 2012; Husman, interview with author; Dell Jacobs, interview with author, December 4, 2012; Alicia Solum, interview with author, January 26, 2013; Spearman, interview with author.

³² “Ceremony Sunday at Housing Units,” *Kansas City Star*, November 17, 1960, 16; “Felled High-rises Mark Start of ‘New Era,’” *Kansas City Star*, March 1, 1987, 4A; Kevin Fox Gotham, “A City Without Slums: Urban Renewal, Public Housing, and Downtown Revitalization in Kansas City, Missouri,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60, no. 1 (January 2001): 303.

segregated, because integrated housing, even for poor residents, was seen as anathema.³³ Thus, Wayne Miner was for black families while its counterparts, Chouteau Court, West Bluff, and Pennway Plaza in other parts of town, were reserved largely for whites.³⁴ Kansas City leaders hoped for the success of the high-rise apartments, but problems of crime, vandalism, and disrepair quickly arose to the point that they became permanent fixtures of life at Wayne Miner.³⁵ By the late 1980s, Wayne Miner was widely considered “a blighting influence in the city of Kansas City.”³⁶ Its demolition in 1987 coincided with pressures from the federal government and local authorities to desegregate housing in Kansas City. However, efforts to desegregate led to clashes with residents of the Hickman Mills district.

The case of housing desegregation in Hickman Mills illustrates the complex ties between a school district and its larger community, in that the efforts taken by the Housing Authority of Kansas City (HAKC) to provide low-income residences came at a time when the state government was demanding Kansas City resolve its issues of educational segregation, as per the *Missouri v. Jenkins* ruling in June of 1995.³⁷ As discussed in chapter 4, the HAKC, together with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), had been attempting to provide low-income housing throughout the Kansas City metro area since the late 1970s, with heavy resistance from the

³³ Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 75-76.

³⁴ Gotham, “A City Without Slums,” 303; Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, 78-79. The high-rise was named after an African-American soldier from Kansas City who fought and died in World War I.

³⁵ “A Dream Neglected: Disrepair, Vandalism at Wayne Miner are Growing,” *Kansas City Times*, October 29, 1981, A1; E. Chrichton Singleton, “A Tale of Two Projects: Wayne Miner and Parade Park Compared,” *Cooperative Housing Bulletin* (January/February 1996): 2.

³⁶ “Wayne Miner Done,” *Kansas City Star*, March 1, 1987, 4A.

³⁷ Alison Morantz, “Money and Choice in Kansas City: Major Investments With Modest Returns,” in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, ed. Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton (New York: The New Press, 1996), 250-251.

neighborhoods in Hickman Mills.³⁸ Additionally, the Kansas City Missouri School District filed suit in 1977 against eighteen surrounding school districts in the Kansas City metro area (including Hickman Mills), the federal government, and the states of Missouri and Kansas. This suit demanded a metropolitan desegregation remedy, chiefly in school assignments.³⁹ However, Judge Clark changed the case, as the plaintiffs became the defendants. The eventual ruling from the Supreme Court stated that Kansas City had to find a solution to its educational problems without turning to the surrounding school districts in the suburbs. However, conveniently for Kansas City, Hickman Mills was part of the city, even if it had its own school district. At the same time, Kansas City needed to desegregate its housing, yet only had authority to work within its own city borders, a court decision that mirrored that of *Missouri v Jenkins*. Thus the neighborhoods of southern Kansas City became one of several attractive sites for providing section eight homes.

This effort on the part of the HAKC did not go unchecked by residents of Hickman Mills, particularly the SCC. As Wayne Miner closed and families from the project were distributed to other housing, the Housing Authority began purchasing homes in southern Kansas City, primarily in the Kirkside neighborhood.⁴⁰ Opposition from Hickman Mills's residents was immediate with letter campaigns taking a central role. The Kansas City HUD office began receiving dozens of letters, with the typical communication outlining the dangers low-income housing would pose to the rest of the community:

We feel this will depreciate our property and turn our wonderful neighborhood into a high-crime area. Also our neighborhood is kept up. This does not happen when you

³⁸ "Low-Income Housing in Suburbs Sought," *Kansas City Star*, October 24, 1977, 16A; "Hickman School Board Protests Rights Survey Sought by HEW," *Kansas City Star*, February 4, 1977, 2; Morantz, "Money and Choice," 245.

³⁹ Morantz, "Money and Choice," 245-246.

⁴⁰ Ironically, this was the most non-white neighborhood in Hickman Mills, as many middle-class black families who moved south bought houses in Kirkside. Thus, to a degree, the efforts to desegregate still clung to racial lines.

have low-income housing in your neighborhood. These houses are never kept up, and it makes the rest of the neighborhood look run-down.⁴¹

This notion of rental and low-income housing never being “kept up” was a common concern among residents, as they feared their own property values and neighborhood conditions would be adversely affected. Longtime residents of Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills reiterated the same sentiments when asked about housing values in their area.⁴² Hickman Mills residents stated that their efforts in fighting the low-income housing were futile, but they also expressed that it was a battle worth having.⁴³

The SCC sued the Housing Authority in May 1990, joining with councilman Sharp’s objection to the plan.⁴⁴ The lawyer representing the SCC explained its dissatisfaction with the low-income housing plan with a simple, yet brutally honest statement: “the residents of the area don’t object to the units there now, but they don’t want the Housing Authority to pour any more units into the area.”⁴⁵ The judge, Forest W. Hanna, sympathized with the SCC and ordered a stop to any purchases of single-family homes in June.⁴⁶ However, representatives from the Housing Authority countered that they were ordered by HUD to specifically purchase houses outside of the Kansas City Missouri School District.⁴⁷ The HAKC was simultaneously ordered by Missouri Governor John Ashcroft and the Missouri legislature to scatter the section eight housing proportionally among school districts “according to population and...amount of public

⁴¹ “South KC Opposes HUD,” *Kansas City Times*, January 19, 1990, B-3.

⁴² Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Hill, Husman, Spearman, Husman, Jacobs, Martin, Solum, and Wade, interviews with author.

⁴³ Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Hill, Husman, Spearman, Husman, Jacobs, Martin, Solum, and Wade, interviews with author.

⁴⁴ “Judge hears lawsuit to halt growth of low-income units in southeast KC,” *Kansas City Star*, May 11, 1990, C9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; “Housing Bill Set,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 19, June 14, 1990, 1.

⁴⁶ “Scattered-site Law, Court Ruling at Odds, Housing Authority says,” *Kansas City Star*, August 15, 1990, 2C.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

housing in census tracts.”⁴⁸ For the HAKC, these were contradictory orders, with one issued by the state government and another coming from a federal entity.

The Housing Authority’s request was that the judge allow HUD and HAKC to continue to purchase housing in Hickman Mills.⁴⁹ HAKC submitted several proposals to be able to continue to operate section eight housing in southern and northern Kansas City, and gained approval from HUD in early 1991 with a plan that placed sixty-one percent of the low-income housing in the KCMO school district, sixteen percent in the North Kansas City district, six percent each in the Center and Raytown districts, and four percent in Park Hill. All of these houses would be within Kansas City, Missouri, as the HAKC did not have the authority to build beyond city borders.⁵⁰ The neighborhoods of Hickman Mills were purposefully left out of the plan, as judge Hanna’s ruling from the previous year remained in effect and the HAKC was forced to sell eight of its already purchased properties within the Hickman Mills School District. This effectively decreased the number of section eight houses from nineteen to eleven.⁵¹ The result was essentially a draw for the SCC and HUD/HAKC as low-income housing would still be provided within Hickman Mills’s borders, but to a smaller degree.

However, as before in their struggle to provide housing in South Kansas City, HUD and HAKC would continue efforts to build low-income apartment complexes or convert existing housing to section eight plans. They succeeded after 2000, as many of the houses in Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills became section eight certified when their previous owners left.⁵² Additionally, the neighborhoods in the Hickman Mills district were still adversely affected by

⁴⁸ “Authority Files Court Motion—Seek Housing Retrial,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 101, no. 23, July 12, 1990, 1, 3.

⁴⁹ “Scattered-site Law,” 2C.

⁵⁰ “Scattered-site Plan Meets State’s Rules,” *Kansas City Star*, January 23, 1991, 1C.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Davis, interview with author; Solum, interview with author.

these battles as residents and outsiders began to see the southland as increasingly poor, black, and violent. Local businesses, large and small, began to suffer, which led to an economic downturn in South Kansas City. Hence, in the minds of the long-time residents, Hickman Mills spiraled from being a quiet suburb to dangerous urban blight.⁵³

Perception and Reality, Fear and Economics

By the end of the 1990s, much of the battle to retain Hickman Mills as a suburb was lost inside the minds of people who created suburban Hickman Mills. To a large degree, the problems Hickman Mills C-1 School District faced in the 1990s reflected and were results of economic decline within district boundaries. The story of a major shopping center in Kansas City is indicative of this reality, as it was located within Hickman Mills, promised great economic and social benefits, but eventually failed, damaging the reputation and the economy of southern Kansas City.

Bannister Mall opened in August of 1980 at the corner of I-435 and Bannister Road as a modern and elaborate shopping center, the largest up to that date in the Kansas City metro area.⁵⁴ Boasting a Macy's upon opening and a J.C. Penney's, Jones Store, and a Sears shortly after, Bannister Mall showed promise as an economic and shopping powerhouse for the Kansas City area and particularly for Hickman Mills.⁵⁵ Some residents were concerned that the mall would take business away from Truman Corners, the shopping plaza that straddled the border between Hickman Mills and Grandview school districts. However, excitement over a one million square foot center with over 150 stores, a movie theater, along with restaurants and businesses that would be built around the mall itself, overshadowed any fears of the potential demise of Truman

⁵³ Hill, interview with author; Spearman, interview with author.

⁵⁴ "Bannister Mall Opens Doors," *Kansas City Star*, August 7, 1980, 10A.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; "Competitors Looking over Shoulders at Bannister Mall," *Kansas City Star*, July 29, 1980, 5C; "Bannister Mall Complex Continues to Add Stores," *Kansas City Star*, November 1, 1981, 7H.

Corners.⁵⁶ The mall provided work for almost two thousand construction workers and would employ over 2,400 employees. The Hickman Mills School District would also benefit, with approximately \$400,000 in yearly sales tax revenues heading to the schools.⁵⁷ Within five years, developers such as J.C. Nichols Co. and Robertson Homes began planning and building office spaces and apartment complexes near the mall.⁵⁸ In 1988, Wal-Mart added a then new “hypermarts” to the Bannister area, which had the distinction of being the fourth in the nation and the largest Wal-Mart to date.⁵⁹ From its beginnings throughout the 1980s, Bannister continued to grow and thrive. This reflected well on the school district, not only because economic development and trade led to more funds available for Hickman Mills’s schools, but also because housing values increased, which also directly boosted funding. Hickman Mills as a school district was now associated with a seemingly new, thriving, and exciting part of Kansas City.

The mall did not prove to be a panacea for the area and eventually met its demise due to expansions of other malls in the metropolitan area and the spread of fears on the part of suburban, middle-class whites over entering South Kansas City. Just as the school district experienced racial change in greater numbers in the 1990s followed by both real and perceived violence, the economic corridor of shops, plazas, and restaurants along Bannister Road began to experience difficulties. In the early 1990s, rumors of gangs, violent adults, child-molesters, and drug-dealing in the vicinity of Bannister Mall began to circulate, prompting the owners of the complex to begin a public relations campaign in order to convince shoppers to return to their

⁵⁶ “Million-square-foot Mall May Be Last One in Kansas City Area,” *Kansas City Star*, August 3, 1980, 1H.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Hickman Mills was not the only beneficiary of Bannister’s largesse, in that Kansas City mass transit and the County stood to also receive \$400,000 each. The state of Missouri was planning on receiving two and a half million dollars.

⁵⁸ “Nichols Begins a 5-building Project on Bannister,” *Kansas City Star*, September 30, 1984, 11E; “Apartments May Be Built Northeast of Bannister Mall,” *Kansas City Star*, March 5, 1985, D1.

⁵⁹ “Hypermart, Expansion at Mall Advance,” *Kansas City Star*, April 24, 1988, D8.

stores.⁶⁰ Crime, especially shoplifting and theft, did occur at Bannister and happened more frequently than at other shopping locations in the metro area. However, when considered in the context of how many people shopped at Bannister, the ratios were on par with other malls throughout Kansas City.⁶¹

In order to address both the real and imagined instances of theft and crime, mall management installed additional security cameras and special safety booths spaced evenly throughout the parking lot. These measures did decrease crime, especially in the parking lot, but were not effective in causing customers to perceive Bannister as a safe place to shop.⁶² Hickman Mills residents recall that some called the booths “sniper towers” and rumors spread that mall security had armed guards ready to shoot criminals in the parking lot.⁶³ Additional staff at the mall implemented youth outreach programs, providing activities and adult “mentors” to teenagers who frequented the mall, particularly on evenings and weekends.⁶⁴ Kansas City bus lines began running to Bannister Mall in the late 80s through the 90s and both shoppers and adolescents used the busses to travel to and from the mall. Because many of these teenagers were black, discomfort toward the youth helped propagate the myth that gangs were employing the mall as a center of operations. Bannister communications director Bev Livingston alluded to this theory in stating one of the benefits of a Bannister Mall mentor program is that adults “learn that not everyone in a Starter jacket is in a gang.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ “Shopping Mall Rumors: Police Say Assaults Never Occurred,” *Kansas City Star*, December 24, 1992, C2.

⁶¹ “Bannister’s Reputation for Crime is Unearned, Mall Officials Say,” *Kansas City Star*, August 12, 1991, A11, B1, C1. While robbery numbers were higher than most other malls in the Kansas City area, they were within the range of the other shopping centers. The numbers become less significant when considering the greater numbers of shoppers at Bannister in comparison to other malls, as Bannister was one of the most popular and largest shopping centers in the metropolitan area at the time.

⁶² “Mall Cites the Benefits of its Security Efforts,” *Kansas City Star*, April 23, 1992, D1.

⁶³ Baker, interview with author; Hamilton, interview with author.

⁶⁴ “Teen-agers Stir Concern,” *Kansas City Star*, December 17, 1992, D1.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Ultimately, attempts at reassuring customers that the mall was safe and a friendly place to shop failed. As fewer paying customers frequented the mall, stores began to close and businesses left. For example, after operating for eleven years at Bannister, dentist Dennis T. Myers moved out in 1994 with the explanation, “there’s perception of a problem with the mall. We believe it was very safe, but our clientele didn’t believe that.”⁶⁶ Mall owners continued to implement new measures to convince customers to return, again without success. By December of the same year, Bannister added a unit of bicycle-riding security officers, hoping to placate consumers during the Christmas shopping season. Mall security chief Major John Coleman, the former police commander of Kansas City’s South Patrol Division, remarked that security at Bannister was largely a cosmetic issue, as “there really is much less crime than people perceive. This is more of a public-relations effort, since security problems are rather minimal.”⁶⁷ These attempts to reassure shoppers all ultimately failed, as stores began to close or relocate from the mall because their owners were not receiving enough business.

Facing years of decline and operational challenges, the owners of Bannister Mall eventually decided to close the facility in 2007. At its zenith, Bannister offered 180 stores, a movie theater, and 27 restaurants. When its closing was announced, Bannister had less than fifty stores, a barber shop, and a flea market.⁶⁸ Burlington Coat Factory was one of the few major retailers to remain, managing to direct its merchandizing to the changing clientele. Alicia Solum, a longtime resident of Ruskin Heights and among an early wave of African Americans to move to the neighborhood, shared her appreciation for stores like Burlington Coat Factory, which stayed while fears of uncertainty and economic decline loomed.

⁶⁶ “Moving in, Moving Out at Bannister,” *Kansas City Star*, October 25, 1994, D7.

⁶⁷ “Bicycle Squad Helps Shoppers, Bolsters Security Over Holidays,” *Kansas City Star*, December 3, 1994, C5.

⁶⁸ “Bannister Mall Officially Dead,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 117 no. 23, June 6, 2007, 1.

Those [stores] were the ones who stayed real, stayed true, and we have never forgotten it. I make a point to buy from the Factory, and so do all my friends. They stayed with us, so we stay with them.⁶⁹

Merchants like Burlington and K-Mart that have remained in the Bannister area do continue to do steady business and have a loyal customer base, but not enough to convince other businesses to return. Recent attempts at building a soccer stadium in the area or converting the site to an outdoor-style mall complex have stalled and failed, as, usually, the projects ultimately went to Kansas City, Kansas.⁷⁰ What was briefly a thriving commercial center now stands largely as empty lots and concrete plains with occasional grass and weeds growing between the cracks. The existing K-Mart has boarded front windows and an armed guard. Bannister Mall and its surrounding stores were a shopping haven for middle-class whites and, for a time, thrived. Its transformation from a middle-class and upscale shopping center to an example of urban blight all occurred without the mall moving locations. The city, and its accompanying “problems,” traveled to Bannister and Hickman Mills.

Community Woes to School Woes

The events in southern Kansas City during the last decade of the twentieth century were highly destructive to the Hickman Mills School District. Due to changes in housing and economic decline within its borders, from 1990 on Hickman Mills began to experience extreme financial difficulties, more so than it ever had in the past. Property values began to decline in the 1990s, which translated to fewer funds for the school district.⁷¹ This reality, combined with fears of further decay, led to an outmigration from the neighborhoods, which also meant leaving the school district. Older, more established families began to leave the chief neighborhoods in

⁶⁹ Solum, interview with author.

⁷⁰ “Work starts on Kansas City Wizards Stadium,” *Kansas City Business Journal*, December 24, 2008, 2.

⁷¹ “Property Values Down,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 104, no. 45, December 8, 1994, 1; “Housing Value Lowest in Century,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 109, no. 32, August 26, 1999, 3.

Hickman Mills (Kirkside, Ruskin Heights, and Ruskin Hills), often for neighboring communities to the east such as Lee's Summit and Independence.⁷² Alison Wade remembers her neighborhood in Ruskin Heights changing: "People left because they were afraid, then others would react and leave too. Out of sixteen homes on these two blocks, nine became empty."⁷³ Heather Davis, another long-time resident of Ruskin Heights, told the story of how her realtor neighbor tried to reassure residents that they could maintain stable neighborhoods:

He told us 'just don't leave—if people leave, then it starts a panic. So stay, and things will even out.' He was the first to leave our block, sold his house and moved to Independence!⁷⁴

Davis expressed that she was not planning on leaving and still continues to walk in her neighborhood in order to show her neighbors that it is still possible.⁷⁵ On the whole, many white families did leave the Hickman Mills neighborhoods. Some residents who stayed and still remain expressed that as much as they want to leave, they feel they would not be able to sell their homes.⁷⁶

As white flight began to occur in Hickman Mills in the 1990s with subsequent decline in housing values, the school district received less funding from its mill levy, which made school operations more difficult to finance. Tax changes on the city and state level also dealt a blow to how the school district helped fund its daily operations, compounding Hickman Mills's financial woes. The city of Kansas City declared it was ceasing sharing its sales tax revenue with Hickman Mills, Grandview, Raytown, Center, and North Kansas City school districts effective

⁷² Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Hill, Husman, Solum, Spearman, and Wade, interviews with author; James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822-2011* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 194-95.

⁷³ Wade, interview with author.

⁷⁴ Davis, interview with author.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Davis expressed that her friends think she is crazy walking outside in her neighborhood and believe that it is too dangerous to do so.

⁷⁶ Hill, interview with author; Cardona, interview with author.

December 31, 1994.⁷⁷ This did hurt the other school districts to a degree, but it was additionally insulting to Hickman Mills considering the district was inside the limits of Kansas City. Residents paid a local sales tax whose monies did not fund their local school. Additionally, Missouri state funding of public schools was changing at this time in an effort to address inequalities between school districts' budgets throughout the state, which, in an ironic twist of fate, led to Hickman Mills receiving less state aid than in previous years.⁷⁸

In order to address decreased local and state funding, the school board proposed a tax levy hike of \$1.60 for residents of the district, while at the same time it decreased the yearly budget by \$300,000. This decrease would remove funding for travel and meetings, retract the planned inclusion of new computer systems in the high schools, and delay the purchase of new books.⁷⁹ Even with a large get-out-the-vote campaign and the use of election consultants, the levy failed when voted upon in February of 1995, with 3,278 voting against the tax increase and 2,020 voting in favor.⁸⁰ School board president George Flesher despaired, "I feel like a boxer after a losing fight. It's hard to come up off the mat."⁸¹ Flesher and the rest of the board did recover, then proposed a fifty-two cent levy increase for an April vote, which did pass.⁸² While considered a win for district leadership, the school budget was still not sustainable when considering lower commercial and residential property values in Hickman Mills.

Hence, even with the levy increase, by 1995 and 1996, many of Hickman Mills's programs were closed, teachers dismissed, and classes cancelled. The school board fired fifty teachers, cut "minor" high school sports such as soccer, baseball, golf, tennis, wrestling, and

⁷⁷ "CSD1 Faces Budget Woes—Ponder School Decision," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 104, no. 42, November 17, 1994, 1, 3.

⁷⁸ Michael Podgursky and Matthew G. Springer, "K-12 Public School Finance in Missouri: An Overview," *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Regional Economic Development* 2, no. 1 (2006): 36; "CSD1 Faces Budget Woes," 3.

⁷⁹ "CSD1 Goes for Levy Hike," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 104, no. 45, December 8, 1994, 1.

⁸⁰ "Big 'No' Vote on Levy," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 105, no. 2, February 2, 1995, 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² "Hickman School Levy Endorsed by C-1 Voters," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 105, no. 10, April 6, 1995, 1.

eliminated all athletic activities at the junior high level.⁸³ Hickman leadership was extremely concerned. Resurrecting fears of consolidation from the 1960s, President Flesher lamented:

what we're looking at here is the potential collapse of the school district. In the worst-case scenario if the state were to eliminate the Hickman Mills school district, it would have to combine it with another district.⁸⁴

While the state did have power to close a school district, it would have been very difficult to do so, requiring the political will to merge two districts together, even against the wishes of the residents within the districts. Flesher's dire warning probably served to attempt to scare long-time residents who were in the district during the 1960s into supporting tax levies.

In the 1990s, the school board was unable to obtain enough funds to maintain school operation, pay for staff and equipment, as well as building maintenance. This was much worse of a problem to have than thirty years earlier in the 1970s when the district was not able to fully accommodate its growing populace. Harkening back to financial problems in the 1950s, the district even tried raising funds from students' families in order to absorb costs. In the 1950s and 60s, parents had to pay a fee to send their children to kindergarten. In the 1990s, families paid to have children take part in school activities. For a time during the 1990s, a \$25 activity fee was instituted for high school students for available extra-curricular clubs and sports, with its subsequent removal in 1996 because of parent complaints.⁸⁵ The district virtually limped along through the end of the 1990s in operating its schools, paying its teachers, and hosting activities for its youth. The situation for the schools would become more severe at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as the district struggled to afford increasingly expensive school repairs.⁸⁶

⁸³ "Officials Give Out Budget-Cut List," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 105, no. 4, February 23, 1995, 1, 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ "Remove Activity Fee," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 106, no. 27, August 1, 1996, 1.

⁸⁶ Davis, interview with author; Wade, interview with author.

The End of Long-Term School Leadership

Some changes in school leadership helped strengthen the perception that Hickman Mills was a declining district. After leading the schools for three years, Superintendent Hill resigned in 1993 to head a school district in South Dakota and the board named Deputy Ron Goodwin as superintendent.⁸⁷ Two years later, Superintendent Goodwin resigned and the school board elected to have Jerry L. Cooper serve as interim superintendent until the position could be filled, though searches for a new superintendent were unsuccessful.⁸⁸ Cooper became the *de facto* superintendent until he announced his resignation in 1999 in order to take a professorship at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.⁸⁹ The board named then-principal Marge Williams as interim superintendent for the 2000-01 school year, after which she became full superintendent, serving until 2012.⁹⁰ While Williams ended up providing the stability of a long-term leader, by the end of the 1990s, residents were not sure how long any superintendent was going to last, as the previous three only stayed for a few years.⁹¹ This injured the reputation of Hickman Mills as a stable school district, as it appeared it was a district that could not hold on to leadership.⁹² To be fair, as has been shown throughout this study, leadership for Hickman Mills was historically less stable than residents would care to admit. However, by the 1990s and into the 2000s, the school district's leadership woes were more public.

⁸⁷ "Dr. Goodwin to Helm," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 104, no. 17, May 27, 1993, 1.

⁸⁸ "School Chief Resigns Hickman Mills Position," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 105, no. 35, September 28, 1995, 1, 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*; "CSD 1 Superintendent To Leave at Year's End," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 109, no. 25, May 13, 1999, 1.

⁹⁰ "Name Dr. Williams," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 110, no. 23, June 22, 2000, 1.

⁹¹ Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Hill, Husman, Solum, Spearman, and Wade, interviews with author.

⁹² Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Hill, Husman, Solum, Spearman, and Wade, interviews with author.

Declining Status

The last few years of the 1990s continued to be very difficult for the school district. In October 1997, there was another shooting at Ruskin Park close to Ruskin High.⁹³ Two high school students began an argument at school and when classes were dismissed at 2:12 pm, they walked to the park to have a fight when one pulled out a gun and shot the other. By that evening, one student was dead and the other was in juvenile detention.⁹⁴ This event brought memories of the shootings in 1990, made local metropolitan news, which again raised questions about the reality and the perception of violence in the neighborhoods of South Kansas City.⁹⁵ In April 1999, somebody started a fire in the Ruskin gymnasium. Although it was quickly contained, the fire caused \$15,000 in damage.⁹⁶ Again, this unfortunate event made local news in Kansas City and questions were raised once more about the safety and quality of the school district.⁹⁷

Further markers of decline appear in testing data that reveal Hickman Mills's similarities to the urban Kansas City Missouri School District instead of the other suburban districts that had once been its compatriots. In August 1999, Missouri gave a report of ACT scores among high school students across the state, with the national and state average being about 21 points. Hickman Mills students scored an average of 18.9 and Ruskin students scored 18.7, well below any of the students in surrounding suburban districts (who scored well above the state and national average), but on par with the high schools in Kansas City, Missouri.⁹⁸ Both by reputation and by objective standards, at least on a national test for students wanting to enter college, Hickman Mills was like Kansas City in its status as a failing school district.

⁹³ "At Ruskin Park—Watch Fatal Shooting," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 107, no. 38, October 16, 1997, 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Spearman, interview with author.

⁹⁶ "Ruskin Arson Fire," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 109, no. 14, April 22, 1999, 1.

⁹⁷ Husman, interview with author; Spearman, interview with author.

⁹⁸ "State Gives ACT Scores—Schools Here Fall Short," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 109, no. 32, August 26, 1999, 1.

The 1990s marked the beginning of the shift Hickman Mills took from being a largely white, lower middle-class suburb of Kansas City with a middling school district, shopping, and affordable housing into what essentially became an extension of Kansas City, Missouri, with all the problems and negative perceptions that came with that association. While the district never in its history had an “easy” period free of strife, it also never had a reputation of being an embattled district like KCMSD. This perception changed in the 1990s and was cemented in the first decade of the twenty-first century, as Hickman Mills completed its transformation from a quiet village, to a first-ring suburb, and finally, to an extension of the Kansas City urban core. The shift Hickman Mills went through in becoming a suburb in the 1950s and 1960s was largely the result of housing and commercial development, which ultimately benefited the school district, even if that change was difficult. The later transformation to an urban space began as one of perception. The entrance of low-income housing and larger numbers of black families seemed to signal to the white residents that the city was coming their way; either they had to adapt to Hickman Mills’s urbanization, or they should leave. One of the long-term residents of Ruskin Hills expressed her view on the change the district underwent as inevitable:

It is all urban sprawl, and it is happening everywhere. I talk to my friends, and they see it where they live too. I don’t live in a suburb anymore, but who does? The cities, they just keep expanding.⁹⁹

While the resident seems to be adapting well to the changes, her pointing out that cities keep expanding reveals a view of cities that was not pervasive in 1961, when Kansas City annexed Hickman Mills. While Ruskinites had no say in annexation, many were mollified by the increased services that would result from Kansas City’s action, along with a decrease in local taxes. Nobody at the time (as far as I can tell) stated dejectedly that the annexation was an example of the city expanding. Yet, by the 1990s through the 2000s, that seems to be the

⁹⁹ Davis, interview with author.

common sentiment, as Hickman Mills's decline became yet another example of urban sprawl and the ruination of quiet neighborhoods.

In interviews I conducted with both white and black residents of Hickman Mills, there seems to be a perception that there was nothing that could be done to prevent the ultimate transformation of Hickman Mills into an urban community and school district. Persons interviewed tended to believe that Hickman Mills's fate was sealed by its location relative to Kansas City, Missouri, as well as the economic ruination that whites blame on violence and that blacks blame on white fears of violence.¹⁰⁰ The two groups do come together in that both white and black residents equally blame economic decline in the area on the proliferation of section eight housing.¹⁰¹ However, as examined in this chapter, economic decline started before section eight housing grew to large numbers in Hickman Mills. It is only after 2000 that HUD opened many homes, particularly in Ruskin Heights, Ruskin Hills, Crossgates, and Kirkside, to be designated as section eight. Hickman Mills became a "ghetto" in the minds of some residents, ex-residents, and even surrounding communities before it truly became the economically depressed place it is today.

¹⁰⁰ Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Hill, Husman, Jacobs, Martin, Solum, Spearman, Wade, interviews with author.

¹⁰¹ Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Hill, Husman, Jacobs, Martin, Solum, Spearman, Wade, interviews with author. Everyone I spoke with had strong opinions on section eight housing and unanimously consider it to be disastrous for the community.

Conclusion: From Suburban to Urban Space

Hickman Mills as a Community and a School District in the 21st Century

The popular narrative among residents of Hickman Mills, both white and black, is that the introduction and spread of section eight homes by HUD and HAKC in the 1990s and 2000s destroyed the community. White residents reported that when children from these homes entered the schools, they made teaching more difficult.¹ One teacher pointed out that after the 1990s, it was not uncommon to have students whose parents were in jail.² Thus the degradation of Hickman Mills was a result of the degradation of the family.³ This may have been partially true, but is an overgeneralization of a larger problem. The roots of Hickman Mills's "decline" are more complex and far-reaching. Hickman Mills suffered as a school district because for much of its operation in the twentieth century, leaders focused on school growth without gaining the community's full support in terms of taxes. This of course, was made much more difficult by virtue of the fact that schools in Missouri had to obtain two-thirds of voter approval in order to raise mill levies. Added to the taxation woes, when whites left the district as black families entered in significant numbers at the end of the twentieth century, property values decreased, which proved detrimental to Hickman Mills's funding. As perception towards the neighborhoods in South Kansas City fed a myth of a dangerous urban space, businesses left, which also harmed the school district's finances.

Unfortunately, the perception that Hickman Mills was an area of Kansas City that was declining, unsafe, and poor and black became more of a reality in the first decade of the twenty-

¹ Carla Baker, interview with author, August 14, 2012; Colleen Hamilton, interview with author, August 14, 2012.

² Hamilton, interview with the author.

³ Baker, Hamilton, interview with author; Gloria Cardona, interview with author, August 30, 2012; Heather Davis, interview with author, December 4, 2012; Robert Spearman, interview with author, August 25, 2012; Allison Wade, interview with author, September 8, 2012. The idea of the "degradation of the family" most likely comes from the famous Moynihan Report of 1965. Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

first century. Section eight housing proliferated in Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills and ultimately had the effect of transforming the neighborhoods, but only with the help of white flight. Houses that were left vacant became HUD/section eight homes, which were often bought by out-of-state companies searching for a cheap investment in housing speculation schemes.⁴ When visiting the neighborhood association office for the two Ruskin developments, it is possible to see a map of each house in the community with section eight houses marked in green. Green sections mark over half of the homes. Designating houses as section eight did not solve the problem of vacant buildings, as often landlords who lived miles away were not aware of renters abandoning homes. Today, many of the neighborhoods in Hickman Mills have deserted and empty homes, which serve as an eyesore and a source of shame for surrounding residents.⁵

While researching Hickman Mills, I spent some time with the leaders of the homeowners associations for some of the major neighborhoods in Hickman Mills. These same organizations who played a significant role in the growth of Hickman Mills as a suburban community, for involvement in the schools, for fighting against HUD and the HAKC, were now a shadow of what they used to be. For the continued association fee of thirty-five dollars (relatively unchanged from when the association started), residents receive a free weekly subscription to the *Jackson County Advocate*, which is the only tangible benefit homeowners or renters receive. The few volunteer workers in the association offices collect the money, usually in the form of checks written by large businesses from out of state, often Texas. The workers record the payments, and deliver the newspapers. They also collect donations for the schools and the elementary children. On one of my visits, the volunteers were buying large numbers of socks

⁴ James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822-2011* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 153.

⁵ Baker, Cardona, Davis, Husman, Spearman, Wade, interviews with author; James Hill, interview with author, August 30, 2012; Graham Martin, interview with author, September 8, 2012; Alicia Solum, interview with author, January 26, 2013.

and knitted gloves, to give a pair to each child at Johnson, Burke, and Symington elementary schools.

South Kansas City is hurting in other areas as well, not just in housing. Many of the local businesses and restaurants are gone from Ruskin Heights and Hills, replaced by paycheck loan services, liquor stores, or empty lots. Bannister road still has heavy traffic from motorists heading to or from I-435 or Highway 71, which brings business to the local Burger King and McDonalds, but little else. Bannister Mall, the symbol of how South Kansas City has declined, itself is largely empty buildings and open space, with grass growing through cracks in the parking lot.

Kansas City officials have been trying to find somebody willing to redevelop the Bannister site, coming close in 2009 when they almost convinced the Kansas City Wizards, a prominent professional soccer team, to build their stadium in South Kansas City at Bannister Mall.⁶ Negotiations over tax breaks stalled the deal and the owner of the soccer club had the stadium built in Kansas City, Kansas. Specifically, the team plays in Village West, part of Wyandotte County where I-70 meets I-435.⁷ The Bannister Mall was purchased by a group called Trails Properties II, who renamed the Bannister area “Three Trails,” a reminder that the Oregon, Santa Fe, and California trails all went through Hickman Mills.⁸ Trails Properties began promising they would find a buyer to redevelop the Bannister Mall, but nothing has materialized.

For the school district, while the racial and economic status of the children attending the schools largely changed, much of the approach towards school operations did not. Just as presented in this study, school leadership in Hickman Mills continued to strive to pass levies in

⁶ “Kansas City Wizards choose Kansas City, Kan., for new stadium” *Kansas City Business Journal*, December 18, 2009, <http://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/stories/2009/12/14/daily48.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Steve Vockrodt, “Bannister Mall redevelopment could get new life,” *Kansas City Business Journal*, February 13, 2013, <http://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/news/2013/02/13/bannister-mall-redevelopment-could-get.html?page=all>.

order to maintain an operating budget, but most of these levies have failed. The school bonds that passed, like decades before, tended to come without any tax increase. As if to recreate the infamous “Langford & Co.,” board and superintendent intrigue continued, most recently with an ousting of Breman Anderson Jr, the school board president who had been antagonistic to the superintendent and other board members, as well as breaking district rules for personal power.⁹ Most recently, a state financial audit of the school board has raised questions of mismanagement and embezzlement by some members of the school board.¹⁰ The present school board and new superintendent Dennis Carpenter have promised to fully investigate the matter and make the necessary changes to have transparent and honest finances.¹¹

The district has had stability of leadership in that Marjorie Williams stayed as superintendent from 2000 to 2012, but her tenure has not been without controversy. As the first black and female superintendent for the district, some whites complained she was a “diversity hire,” an “outsider” who did not live in the district and was not fit for the job.¹² Additionally, the district’s loss of full accreditation in 2012 and its status since as a provisionally accredited school by Missouri tarnished William’s reputation among locals.¹³ Opinions toward Williams among residents I interviewed diverged according to race, as white interviewees tended to describe her as a Kansas City interloper who brought cronies to the district. Black interviewees describe her as a long-time fixture for the district, first as principal then superintendent, who fought to keep

⁹ Joe Robertson, “New superintendent at Hickman Mills witnesses more trouble,” *Kansas City Star*, April 18, 2013, B6; Joe Robertson, “Hickman Mills school board stages a coup and ousts its president,” *Kansas City Star*, May 23, 2013, B5.

¹⁰ Joe Robertson, “Missouri audit paints a dysfunctional portrait of Hickman Mills School District,” *Kansas City Star*, March 4, 2014, A1.

¹¹ Joe Robertson, “Hickman Mills audit exposes past turmoil,” *Kansas City Star*, March 5, 2014, A1.

¹² Heather Davis, Lilly Husman, Robert Spearman, personal interviews with the author. Previous superintendents also did not live within district boundaries, which also brought some complaints by residents.

¹³ Alex Smith, “Hickman Mills District Struggles Through Tough Year,” *KC Currents*, Kansas City Public Media, December 5, 2012, <http://kcur.org/post/hickman-mills-district-struggles-through-tough-year>; Donald Bradley, “Hickman Mills School District slips to provisional accreditation,” *Kansas City Star*, September 19, 2012, B6.

Hickman Mills going during tough times.¹⁴ Williams had also made difficult decisions in the face of declining enrollment and funds. She led the resolution to decrease the district's operating budget by \$5 million in 2009, to close Hickman High School and merge it with Ruskin High in 2010, then cut the budget by another \$3 million with 28 teachers eliminated in 2011.¹⁵ Finally, one more round of cuts came in early 2012 with another \$3 million and fifty positions removed.¹⁶ In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Hickman Mills was experiencing the inverse of its history in the mid-twentieth century. Finally, the word decline took a literal meaning as the district's budget, open buildings, and enrollment shrank. After decades of fighting for appropriate funding to grow the district, Hickman Mills found itself fighting to get enough funding to operate the schools. Eventually, beaten by the realities of decreasing property revenues, lack of sufficient funding, as well as a declining student population, Hickman Mills C-1 School District had to reduce in size.

Williams retired in December 2012 and controversy continued around who would be her successor, with the district accepting one interim superintendent, then replacing her within months with another interim leader.¹⁷ Finally, the district hired Dennis Carpenter, previously a deputy superintendent in a Georgia school district, to head Hickman Mills beginning in July 2013.¹⁸ So far the focus of his tenure has been along the lines of the cliché of turning a

¹⁴ Dell Jacobs, interview with author, December 4, 2012; Graham Martin, interview with author, September 8, 2012; Alicia Solum, interview with author, January 26, 2013.

¹⁵ Susan B. Wilson, "Hickman Mills School District Slashes Budget," *KCUR News*, March 16, 2009, <http://kcur.org/post/hickman-mills-school-district-slashes-budget>; Dr. Marjorie Williams and John Baccala, "Letter to the Editor," *Jackson County Advocate* vol. 110, no. 7, March 9, 2010, 3; "Ruskin Remains, No More HMHS," *Jackson County Advocate* vol. 110, no. 7, March 9, 2010, 1; Aaron Heintzleman, "Hickman Mills approves \$3.38 million in budget cuts, including elimination of 28 positions," *41 Action News*, April 13, 2011, <http://www.kshb.com/dpp/news/education/hickman-mills-approves-3.38-million-in-budget-cuts-including-elimination-of-28-positions>.

¹⁶ "Hickman Mills Proposes Teacher Layoffs," *Jackson County Advocate* vol. 112, vol 1, February 15, 2012, 1.

¹⁷ "Tate Replaces Williams as Hickman Mills Superintendent," *Jackson County Advocate* vol. 112, no. 43, October 26, 2012, 1.

¹⁸ John Baccala, "District Hires Georgia Educator as New Superintendent," *Hickman Mills C-1 Schools Press Release*, January 2, 2013.

struggling district around, with language similarly used in the Kansas City Missouri School District. Currently Hickman Mills has a little over six thousand students enrolled, 78% of whom are black, 86% receive free and reduced lunch.¹⁹

As apparent through the recent history of Hickman Mills as a community and a school district, there is no rosy or particularly hopeful ending to this study. As illustrated in the introduction to this dissertation, multiple scholars have pointed out that the root problem for urban and suburban communities and struggling school districts comes from the inequitable distribution of resources.²⁰ Communities like Hickman Mills that began as havens for middle-class white families escaping life in the city are now often part of cities themselves. Again, this questions popular definitions of suburban and urban space as it applies to communities and schools. Hickman Mills serves as another example of a community that gained a large enough population of black residents, hence it became “urban.” White middle and upper-class families move on to greener pastures in suburban communities that are even further away from the urban core, and the cycle continues, even while places like Hickman Mills get left behind. At the time of the writing of this conclusion, some attention is being given to the fact that it is the fiftieth anniversary of the War on Poverty started by LBJ in 1964. Arguments abound on each side of the debate, but consensus is that the policies enacted in the name of fighting poverty have not solved inherent inequalities in America, inequalities that are often predicted by race, residence, and location of school.

And yet, even as I have been writing the conclusion to this study, hope returns for South Kansas City. In recent developments, Cerner Corp. a medical technology firm originating in

¹⁹ Hickman Mills C-1 School District Overview, <http://www.hickmanmills.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=63>.

²⁰ Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton, eds., *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 361; Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-81* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 401; John L. Rury and Argun Saatcioglu, “Suburban Advantage: Opportunity Hoarding and Secondary Attainment in the Postwar Metropolitan North,” *American Journal of Education* 117, no. 3 (May 2011), 333.

North Kansas City, has announced plans to build a \$4.3 billion campus replacing Bannister Mall.²¹ Cerner promises to employ 15,000 people at the location, which it expects to have completed by 2024.²² On January 17th, 2014, representatives from Cerner announced that they would begin demolition immediately and have the first office operating by 2016, with 1,500 employees working.²³ During the press conference, Mayor Sly James told South Kansas Citians, “I know people felt abandoned when the stadium didn’t work, but this is absolute proof Cerner does what they say they’re going to do.”²⁴ Excitement over a brighter future was palpable.

It is naïve to state that this new development will transform Hickman Mills and its schools, yet if Cerner is able to build a large complex and invest such a large amount of money into the economic development of South Kansas City, other businesses may follow. Again, these announcements are new as of the writing of this dissertation and there are important details that are missing. Will the school district gain tax monies from the Cerner complex? Will the new development change the surrounding neighborhoods? Will it draw new people to live in the area and send their children to Hickman Mills’ schools?

Hickman Mills C-1 School District, with or without Cerner, still has to gain full accreditation to be considered a successful district. The district needs more funding, whether from federal, state, or local sources, in order to appropriately respond to the needs of an ever-growing population of poor and underprivileged children. Hickman Mills is like any other district in that it is strongly linked to the community in which it exists. Thus when there is an economic boom in South Kansas City, the school district most likely benefits. When the community is struggling, often so is the school. Because the funding formula for America’s

²¹ Devin Collison, “Cerner will formally announce Three Trails expansion Friday,” *Kansas City Star*, January 16, 2014, B8.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kevin Collison, “Cerner officially launches its \$4.3 billion Three Trails office campus,” *Kansas City Star*, January 17, 2014, <http://www.kansascity.com/2014/01/17/4760042/cerner-officially-launches-its.html>.

²⁴ Ibid.

schools depends so heavily upon locally-raised revenue in the form of property taxes, schools are held to the whim of the housing market. For the part of Hickman Mills's school leadership, their great mistake over the past sixty years has been to not raise the tax levy high enough in order to be more self-sufficient and not depend upon federal aid. However, as has been explained, there was not a lack of effort on the part of Hickman Mills as a district to raise levies and be financially secure. Instead, the public's own apathy and willingness to fight bond and levy issues in the name of lesser taxation, combined with the state rule that levies have to be passed with a 2/3 majority, severely harmed Hickman Mills C-1 School District. Perhaps Cerner can alleviate the problem, but again, the entrance of a large company is an "outside" solution, the district will probably, as always before, struggle to fund itself in its educational endeavors. Additionally, the damage to Hickman Mills's reputation is probably done—the area is perceived to be an extension of Kansas City; poor, black, and unattractive. The suburban has become urban.

This raises a point made in the introduction to this study. While the geographic definition of a locale like Hickman Mills would have determined it to be unquestionably "urban" in 1961 when it was annexed by Kansas City, the neighborhoods in South Kansas City did not identify as urban until the 1990s and 2000s when economic decline, racial change, and school deterioration led residents to believe they were living in the city. The story presented here of Hickman Mills, like Emily Strauss's work on Compton, California, demonstrates the concept of the social construction of space.²⁵ Ruskinites saw themselves as suburbanites for much of the latter half of the twentieth century because their neighborhoods and school district were perceived as safe, white, and middle-class (in this case, blue-collar). When the community began to experience

²⁵ See Emily Strauss, *Death of a Suburban Dream: Race and Schools in Compton, California* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

greater crime and a larger influx of African-American residents, then Hickman Mills became urban. The change the district and the neighborhoods underwent was largely social, with economic, political, and educational ramifications.

This change in the school district and in the larger community supports part of an older theory of metropolitan segregation called “tipping point,” which was recently adapted by Malcolm Gladwell to explain various phenomenon in American society.²⁶ The political scientist Morton Grodzins coined “tipping point” in 1957 when he addressed racial change in metropolitan areas, and the term enjoyed a period of popularity during the 1960s and 1970s as an explanation for white flight.²⁷ Grodzins argued that neighborhoods changed from having one dominant race to another, usually white to black, because whites had varying levels of tolerability to non-whites. When a “tipping point” was reached (usually more than 30 percent according to his findings), then whites moved away from neighborhoods in larger numbers and non-whites filled the vacancies.²⁸ Other social scientists, particularly sociologists and some historians, took Grodzins’s theory and applied it to school change, as school racial composition tended to reflect that of the surrounding community.²⁹ This theory was most popular among urban scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, but has largely fallen out of favor, particularly with more recent modeling of neighborhood movements from U.S. Census data which reveal that

²⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000). Interestingly, perhaps disturbingly, Gladwell never cites political scientist Morton Grodzins, who created the term “tipping point.”

²⁷ Morton Grodzins, “Metropolitan Segregation,” *Scientific American* 24 (October 1957): 33-41. See also Gary S. Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Thomas C. Schelling, “A Process of Residential Segregation: Neighborhood Tipping,” in *Racial Discrimination in Economic Life*, ed. Anthony H. Pascal (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1972); Karl Taeuber and Alma Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

²⁸ Grodzins, “Metropolitan Segregation,” 37.

²⁹ Charles Clotfelter, “School Desegregation, ‘Tipping,’ and Private School Enrollment,” *The Journal of Human Resources* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 28-50; Donald Steinnes, “Models of Neighborhood Change,” *Social Forces* 55, no. 4 (June 1977): 1043-1057.

neighborhood change, as well as white flight, are more complex than the tipping point theory posits.

While the tipping point theory does not exactly explain the changes in Hickman Mills over time, it serves as an interesting lens or framework to white flight both to and from the suburban communities forming the school district. If tipping point is not satisfactory enough to be a complete model for Hickman Mills, perhaps it does shed light on perceptions of long-time white residents, who often expressed in interviews that friends, neighbors, or they themselves left the district once they felt a major shift in local demographics.³⁰

Another important consideration in the history and development of Hickman Mills is the viewpoint of African-American residents, particularly those who did move from central Kansas City, Missouri. For them, moving to Hickman Mills was not the death of the community, but a change. Additionally, amidst the fears of whites in neighborhoods such as Ruskin Heights and Ruskin Hills, black neighbors were living a quieter, safer life than their counterparts in the extremely violent downtown blocks in Kansas City. While Hickman Mills's schools were never as noteworthy as some of the nearby districts, they were measurably better than Kansas City, Missouri School District, and their students performed better.

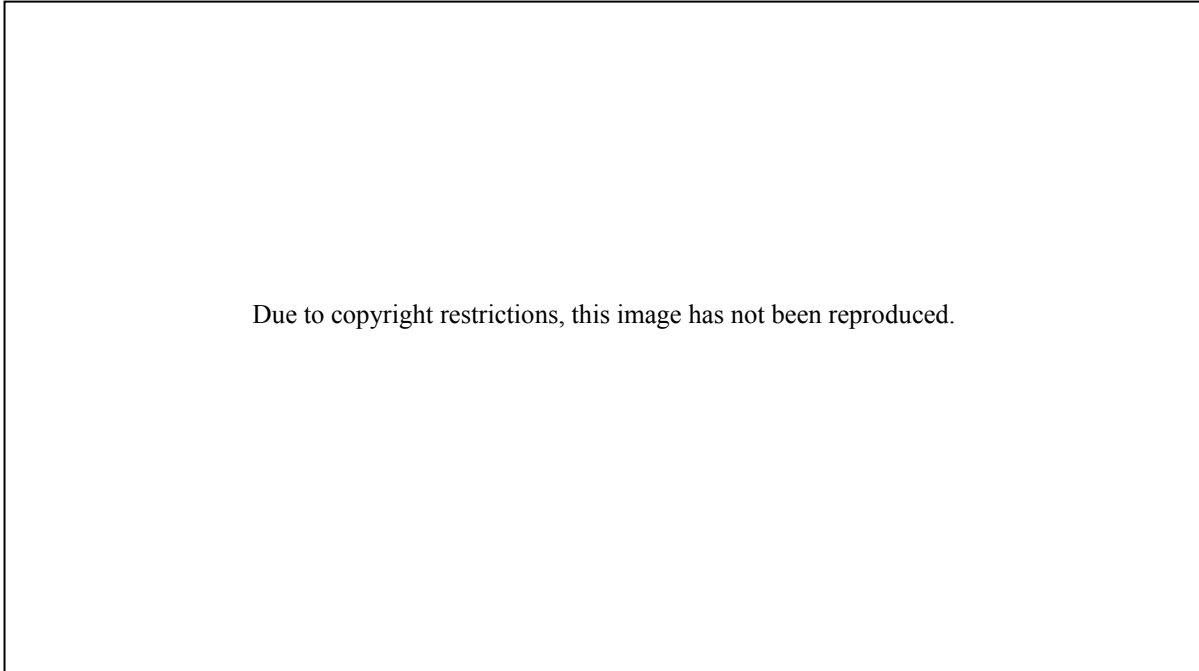
Understanding the history of a suburban school district and community like Hickman Mills helps question the dominant narrative of the excellent, white suburb as a refuge from the dangerous, dirty city. Hickman Mills was never exactly idyllic, as the district and the neighborhoods it served argued over taxation, the role and scope of education, and questions of identity as soon as the community itself substantially grew in the 1950s on. The problems faced by Hickman Mills C-1 School District today are not especially new, as some of the funding issues the district experiences now are a result of poor long-term planning on the part of the

³⁰ Baker, Cardona, Davis, Hamilton, Husman, Spearman, Wade, personal interviews with the author.

district itself, as well as an unwillingness on the part of the community to consistently support the schools by paying a higher school levy. Race and racial change complicated, even highlighted this problem, but the “decline” of Hickman Mills is securely rooted in its “rise.”

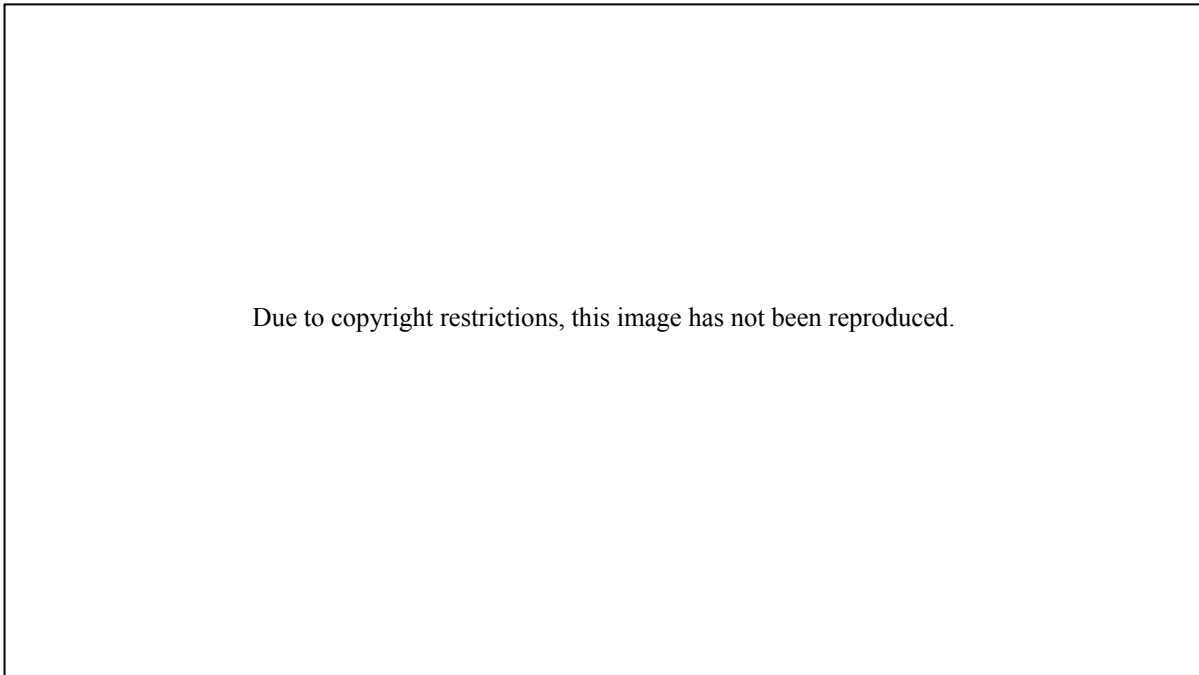
Appendix I: Figures

Figure 1: Map of the first elementary schools in Hickman Mills.¹



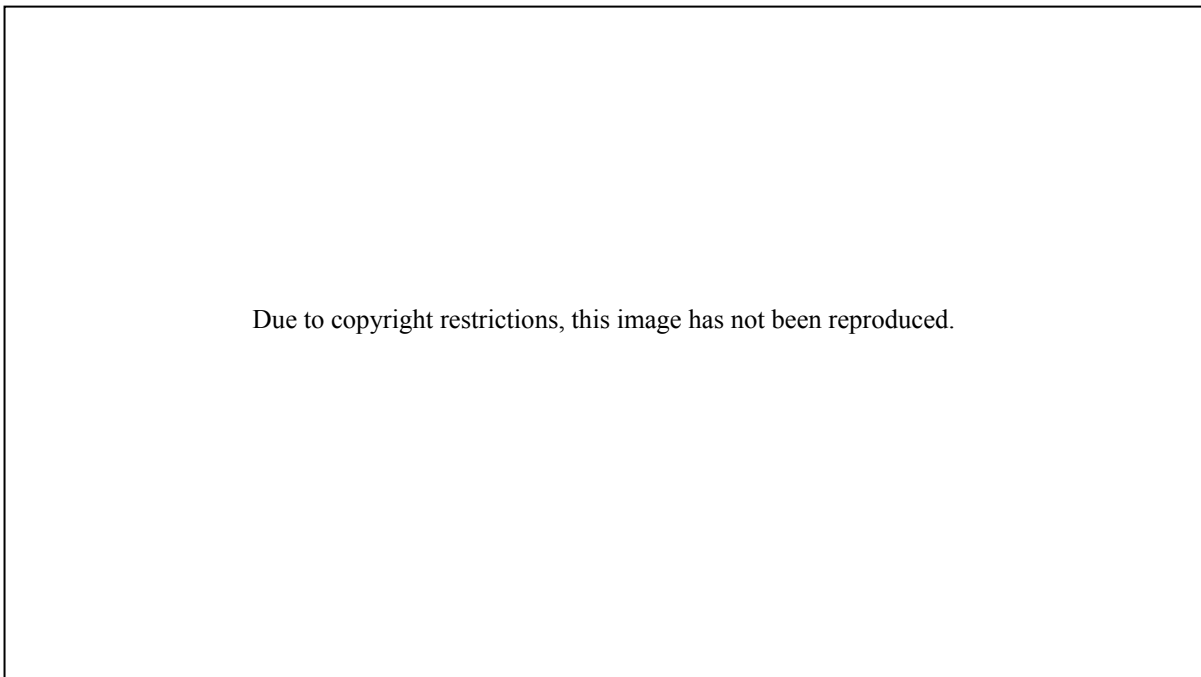
¹ Jami Parkison, *The Journey to Our Future: The History of Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 1902-2002* (Kansas City, MO: Hickman Mills C-1 School District, 2002), 12.

Figure 2: One-Day Teacher Strike, March 16, 1970.²



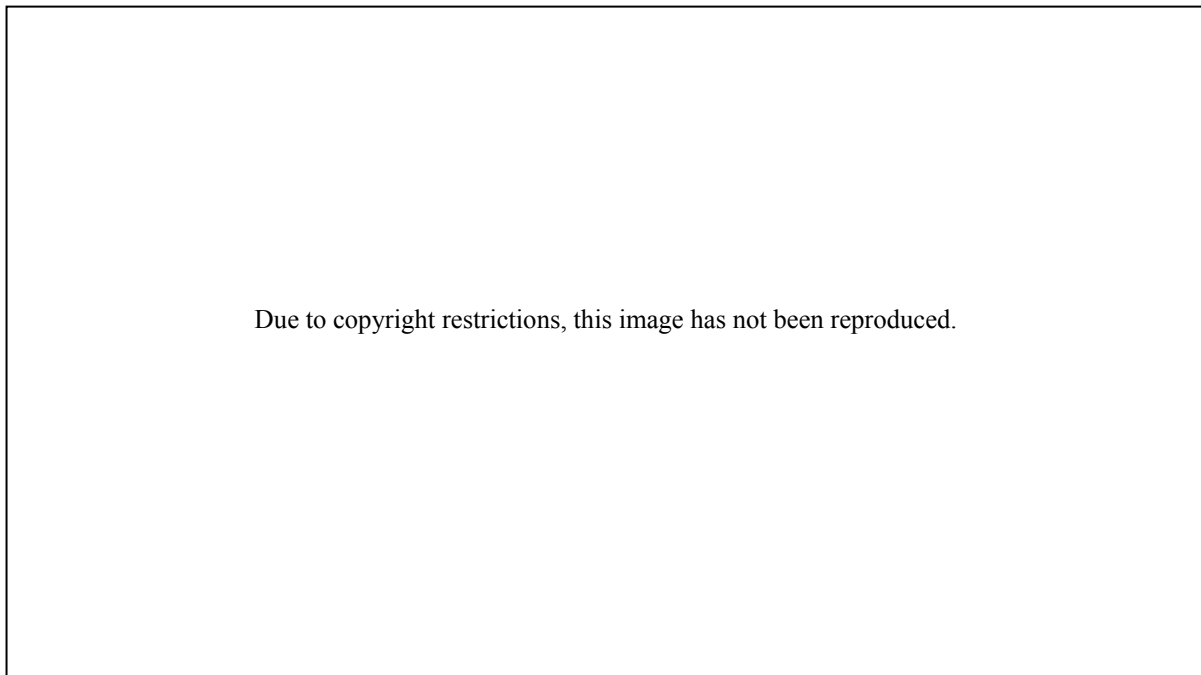
² "School Shut-down is Short," *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 7, March 19, 1970, 1.

Figure 3: Editorial Cartoon, March 5, 1970.³



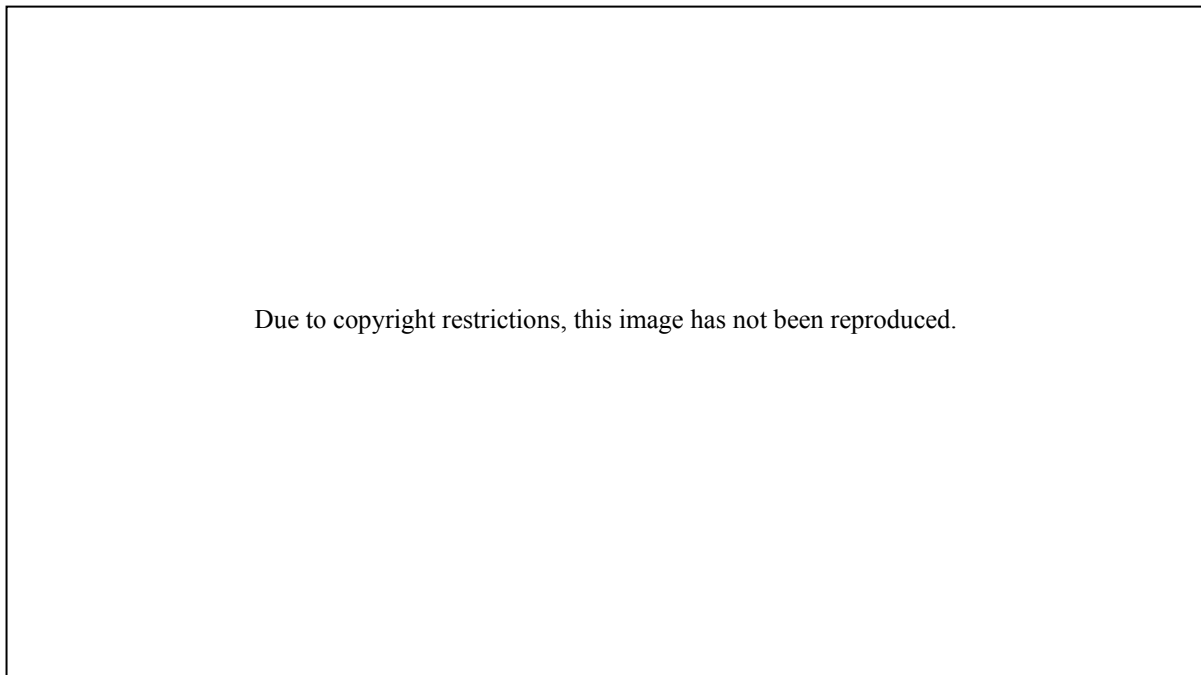
³ Harold Johnson, "Concerned Parents," Cartoon, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 5, March 5, 1970, 1.

Figure 4: Editorial Cartoon, May 7, 1970.⁴



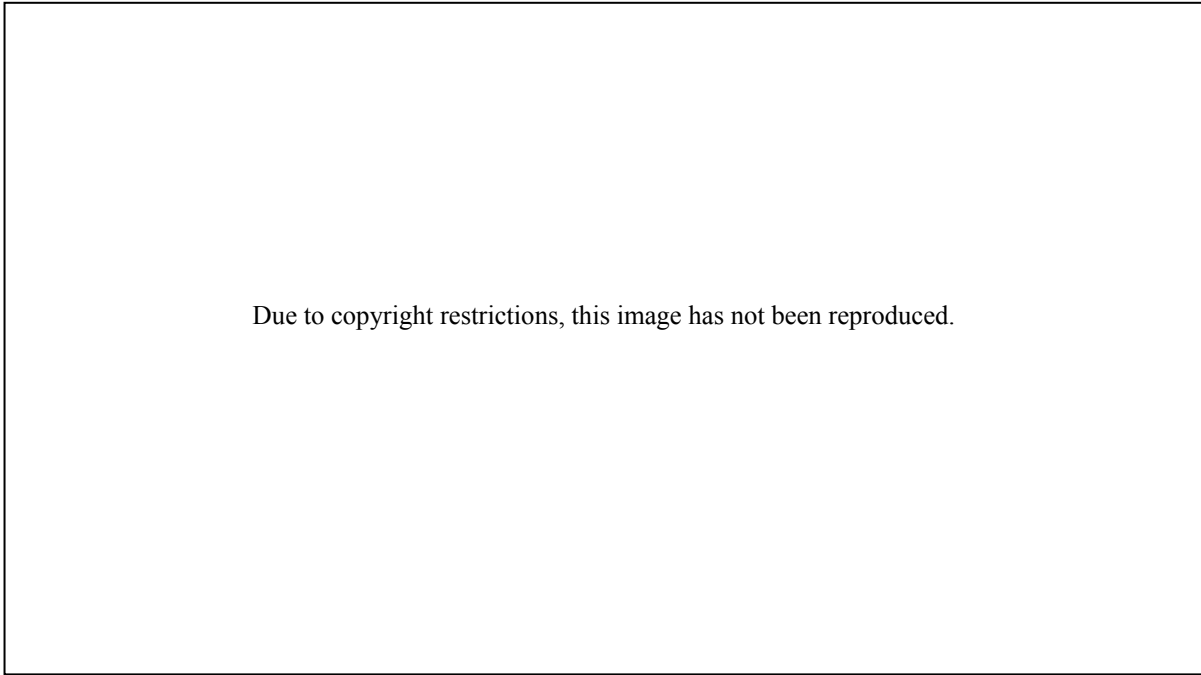
⁴ Johnson, "Our School Song," Cartoon, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 14, May 7, 1970, 1.

Figure 5: Editorial Cartoon, May 28, 1970.⁵



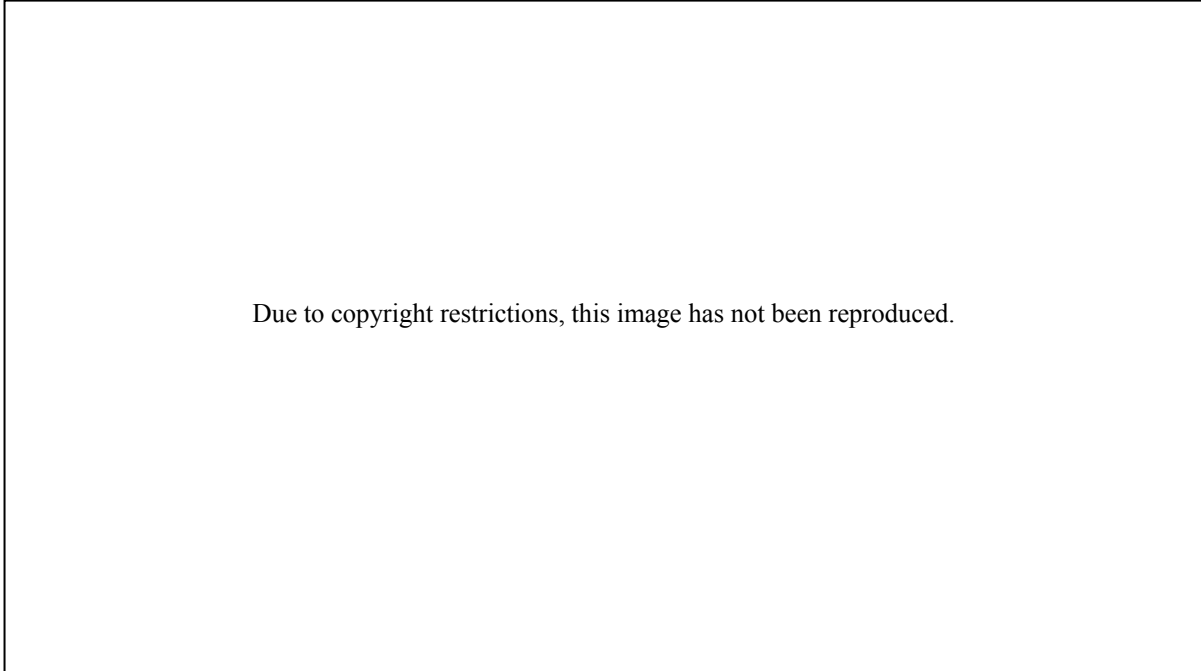
⁵ Johnson, "Voter Apathy," Cartoon, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 17, May 28, 1970, 1.

Figure 6: Editorial Cartoon, September 17, 1970.⁶



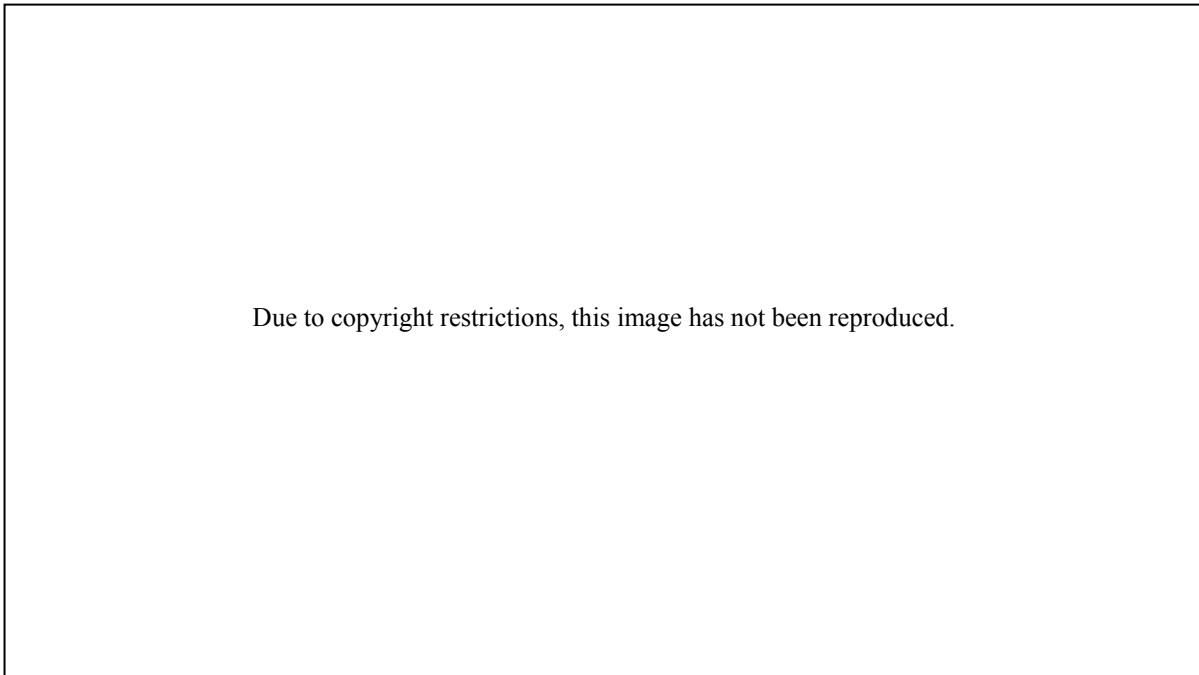
⁶ Johnson, "C'mon, pardners," Cartoon, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 33, September 17, 1970, 1.

Figure 7: St. Luke's United Methodist Church message to those who voted against the levy, July 2, 1970.⁷



⁷ "Shame—You Put Children Last!," *Consolidated School District No. 1 School Gazette*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 2, 1970, 6.

Figure 8: Detail view of full-page ad for levy vote, September 10, 1970.⁸



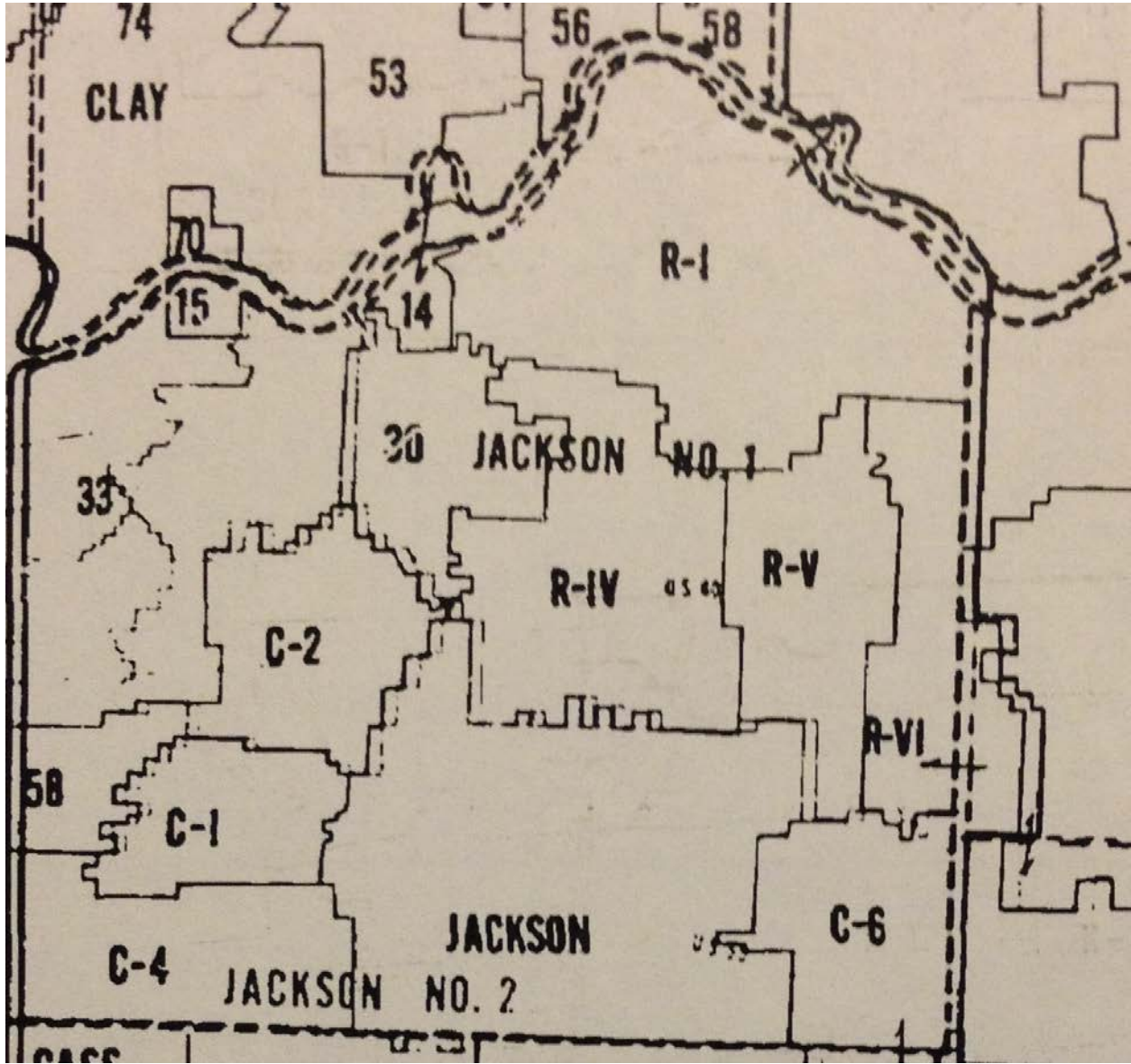
⁸ "VOTE YES!" Two-page Advertisement, *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 80, no. 32, September 10, 1970, 12-13.

Figure 9: Picture of House Education Committee hearing at Jefferson City, Spainhower Plan abandoned, February 6, 1969.⁹

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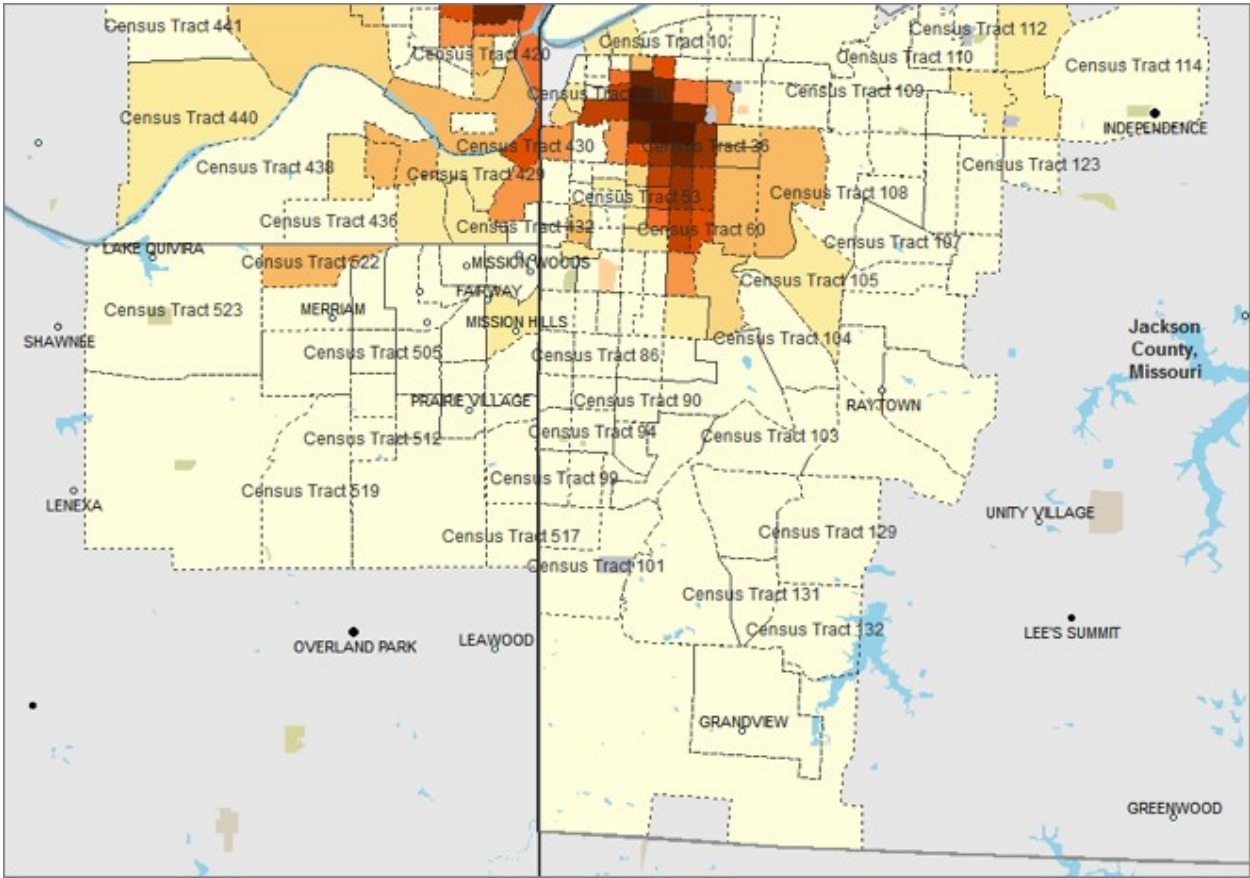
⁹ “Spainhower Plan is Dead,” *Jackson County Advocate*, vol. 79, no. 4, February 7, 1969, 6.

Figure 10: Suggested reorganization of Jackson County No. 1 school districts, 1969.¹⁰



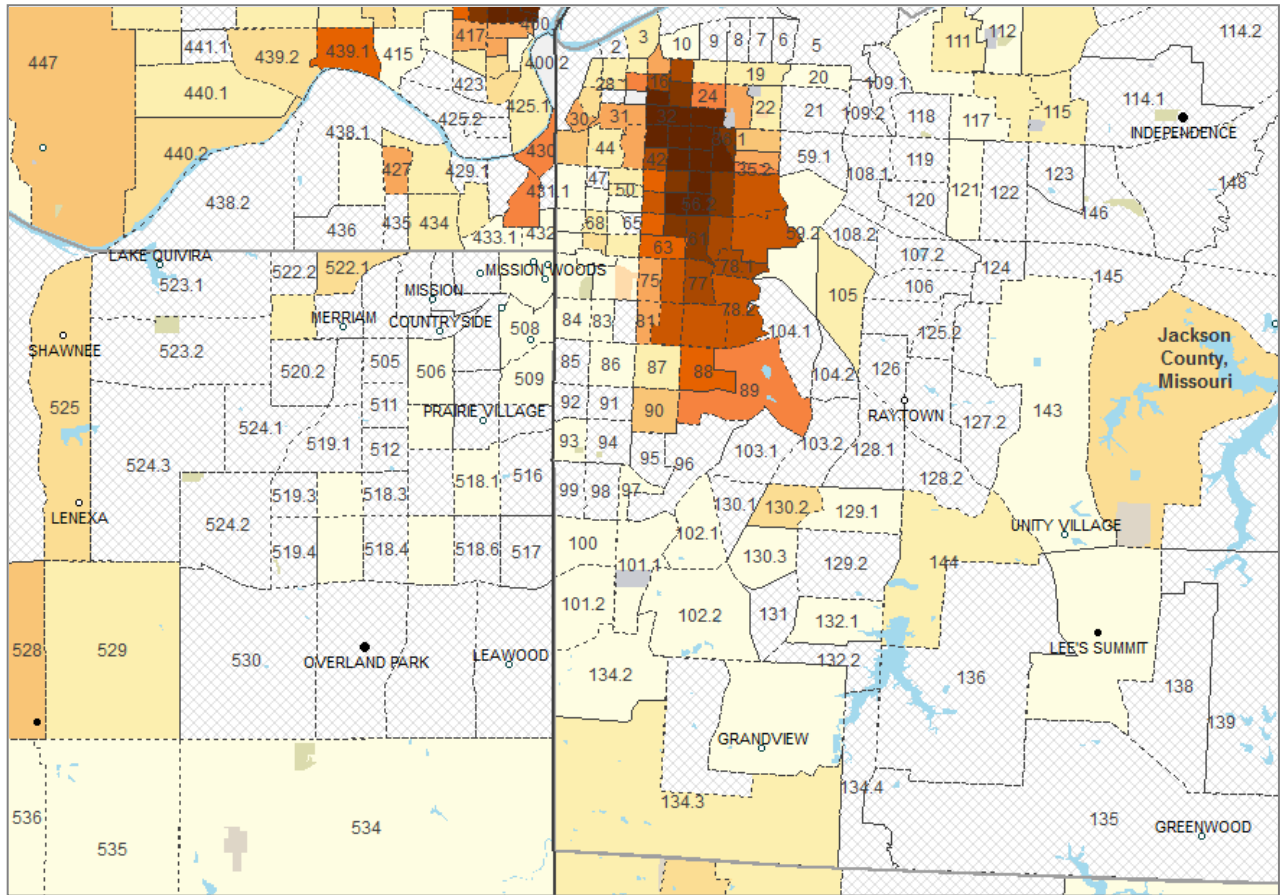
¹⁰ Clifford P. Hooker and Van D. Mueller, "Equal Treatment to Equals: A New Structure for Public Schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis Metropolitan Areas" (Jefferson City, MO: Missouri School District Reorganization Commission, June 1969), 72.

Figure 11: African American Migration in Kansas City, 1960.¹¹



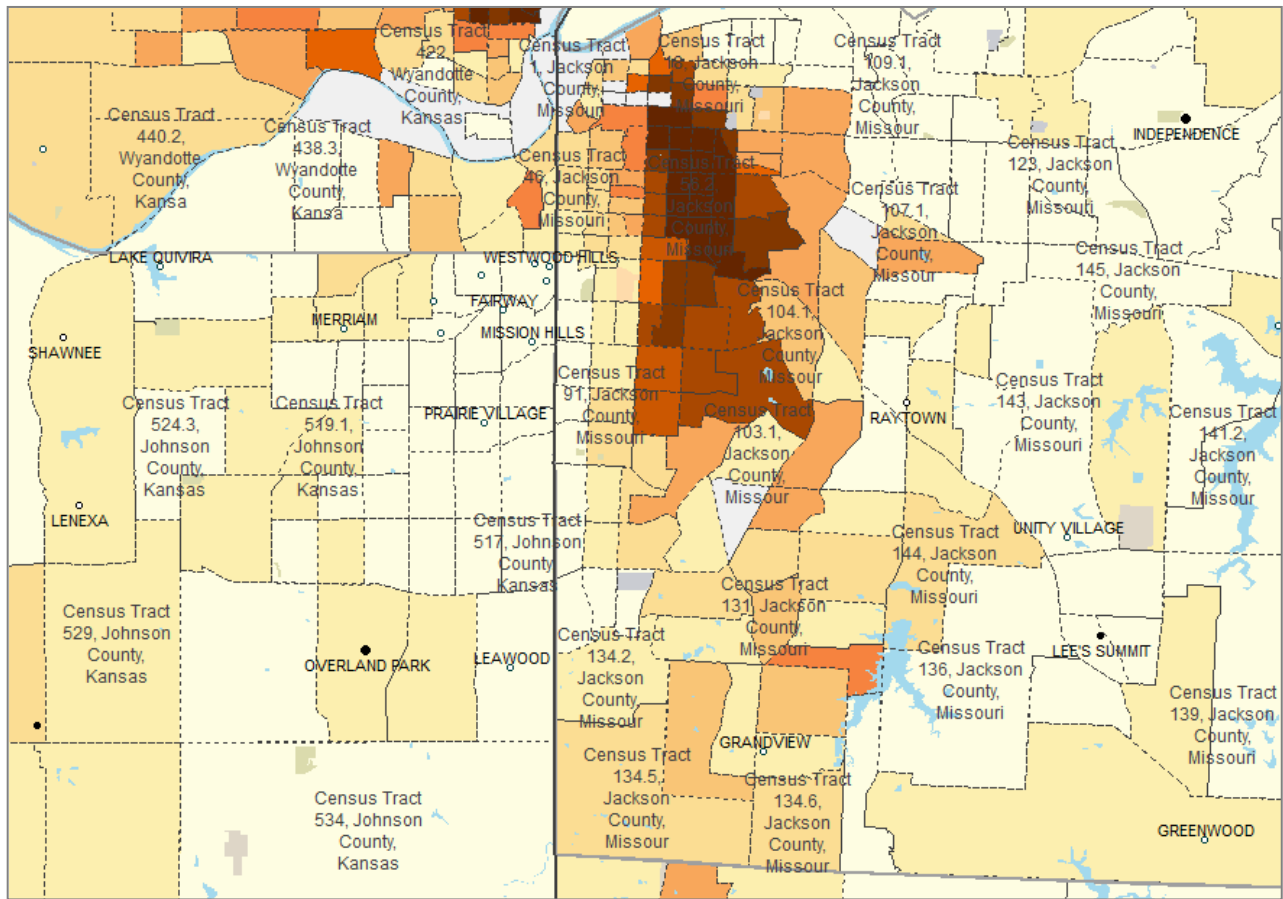
¹¹ U.S. Census of the Population, 1960.

Figure 12: African American Migration in Kansas City, 1970.¹²



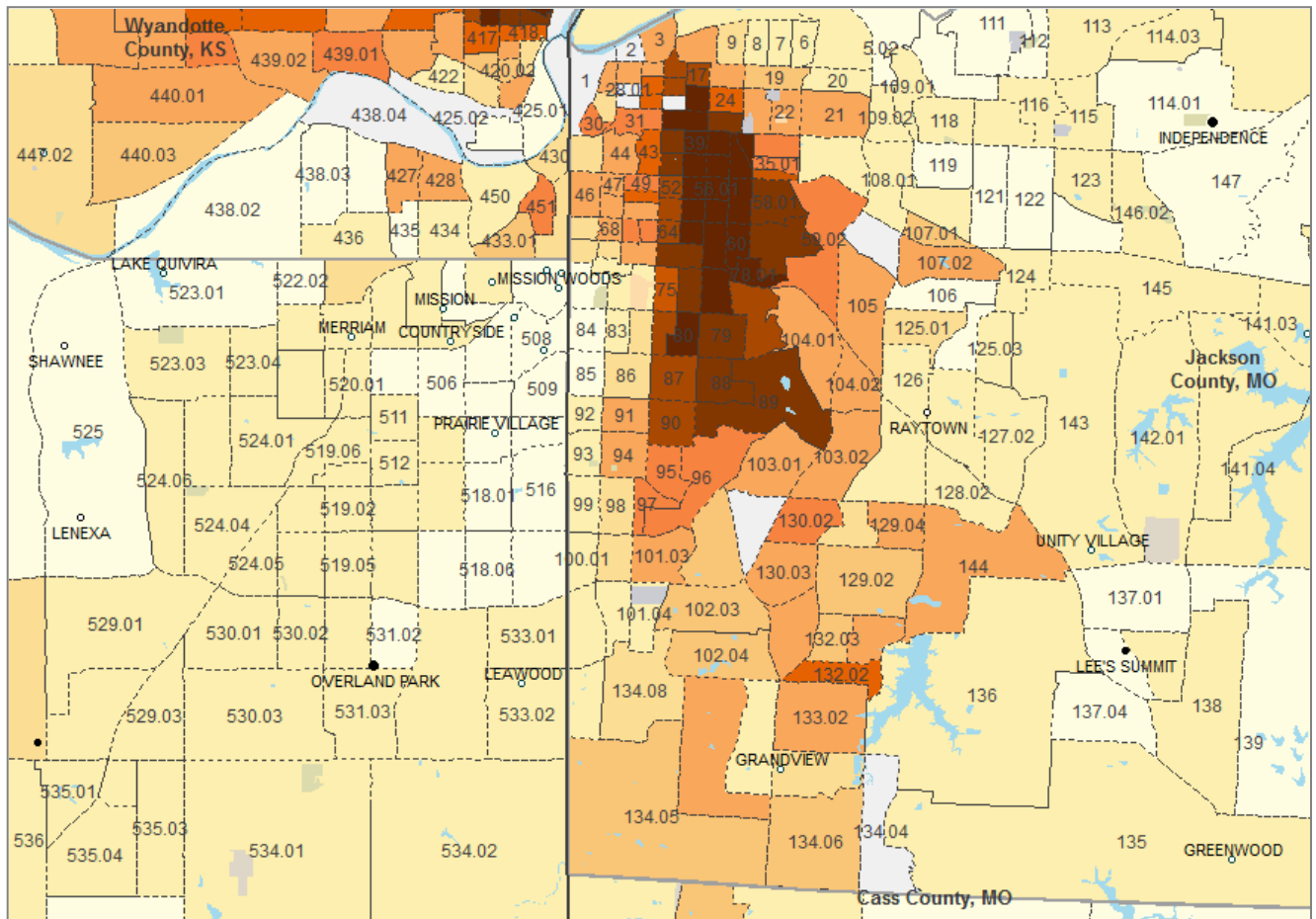
¹² U.S. Census of the Population, 1970.

Figure 13: African American Migration in Kansas City, 1980.¹³



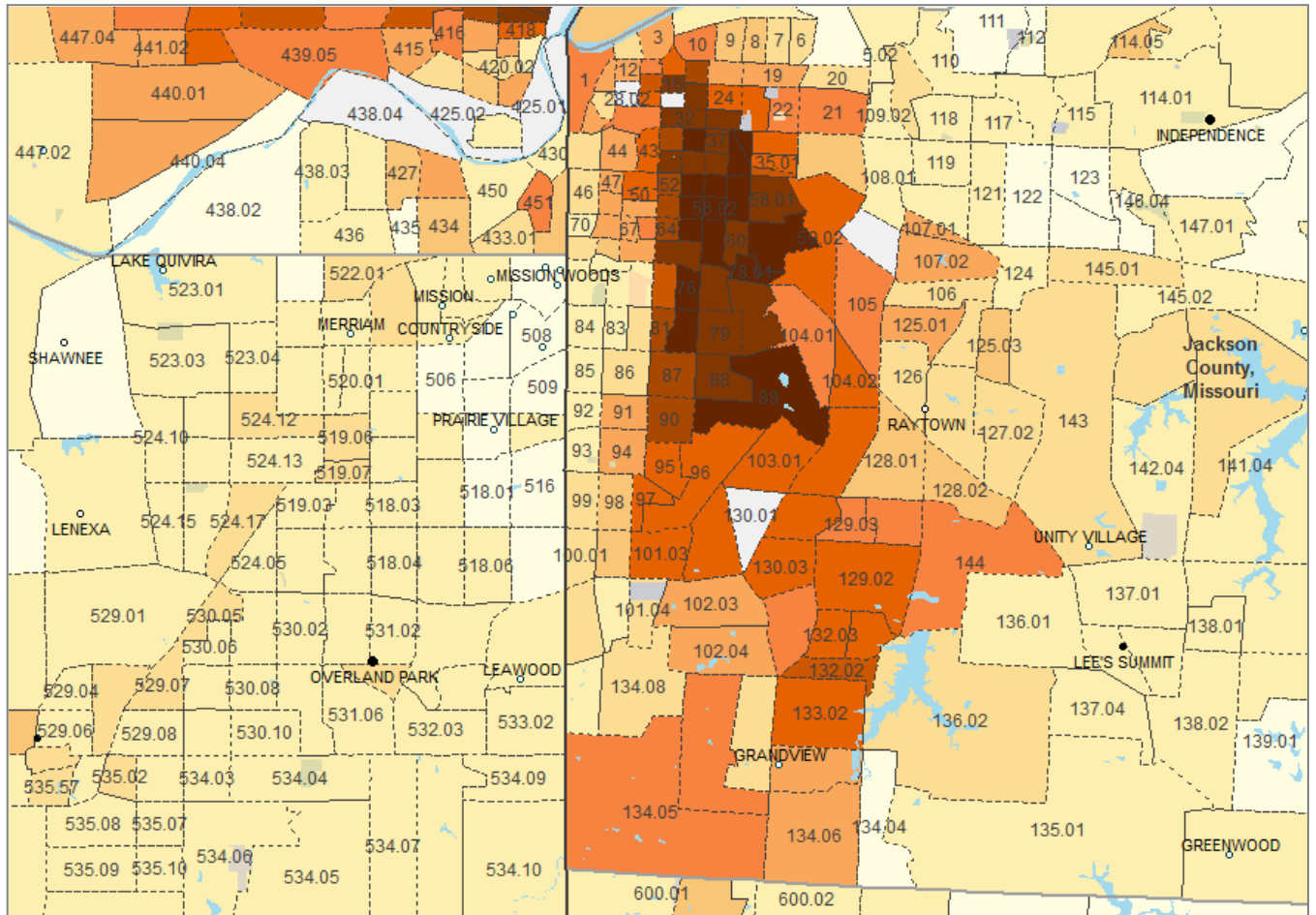
¹³ U.S. Census of the Population, 1980.

Figure 14: African American Migration in Kansas City, 1990.¹⁴



¹⁴ U.S. Census of the Population, 1990.

Figure 15: African American Migration in Kansas City, 2000.¹⁵



¹⁵ U.S. Census of the Population, 2000.

Appendix II: Informed Consent Statement

I am conducting an oral history on the Hickman Mills school district as part of my dissertation project at the University of Kansas. The University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am interested in learning about the experiences of those who lived within the boundaries of Hickman Mills or attended/taught at its schools. I will be asking you to participate in an interview. It is estimated that this will take no more than an hour of your time.

The content of the questions concerns your personal experiences and observations from the past. You may or may not feel comfortable with some of these questions. Although participation in my study will not directly benefit you, I believe that the information will be useful to better understand the history of suburban southern Kansas City.

Your participation is solicited although strictly voluntary. I assure you that your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. Interviews will be audio recorded, all participants will be assigned pseudonyms, and only I will have access to the audio recordings. I will perform the transcriptions of these recordings, and will have sole access to such. You are not required to be taped and may refuse to be recorded at any time during the interview. The recordings will be erased upon completion of the transcripts. You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to Aaron Rife.

Appendix III: Interview Protocol

Tell me about yourself, how did you come to live in Hickman Mills?

Why did you move to your neighborhood? Did anything draw you here, or was it something else?

Where else have you lived, if you have lived anywhere else?

Why did you move out?

What can you tell me about the Hickman Mills school district?

-If you raised children here, what was your experience sending them to the schools?

What did you see as important events occurring in Hickman Mills while you were here?

How did you or others you knew feel about the annexation with Kansas City?

How did you or others you knew feel about joining or working with the Kansas City school district?

-If you remember the Spainhower Plan, what were your thoughts about it?

How has Hickman Mills changed since you have been here?

-How is it the same?

How do you feel about the schools in Hickman Mills now?

What would you want me to know about Hickman Mills as a community and a school district?

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