

Outlook Not So Good: The Struggle for Integration in Evanston, Illinois 1966–1971

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Introduction

Ten years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, public School District 65 in Evanston, Illinois began voluntary, systematic, racial integration as a first step in a 50-year journey towards a still-unrealized dream of social and educational equity.¹ Superintendent Gregory C. Coffin was hired to advance a broad, civil-rights agenda starting with the racial integration of District 65, which would become the second school district in the entire nation voluntarily to integrate.² The resolution that guided Coffin's action was passed just before his tenure began:

...RESOLVED That the Board of Education does hereby resolve to eliminate de facto segregation in this school district and to develop a plan to achieve this end; and be it RESOLVED further, that the Board of Education will encourage other agencies of government to take effective action on aspects of the problem as it relates to children within their areas of influence and will provide full cooperation and support in such action.³

With this resolution, the board acknowledged the need racially to integrate its schools while also emphasizing segregation as a broader social issue in Evanston. The primary factor influencing *de facto* school segregation in Evanston was residential segregation. Within the regional context of Chicago's metropolitan area, support of Evanston's residential desegregation represented a sharp departure from support of the *status quo* and the highly segregated status of the metropolitan Chicago area, and state of Illinois more generally. As James Loewen notes in *Sundown Towns*, "...15 suburbs had 85% of Chicago's 128,300 suburban African Americans," and "of Chicago's 285 suburbs...117 were less than 1% [B]lack."⁴ Evanston, an "upper middle-class, white dominated suburb, which prided itself on [its] liberality," was one of

only two Chicago suburbs voluntarily to integrate, the other being Oak Park.⁵ Between 1964 and the present, desegregation nationally, in the Chicago area, and in Evanston specifically has continued as a contentious subject of public and scholarly discourse. The Chicago metropolitan area was and remains one of the most highly segregated regions of the country.⁶ The District 65 community, like many others, continues to grapple with realizing the potential of integration in closing persistent achievement gaps; as recently as 2013, a comprehensive survey of stakeholders found that closing the Black/white achievement gap continues to be the district's most pressing challenge.⁷

In this paper, I explore the voluntary integration of District 65 during the period 1967 through 1971 from the perspective of insider Dolores Story Kaufmann, a white woman with a working-class background who served as the district's Director of Information Services during its initial, wholesale integration implementation. Kaufmann, a public-relations professional, feminist, and civil-rights activist, has devoted much of her professional life to advance the interests of both women and minorities through education. In this paper, I argue Kaufmann's role as Director of Information Services for District 65 placed her on the forefront of struggles for both racial and women's equality and that her role as a public-relations professional for District 65 helped shape the way the civil-rights struggle would unfold in Evanston. Like other female, civil-rights activists of her era, both white and Black, her participation in the movement for racial equality resulted in a painful awareness of the gender inequity not addressed by the racial equality movement.

Methodology

This paper is part of a larger, in-progress biographical study. My primary source is Kaufmann's collection of professional papers, which she assembled while working as Director of Information Services for District 65 between July 1966 and July 1971. Data includes personal correspondence, bi-weekly staff newsletters, copies of the nationally acclaimed, monthly "School Outlook" district newsletter she edited, district press releases, and speeches written for Superintendent Gregory Coffin. Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with Kaufmann. Secondary sources, such as news media coverage of district events from approximately 1966 to 1971, also inform this work. Kaufmann's papers provide a rich source of data for understanding the timeline and differing perspectives of Evanston's integration story. Scholarly work, both primary and secondary, on the civil rights movement in general, women in the civil rights movement, and desegregation nationally and in Illinois provide context for understanding Kaufmann's role.

Formative Influences

Dolores Marie Kaufmann (nee Story) was born in 1929 in Oak Park, Illinois. Her parents were Ellis Jerome Story, a carpenter, and Ada Caroline Schwarz, a part-time homemaker who worked various jobs but did not have a career. She had one half-brother eight years older than herself, child of Ellis Story. Kaufmann endured a peripatetic and materially insecure working-class childhood during the depths of the Great Depression. Her family's circumstances only eased somewhat with economic changes brought on by the war effort in the early 1940s.

Kaufmann attended Chicago's Amundsen High School, graduated in 1947, and attended Northwestern University on a half-tuition scholarship for her freshman and sophomore years, earning enough money at a series of secretarial and assistants' jobs to bridge the gap between scholarship support and actual expenses. She studied at Northwestern's acclaimed Medill School of Journalism and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1952 and a Master's in 1953, at a time when elite higher education was not particularly welcoming to working-class women. Attending Northwestern provided important intellectual and social benefits for Kaufmann. It offered her a promise of meritocratic social mobility through accomplishment and access to expanded social circles that would help later to establish and maintain her career. Yet being a female and working-class graduate student at an elite institution meant she often experienced the feeling of being an outsider. The pervasive, reflexive sexism and class privilege she encountered resulted in development of a life-long sensitivity to prejudice and social inequity.

The civil rights movement writ large provided a tumultuous backdrop for Kaufmann's early career. As a burgeoning journalist, she was tuned in to the news and very aware of civil rights activists' efforts occurring both nationally and locally. At the time Rev. Dr. King, Jr. led the Chicago Freedom Movement,⁸ also known as the Chicago Open Housing Movement, Kaufmann was working her first professional position as editor for the U.S. Savings and Loan League. During this same timeframe, in Evanston, the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) activists illegally occupied the office of a real-estate broker who publicly supported "forced housing" (the term employed by the opponents of state and local open housing laws similar to what was finally enacted at the federal level as the Fair Housing Act of 1968).⁹ As an employee, Kaufmann was at least peripherally aware of discriminatory lending practices such as "redlining" (denying mortgages to prospective buyers of housing in racially determined areas), restrictive covenants, and other discriminatory practices of the housing industry.¹⁰ Kaufmann recalls appreciating her work at the Savings and Loan Association for being a great entry-level job, but notes she was not able fully to use her talents

and passions. Kaufmann was looking for a public relations position that would allow her to make a difference, and she applied for the position of Director of Information Services when she learned of District 65's by-then well-publicized intention to integrate.

Integration of Evanston District 65

Evanston, Illinois is a large, first-ring suburb of Chicago, bordering both the city and Lake Michigan. It is the location of Northwestern University, the world headquarters of Rotary International and the Midwest Montessori School, a major training school for Montessori teachers. During the era of school integration in Evanston, the neighboring suburbs and the city of Chicago were all highly segregated, mirroring the state of Illinois more broadly. District 65's efforts at racial integration of public education began in 1961 with district-wide workshops in human relations for teachers. In 1963, the district implemented a voluntary transfer policy, which did not work. In December 1964, the school board passed a resolution to eliminate segregation and begin voluntary integration. The board authorized then-Superintendent O. M. Chute to develop desegregation plans and to redraw attendance areas.¹¹ The integration plan was to be fully implemented in fall 1967. In 1966, the District 65 school board hired Gregory C. Coffin to carry out the newly approved integration plan.¹² Coffin, who had "all the credentials that go with a Harvard education and a New England ancestry dating back to 1649,"¹³ had previous experience with integration in his former position in Darien, Connecticut.¹⁴ The combination of his elite background combined with his seemingly tame progressive leanings made him appear perfect to the District 65 board that supported integration by varying degrees. Coffin hired Kaufmann in August 1966 as Director of Information Services.¹⁵ At the time, Kaufmann was the only female on the district's administrative team. The letter she received containing her employment offer included her first assignment from the Superintendent to be completed immediately, as it was needed before her contract would begin. As a freelance employee who was not yet under contract, Kaufmann was asked to edit and produce the first issue of the new district newsletter, "School Outlook."¹⁶ The first article she would edit would be a description of the district's "new plan" to remedy "*de facto* segregation."¹⁷

Ending *de facto* segregation through integration in Evanston school district was a multi-faceted plan that would fully be implemented in August 1967. From a technical standpoint, it consisted of redrawing school boundaries and busing some Black pupils from central Evanston to peripheral, all-white schools.¹⁸ In order to accomplish integration, elementary school boundaries were redrawn, and transportation was

arranged for approximately 500 children who would have to walk more than a mile to new schools. The district's elementary schools had a Black student population of 13–32%.¹⁹ Establishment of a feeder school system for the junior high resulted in a Black junior high student population between 16% and 23%.²⁰ Additionally, the all-Black Foster School was converted into a laboratory school with open enrollment.²¹

But implementing integration in Evanston required more than working out technical aspects such as percentages. Successful integration in Evanston required public acceptance. As a public-relations professional, Kaufmann believed one of the biggest obstacles in gaining public acceptance for an integration plan was the public's lack of accurate information. Coffin states, "Facts, many facts had to be interjected into a sea of rumor and distortion."²² One rumor suggested everyone would have to change schools under the integration plan; this was refuted with a "stability chart" providing factual information.²³ Other public concerns included "the cost of busing, overcrowding, lowered academic standards, discipline, and a host of less-significant items."²⁴ Kaufmann, in her role as Director of Information Services, was the person responsible for producing and disseminating needed "facts" to a nervous public throughout 1966 and 1967. She was responsible for all aspects of District 65's public-information campaign on integration, from providing advice on the overall media strategy to producing, editing, and disseminating information. Efforts at providing public information during the year before implementation were broad in scope and designed to reach everyone in the Evanston community. Kaufmann produced regular communication in the form of press releases and articles written for "School Outlook," a bi-weekly, district publication to support the Superintendent's implementation of integration. She also engaged in massive community outreach to help people understand what the integration plan entailed. These efforts included the coordination of:

...speeches made before all service clubs, PTAs and other local organizations; 17 public information meetings, one in each neighborhood school; television, radio and extensive newspaper coverage; flyers and newsletters distributed by such groups as the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Citizens for Better Education; coffees; and a few favorable sermons delivered from the pulpits of local churches.²⁵

Kaufmann designed a dynamic public-relations strategy that provided mechanisms for the school district to target its efforts at disseminating information about its integration plans. For example, during the 1966–1967 school year, Kaufmann focused on a district, two-way communication strategy in which the district systematically sought and received community input on the integration plan in addition to a

more traditional approach of reporting district events and programs. As part of this massive communication effort, Kaufmann leveraged her contacts with the Evanston League of Women Voters to get their participation in analyzing the complaint correspondence received in Dr. Coffin's office and turning it in to a "fact sheet" on integration distributed to over 40,000 voters.

Once basic integration had been achieved in District 65, Kaufmann focused on other, important public relations efforts both within the district and between the district and the community to help the community adapt successfully to an integrated school system. Importantly, Kaufmann worked with the PTA and administration of every single school to help produce individual schools' newsletters. This single act would turn out to be an empowering avenue for Black parents to communicate with one another, particularly when board support for integration waned.

The integration agenda promoted by Coffin's administration included more than racially balancing Evanston's 16 schools. The "integration agenda" was also tightly focused on Coffin's 3Rs: Relevance in the school environment, relevant teachers, and relevant curriculum,²⁶ an early version of what is now referred to as "culturally responsive pedagogy."²⁷ Implementing the 3Rs also extended to training teachers on matters of human relations including ongoing professional development in anti-bias training and selection of class materials that would not privilege existing "white frames of reference,"²⁸ reflecting "critical pedagogy."²⁹ While District 65 had its own curriculum department that made materials and films to support the district's curriculum, communication about these materials was handled by Kaufmann, who regularly disseminated information about the 3Rs through her staff newsletter and the "School Outlook" newsletter; these communications contributed to the legitimacy and efficacy of some of the less-obvious aspects of District 65's integration agenda.

Leaders of the integration movement in Evanston were committed to ending *de facto* segregation for the purpose of promoting educational equity, but there was an explicit and broader social-justice agenda in place as well that involved breaking up the historically inequitable power relations in Evanston. Throughout the year leading up to integration in Evanston, it became increasingly clear that not only was Coffin committed to building a fully integrated school system but he believed schools could be a vehicle for social change, helping to create "a single nation."³⁰ Integration of School District 65 was perceived by supporters, including Coffin and "his army," to be but one step in advancing empowerment of Blacks.³¹ More broadly, and in step with Rev. Dr. King, Jr.'s Freedom Movement and with the 1964 Evanston school

board resolution calling for desegregation, leaders in the Evanston school district strove to extend integration into the community by supporting “a strong open-housing ordinance” in the city and “allowing supporting petitions to be posted in the schools.”³² It was this aspect of the integration agenda that was most threatening to the *status quo* because it would result in integration of Evanston’s neighborhoods, not just its schools. While many in Evanston supported the district’s broader integration agenda being implemented during Coffin’s tenure, there were numerous, powerful opponents.

For years in Evanston, the District 65 Caucus, a coalition of “community and civic groups—PTAs, Kiwanis Club, the North Shore Realty Board” had vetted and screened school-board candidates: a Caucus endorsement being tantamount to guaranteed election. At least one of the groups represented by the Caucus, the North Shore Realty Board, has been described by one source as a group of “white militants” who fought actively Chicago-area open-housing ordinances.³³ In June 1969, the board was pressured not to renew Coffin’s appointment. During a two-day meeting, the board heard testimony from 54 speakers on the “subject of the Coffin superintendency.”³⁴ The board voted to end Coffin’s contract in June 1970 by a four to three vote. At this same meeting, Coffin requested all charges against him be put in writing. This board meeting represented a shift in power between those who supported a full integration agenda and those who supported more limited versions of integration that did not change the racial geography of Evanston or alter existing power structures. On April 11, 1970 a school board election would decide not only Coffin’s length of tenure as Superintendent, but the future direction Evanston would take with integration.

The Caucus ran a slate of candidates from the “non-[B]lack, non-poor, and non-young ward in northwest Evanston,” a white and wealthy part of the city sandwiched between Skokie and Wilmette.³⁵ This slate of candidates publicly supported integration, but in limited ways that did not challenge the substance of the school experience or the racial geography of the Evanston community. The opposing “Citizens for 65” were Coffin supporters, including many Black community groups, who sought to advance a Rev. Dr. King, Jr.-style, comprehensive integration movement of the sort actively promoted by the Coffin administration: Kaufmann included.

During the school-board election campaign, Kaufmann continued to perform her duties, which included producing and disseminating communication promoting the full integration vision that was part of the original board resolution. She received hate mail and phone calls from citizens opposed to the eventual goal of geographic integration. She

recalls one anti-Coffin caller accused her being “Coffin’s Goebbels.” In September 1969 Kaufmann authored an article for “School Outlook” that listed a factual chronology of events related to Coffin’s non-renewal starting with the June board meeting and continuing to the present. When proposing the article to Coffin as a means to provide the public with a factual account of what had happened since the June board meeting, Kaufmann states in a personal note that, “I don’t look for controversy, God knows we have enough without manufacturing any or rekindling fires—ignoring the whole thing seems ridiculous.”³⁶ The article was perceived as antagonistic by the board and its publication became the focus of efforts to censor Kaufmann’s communication. On September 26, 1969 the school board passed two resolutions designed to curtail dissemination of information.³⁷ The first states that in “School Outlook” “no further mention shall be made...as to the contract renewal dispute between Superintendent Coffin and the Board of Education or of any matters related thereto.”³⁸ The second resolution states, “no employees on school time or using school facilities or materials, shall prepare and or disseminate any written statements or news releases of a partisan nature regarding the controversy between the board and Superintendent or the School Board election of April 11, 1970.”³⁹ From the board’s perspective, “partisan” information included any and all facts related to the election including, and not limited to, information about polling places and voter registration.⁴⁰ These resolutions as well as a list of additional guidance to be used in supervising Kaufmann were communicated in a memo to Coffin from Board President Seyl. Kaufmann’s commitment to the role media plays in a functioning democracy was clear in her response to Coffin when she states:

To make necessary the submission in advance to any board member (whose executive officer is the [S]uperintendent, and who always has been responsible for the overall supervision of all programs including that of information is a form of censorship and “management” of the news, which makes suspect to the media any information so released and which results in extremely bad press relations. It also makes the school board appear to be something that is a foretaste of the nightmare world described in the book *1984* where “big Brother” is watching every act of every citizen and would be most harmful to staff morale.⁴¹

Clearly Kaufmann’s public relations acumen was notable in her efforts toward promoting the integration vision, and her skill was perceived as a serious threat by the incumbent board who hoped to gain more support in the April election to release Coffin and replace him

with someone more suitable. Additional efforts to control and constrain Kaufmann's work continued as the election year progressed, including a mounting campaign to reduce the budget for information services so Kaufmann's salary could no longer be paid and distribution of "School Outlook" greatly reduced.

Although the anti-Coffin contingent had very deep pockets, the contentious April 1969 school-board election resulted in a very narrow (400 votes) victory by the anti-Coffin slate, and a recount was ordered. A poster authored by members of the Ad Hoc Committee of Concerned Black Parents and Citizens of School District 65 went up in the community hours after the recount of the board election results stating:

Coffin was the bullseye but the Black community is the target. Is there a plan to repress and then eliminate the Black community? We think so. We must stop this racist repression. We must end all repression. We cannot wait for them to rip off our people. We call on all persons of good will who are prepared to struggle against all oppression to come to Foster Center tonight.⁴²

Unsurprisingly, the non-renewal of Superintendent Coffin was upheld.⁴³ In the weeks following the election, massive demonstrations ensued throughout Evanston, including mass boycotts by Black students at various schools, creation of "freedom schools" attended by boycotting students, a call for an economic boycott of all white-owned Evanston businesses, a request for creation of a permanent advisory committee composed of seven representatives of the Black community, a demand for dismissal of the two board lawyers involved in advising on Coffin's dismissal and Kaufmann's supervision, a demand for participation in selection of a new superintendent, and a request for an emergency meeting to respond to all requests.⁴⁴

With Coffin out, immediate steps were taken by the school board further to "neutralize" Kaufmann and diminish her scope of influence in the midst of a community crisis lest she further empower those in favor of a comprehensive integration agenda. The newly elected board quickly, and without precedent, put oversight of Kaufmann into the hands of the board's president, requiring Kaufmann seek board permission before disseminating information. Additionally, the board completed their review of Kaufmann's department budget and determined it should be greatly reduced. Unsurprisingly, and after almost two years of extremely close supervision, which Kaufmann perceived as hostility from the new board, Coffin left his position, moving on to become a professor at Northeastern University. In 1976, he became the director of Northeastern University's Phase II Desegregation operation (later the

Urban Schools Collaborative Office) and worked on desegregation for the remainder of his career.⁴⁵

Kaufmann left district 65 in Evanston and moved to southern Illinois in 1971. After working on the effort to pass the Equal Rights Amendment for several years, she took a job as the Director of Information Services for the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in 1977. In 1980 she left ISBE to work freelance, moving to Washington, DC at precisely the time when her connections and affiliations could do her the least good there. Kaufmann was a leader in both Illinois' League of Women Voters and the National Organization of Women; these connections did not help further her career. To be a 50-ish feminist and experienced PR manager of a contentious integration effort did not open many doors in Ronald Reagan's Washington.

As for Evanston, research published in 1971 about the first three years of integration indicates integration efforts in Evanston modestly increased academic achievement for Black students in Evanston without decreasing the achievement of whites.⁴⁶ District 65 continued with its initial, voluntary transfer and busing program till the mid 1970s, when the school board adopted a "15% Plus or Minus" policy regarding racial integration which required the racial balance of each school to be within 15% of the overall racial demographic of Evanston. Then, in the mid 1980s, the school board adopted a 60% policy that required each school to be racially balanced so no school population could be made up of more than 60% of a single race.⁴⁷

Review of achievement data from 2004 to 2013 reveals that, although there remains a relatively large, persistent gap between the academic achievement of District 65's white and Black students, the achievement gap is anywhere from 30% to 50% smaller than the average statewide achievement gap in all tested subject areas.⁴⁸ Additionally, review of the most recent data for District 65 shows, when compared to districts of the same size and demographic makeup averaged across grades, District 65's Black students' achievement is higher in every subject. Despite some success at providing better-than-average educational opportunities for Black students, the community continues open dialogue about the importance of addressing the achievement gap and about the integration of its schools.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Voluntary integration of District 65 schools in Evanston, Illinois is an important point on the timeline of U.S. racial equity. Coffin, Kaufmann, and their supporters sought to alter the fabric of their corner of U.S. society by integrating schools, by changing education more broadly, and by challenging the racialized geography of Evanston, Illinois. Through Kaufmann's meticulous documentation and

recollections, it is possible to understand this moment more clearly. But Kaufmann was neither a silent nor passive witness; she helped shape history because she was an active participant in the public discourse emanating from the district on integration. Understanding the civil-rights movement in Evanston through Kaufmann's first-hand account helps one understand how promoting social change takes courage. Kaufmann found the courage to take part in the movement though it put her at professional risk and jeopardized future opportunity. Kaufmann, a woman from a working-class background working in a field dominated by men, put a lot at risk.

Women's contributions to the civil-rights movement have been a topic of scholarly inquiry in recent decades as part of an effort to describe and understand the movement more fully; until very recently, there has been little acknowledgement of the importance of their role.⁵⁰ Recent efforts shed light on the importance of women's various efforts previously eclipsed by better-known, mostly male figures of the movement. As one example, Houck and Dixon⁵¹ uncovered speeches given by previously unrecognized women in the civil rights movement. Many speeches they uncovered could have disappeared forever were it not for a small material trace. In Kaufmann's case, while material traces abound, the context in which they were created did not allow her to be given credit. A female, public-relations professional (a group whose role is to shape narratives invisibly rather than to be subjects in them) and a school administrator, she operated in an era when women did not occupy prestigious positions in either profession and participated in a movement where male perspectives dominated. Without intention to recover a more complete history, her contributions would continue to be an anonymous part of the legacy of Gregory Coffin, much the same way her sisters in struggle were rebuffed at the "Tribute to Women" in 1963 after the March on Washington.⁵²

Many women participated in various civil-rights causes assuming their efforts were needed, and would be welcomed and acknowledged. What became obvious to many women activists was how men in the movement did not extend their beliefs about racial equality to issues of women's equality. Many have noted how the gender inequities of the civil-rights movement combined with those expanded leadership opportunities the civil-rights movement provided to give birth to a new decade of feminism.⁵³ This was certainly the case for Kaufmann, who next focused her efforts on passing the Equal Rights Amendment.

The period of history I recount here represents a most ambitious period in the educational history of Evanston in terms of realizing the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Clearly those activists' efforts that resulted in integration of Evanston's schools and community did not go

uncontested. Efforts to integrate schools in Evanston occurred despite many obstacles and are unique for several reasons. First, Evanston schools voluntarily integrated far earlier than almost any U.S. school district. Next, the schools in Evanston *were* integrated despite powerful opposition within the community. Additionally, Evanston was and is surrounded by one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the entire country, which was true in the 1960s and which remains true today. Despite the pervasive national trend toward dismantling desegregation efforts,⁵⁴ schools in Evanston remain relatively integrated today, though integration is constantly in danger of jeopardization by efforts to redraw attendance areas in Evanston resulting in resegregation. Evanston continues to be segregated with regard to homeownership, but the effort to desegregate its schools has largely prevailed, especially when compared to other cities in the U.S., though not to the extent that was envisioned during the high tide of civil-rights concern. This case demonstrates for educators, civil-rights advocates, and families that concerted and persistent efforts to effect fundamental school reform can succeed; it also shows no such success endures without a continued effort to maintain it, and that such efforts will always be contentious, because they threaten the *status quo*.

Orfield points out that, in the national trends, dismantling desegregation “is, in essence, sleepwalking back to *Plessy*.”⁵⁵ Orfield explains that “*Brown*’s judgment that segregated schools are inherently unequal remains correct, not because something magic happens to minority students when they sit next to whites, but because segregation cuts students off from critical paths to success in American society.”⁵⁶

Endnotes

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- ³⁴ Dolores Story Kaufmann. "Board Votes 4–3 to Drop Superintendent; Heavy Reaction Follows," *School Outlook* (official newsletter of District 65, Evanston Illinois), 5 September 1969.
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