Running from Radicalism: Washington, D.C.'s Public Schools, 1973-1975

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Introduction

Barbara Sizemore's tenure as the superintendent of the Washington, D.C. public schools from 1973-75 is the story of an epic clash between her vision of progressive educational reform and the D.C. Board of Education's (DCBOE) pro-business framework.[1] Hired by the DCBOE in 1973 after years of experimentation in Chicago's school system, Sizemore planned to radically alter D.C.'s public schools by emphasizing community control and decentralization, multicultural and multilingual education, and by rethinking assessments and school organization. The Sizemore-DCBOE battle climaxed with a months-long conflict over the D.C. Youth Orchestra Program (DCYOP) in 1974, in which the DCBOE successfully contracted out public services to the private sector. In doing so, the DCBOE practiced "black regime politics." This phrase, coined by Clarence Stone and Adolph Reed, describes informal alliances brokered between public bodies and private interests to generate public policy. Black regimes seek corporate investment in exchange for managing urban conflict. Usually, such governance comes at the expense of progressive redistributive policies.[2] Compromised by her bitter defeat in the DCYOP controversy, Sizemore waged an ideological (and sometimes personal) war against the DCBOE. Eventually this conflict led to her firing.

The DCBOE-Sizemore conflict illuminates two key factors about urban history: the strength of black regime ideology and the importance of timing. Reed, Stone, Cedric Johnson, J. Phillip Thompson, and Julian Hayter demonstrate that African Americans elected to lead municipalities in the late 1960s-early 1970s oftentimes utilized pro-growth, corporate-influenced policies that were at odds with the interests of the working-class electoral coalitions that

[1] A pro-business framework involves urban policy that emphasizes corporate investment in cities.
[2] Adolph Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 79-115; Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 3-6.

catapulted them to office.[3] As Washington, D.C.'s first democratically elected body, the DCBOE's outsourcing of the orchestra marked the beginning of the city's regime politics. Importantly, the DCBOE's battle with Sizemore demonstrates that black regime politics affected public education similarly to social and municipal services.

Marion Barry epitomized black regime ideology. Thompson argues that Barry is part of a group of "civil rights" mayors—politicians who attempted to refashion the urban landscape with an eye towards achieving racial justice.[4] Barry's education politics, however, place him unequivocally in the pro-growth camp. Barry's vision for the public schools emphasized privatization and a corporate business model. His educational ideology was firmly at odds with the black working-class that supported his DCBOE candidacy

In the DCYOP crisis, Barry and the DCBOE weakened Washington's public school system by successfully outsourcing a public service to the private sector. The private interest in this case was the Friends of the D.C. Youth Orchestra (FDCYO), a non-profit organization. Commonly, the 'non-profit' label implies benevolence. The FDCYO was anything but benign. It pledged to run a *free* music program for *all* students. On the contrary, participation in the DCYOP was *costly*—for both the school system and student musicians—and *discriminatory*. While free for beginners, students were expected to pay DCYOP instructors for expensive private lessons in order to progress in the program. Those who could not afford these pricey additional lessons—non-white students from D.C.'s poorest neighborhoods—were marginalized. The FDCYO's kindhearted mission statement masked the organization's emerging neoliberal characteristics. The FDCYO—a private interest—ran a cutthroat program motivated by a distinct

[3] Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug*, 79-115, Stone, *Regime Politics*, Cedric Johnson, *From Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); J. Phillip Thompson III, *Double Trouble: Black Mayors, Black Communities, and the Call for Deep Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Julian Hayter, "From Intent to Effect: Richmond, Virginia and the Protracted Struggle for Voting Rights, 1965-1977," *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Forthcoming—August of 2014).
[4] Thompson III, *Double Trouble*, 13.

profit motive. The DCBOE's resounding victory in the DCYOP debate validated its policy of contracting out aspects of public education to private business.

The DCYOP debate was a tipping point. The same rationale used to advance this seemingly innocuous program would, in the years that followed, be used to contract more substantive portions of the public education system to the private sector. The DCYOP was a pinprick. For Washington's working-class and black community, the pro-business policies on the horizon would completely reshape the schools. The seeds of the neoliberal restructuring of urban public education that marked the end of the 20th century were planted in the early 1970s.[5]

The DCYOP conflict also reveals the significance of timing. The Civil Rights Revolution began to effect change in Washington just as Sizemore assumed the superintendency. In a few short years, the District went from being under the yoke of Congress to home-rule.[6] These tectonic shifts in local governance occurred alongside fiscal catastrophe. The urban crisis, suburbanization, stagflation, and a retreat from the big government liberalism of the Great Society placed intractable economic constraints on the urban core. With resources in short supply, politicians elected in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement were forced to turn to pro-growth coalitions and corporate tactics to keep cities afloat. Urban leaders turned to private interests—marginalizing their working-class base in the process—in order to keep cities functioning. Black regime politicians were stuck between financial insolvency on the one hand,

[5] For neoliberal ideas: Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw, *The Commanding Heights: The Battle for the World Economy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005); Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Policies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[6] For Washington D.C.'s political changes: Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood*, Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Michael K. Fauntroy, *Home Rule or House Rule? Congress and the Erosion of Local Governance in the District of Columbia* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003).

and working with businesses to try to salvage the city, on the other. The direction of urban politics was assured. Fiscal crisis ensured that corporate interests triumphed.[7]

Finally, Sizemore's superintendency offers a key historiographical intervention in the history of American public education. Scholars are currently fiercely debating the 'equity to excellence' narrative. Adam Nelson and Jack Schneider argue that beginning in the late 1950s, urban school systems first focused on integration and supplying equal educational opportunities. The goal of integration was to provide all students—no matter their race, language, or ethnicity—with an equal education. This goal, in turn, drove parents, administrators, and federal benefactors towards a rhetoric centered on accountability. Equity begat excellence. Parents wanted to be certain that their children, who were sometimes bused around cities to integrate classrooms, were actually getting an excellent education. Only cross-district (read: cross-racial) standardized test scores could prove educational excellence. Administrators had to demonstrate that the structure of the school system benefitted all students so they could satisfy parents. The federal government, as Gareth Davies and Jesse Rhodes argue, also insisted on hard numbers to justify its ever-increasing expenditures on education. Only through crunchable data—usually standardized test scores—could the federal government continue to support grants for urban

[7] For the urban crisis: For urban crisis: Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011); Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For suburbanization: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Kevin Kruse and Thomas Sugrue, eds., *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007). For stagflation: Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

education and prove educational equity. Measureable accountability defended the equity establishment from the threat of poor outcomes.[8]

John Spencer and Heather Lewis attack the equity to excellence narrative. They argue that communities mobilized to define excellence for themselves at the moment that schools were integrated. Shared community accountability was an alternative measurement of excellence—controlled by each neighborhood and not by bureaucratic experts. Educators, families, taxpayers, and political and economic institutions shared responsibility. During the Civil Rights Movement entire systems, specifically Oakland and New York City, were mobilized with the intention of supporting the schools. Because virtually every person in a neighborhood was a stakeholder in that area's educational institutions, officials stressed decentralization and community action.[9]

Sizemore's story illuminates the failure of shared accountability and helps explain contemporary education policies that emphasize high stakes testing. Sizemore believed in decentralization. She aimed to make teachers, administrators, community members, parents, and the students themselves accountable for the education of the city's working-class and non-white students. Her firing propelled the institutionalization of standardized tests supported by the equity to excellence establishment. Her ineffectiveness as a champion of shared community accountability hastened the rise of the equity to excellence model. Sizemore bitterly contested, but could not defeat, the increasing reliance on standardized tests. She pushed one version of accountability (shared), but her troubles in the District opened the door for the other (testing).

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[8] For equity to excellence: Adam Nelson*, The Elusive Ideal: Equal Educational Opportunity and the Federal Role in Boston's Public Schools, 1950-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jack Schneider, *Excellence for All: How a New Breed of Reformers is Transforming America's Public Schools* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011). For federal intervention: Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation and Decline of Great Society Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Jesse Rhodes, *An Education in Politics: The Origins and Evolution of No Child Left Behind* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[9] For shared accountability: John Spencer, *In the Crossfire: Marcus Foster and the Troubled History of American School Reform* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Heather Lewis, *New York City Public Schools from Brownsville to Bloomberg: Community Control and Its Legacy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013).

Second, Sizemore's tenure adds to the literature of the corporatization of American public education. David Tyack, Joel Spring, and Diane Ravitch trace the rise of the United States' bureaucratized and standardized public school system at the turn of the twentieth century. They argue that Progressive Era reformers ushered in corporate influence and a business model. The Sizemore-DCBOE battle verifies Tyack, Spring, and Ravitch's conclusions, while also adding a key distinction. Corporate restructuring of urban public education roared with new life in the 1970s. Unlike at the turn of the century, corporatization involved public-private partnerships between school systems and business interests. In the 1970s, the DCBOE trumpeted business models—as school systems did during the Progressive Era—while also bringing private interests into the schools themselves. Business became an active ally in education reform.[10]

Sizemore offered hope to Washington, D.C. She was an educational revolutionary who attempted to refashion urban schools, and a flawed figurehead oftentimes isolated by her complexities. Sizemore was stubborn, refused to play politics, and opened herself up to many of the same criticisms that she leveled at the DCBOE. Her ideas had the potential to affect legitimate change. Her downfall marks a road ineffectively navigated.

Hiring a Radical

In 1973, Washington, D.C. was in turmoil. The urban crisis—deindustrialization, suburbanization, and racial tensions that defined the post-World War Two city—crippled the District. The byzantine power structure that governed Washington exacerbated the city's problems. Four Congressional committees—two in each chamber—controlled Washington's appropriations and policies. The oft-changing political winds and the whim of legislators unaccountable to District voters affected everything from the city's annual budget to new laws

[10] David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Joel H. Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

and regulations. Inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, Washingtonians demanded self-determination and home-rule.

In response to this outcry, the federal government granted the District greater autonomy, bit by bit. Responding to calls for community control—a central tenet of Black Power ideology that was popular in the overwhelmingly African American city—Congress granted D.C. jurisdiction over the public school system in late 1968 with the city's first elected body: the D.C. Board of Education (DCBOE). In 1969, the DCBOE fired Superintendent William Manning, a Congressional appointee. In 1970, the board hired Hugh J. Scott, its first black superintendent, to replace Manning, who had served for just over two years. That same year Congress allowed the city to elect a non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives.

In 1971, Julius W. Hobson, Sr., a prominent local black activist, sued the DCBOE over unequal distribution of the system's resources. Racialized economic inequality undergirded Hobson's suit. On May 25, federal judge, James Skelly Wright, mandated that Washington, D.C. standardize per-pupil expenditures at every city school. Similar to countless other cities, Washington's neighborhoods, and, by extension, schools, were segregated by race. The Wright Decree made it illegal to privilege any student or any school. After Wright, neither race nor zip code could determine the city's allocation of money.[11]

Although the Wright Decree was a victory for working-class blacks and even though Congress steadily increased District autonomy, the school system, like the city, was in shambles. In early 1973, the DCBOE abruptly fired Scott for failing to improve the city's schools. The system leaked students. Middle-class families fled the District for affluent suburbs in Virginia and Maryland. When the DCBOE began the process of hiring the city's third superintendent in

[11] Barbara A. Sizemore, *The Ruptured Diamond: The Politics of the Decentralization of the District of Columbia Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 195-203.

six years, board member Mattie G. Taylor told the *Washington Post*, the system "need[s] so much we're almost looking for the second coming of Christ."[12]

Marion Barry, the DCBOE president, spearheaded the superintendent search. Barry's activist pedigree bordered on the legendary. Molded by his years in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Barry moved to Washington in 1965 and immediately helped launch the Free D.C. Movement—an organization that utilized economic pressure and mass protests to campaign against the injustice of a powerless black city ruled by a white United States Congress. In 1967, Barry founded Pride, Inc., a nonprofit that provided "street dudes" with skills and jobs in construction, retail, and auto mechanics.[13]

In 1971, during the second cycle of elections for the DCBOE, Barry easily won a seat. His name-recognition and large network of supporters—from toughs on the corner to businessmen who bankrolled both his D.C. organizations—secured his victory. Barry's colleagues unanimously elected him board president. In less than a decade, he had become Washington's political powerbroker. The *Post* dubbed him "the spokesman for the underprivileged." Gone were the days of Barry as the "firebrand dashiki-clad militant." As DCBOE president, he was "a groomed and restrained city politician." Barry described himself as "a situationist." He altered his style to achieve success. When the DCBOE began hunting for Scott's replacement, Barry was positioned to sway the entire process.[14]

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[12] Sizemore, *The Ruptured Diamond*, 91; Richard E. Prince, "D.C. Pushes Hunt for Schools Chief," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1973, D1.

[13] Leon Dash, "Role Changes Create Doubt in Barry's Mayoralty Bid," *Washington Post*, September 6, 1978, B1. For Marion Barry's biography: Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Jonathan Agronsky, *Marion Barry: The Politics of Race* (Latham, New York: British American Publications, 1991); Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Jonetta Rose Barras, *The Last of the Black Emperors: The Hollow Comeback of Marion Barry in the New Age of Black Leaders* (Baltimore: Bancroft Press, 1998); Marion Barry and Omar Tyree, *Mayor for Life: The Incredible Story of Marion Barry, Jr.* (New York: Strebor Books, 2014).

[14] Leon Dash, "Role Changes Create Doubt in Barry's Mayoralty Bid," *Washington Post*, September 6, 1978, B1.

From the outset, Barbara Sizemore, a leading proponent of shared community accountability, was a contender for the superintendency. She directed Chicago's acclaimed Woodlawn Experimental Schools Project (WESP), a community control initiative jointly conducted by the University of Chicago and Chicago's school board and financed by the federal government. Under her leadership, WESP achieved miraculous academic gains in some of the South Side's most gang-infested schools by stressing student decision-making, nontraditional instruction, and rejecting tests.[15]

The superintendent search revealed the board's ideological divide. Marion Barry, according to Richard E. Prince, the *Post's* education beat writer, preferred Andrew Donaldson, a superintendent in the Bronx and the uncle of Barry's SNCC comrade, Ivanhoe Donaldson. By late July 1973, the board split into two opposing ideological camps. Marion Barry led one cohort along with his white vice-president Martha Swaim; Charles I. Cassell and Hilda Mason led the other.[16] Barry and Swaim argued that Washington, D.C.'s educational crisis required a traditional, orthodox leader who could right the school system without rocking the boat. They wanted an administrator. On the contrary, Cassell and Mason urged the board to hire a creative risk-taker, a leader who would fundamentally rethink public education. They demanded immediate revolution. Cassell told Prince, "Barry and Swaim intend to get Donaldson in." He reported that Barry wanted "to have an administrative type, a type [he] can control." Cassell stated that Sizemore would make "Barry and Swaim…jealous!"[17]

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[15] Peter Negronida, "Pupils Show Gains in Woodlawn Tests," *Chicago Tribune*, February 25, 1970, 10; David Harrison, "The Argument for a Separate WESP District," *Chicago Defender*, November 28, 1970, 8; Richard Prince, "Mrs. Sizemore in Chicago: Innovative and Controversial," *Washington Post*, October 1, 1973, A1.

[16] For full biographies: Sizemore, *The Ruptured Diamond*, 93-98; Nancy L. Arnez, *The Besieged School Superintendent: A Case Study of the School Superintendent-School Board Relations In Washington, D.C., 1973-75* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 226-229.

[17] Richard Prince, "12 Named as School Candidates," *Washington Post*, June 27, 1973, C1; Richard Prince, "School Job May Go To Woman Educator," *Washington Post*, July 12, 1973, D1; Richard Prince, "School Board Starts Over on Superintendent," *Washington Post*, July 14, 1973, B2; Richard Prince, "Selection of School Superintendent Not Going as Planned," *Washington Post*, July 18, 1973, C1.

Cassell hinted that Barry was not focused on education but on his personal political ambitions, which was a constant source of gossip. Congress was drafting a District of Columbia Home Rule Act, which would create an elected city council and mayor. Cassell implied that Barry had his eyes on bigger prizes. He did not want to hire a superintendent who would hog the spotlight. He enjoyed his place atop D.C.'s political scene. Cassell inferred that Barry wanted to further his political career by hiring a safe superintendent, someone who would take his orders.

While Cassell's emphasis on Barry's personal ambition certainly played a role, a distinct ideological perspective also motivated the DCBOE president. A corporate bent defined Barry's education politics. Donaldson, Barry's preferred choice, had provoked serious controversy in the Bronx by engaging in regime politics. In May 1973, as superintendent of District Nine, Donaldson had clashed with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), one the country's most powerful unions. Albert Shanker, the UFT president, charged Donaldson with playing "patronage" politics, offering jobs to non-unionized cronies rather than capable teachers. The UFT, in response, ran a slew of candidates in the May school board election. Five anti-Donaldson, pro-UFT candidates won. The UFT's representative in Donaldson's district, Howard Bloch, told the *Times*, that the results "indicate quite clearly that Mr. Donaldson's future is not in" the Bronx. Shortly thereafter, Donaldson was relieved of his duties.[18]

A year later, the *New York Times* revealed that while Donaldson directed District Nine he had spent "a considerable amount" of money—to the tune of almost two million dollars—in outsourced contracts. Donaldson paid Edu-Force, a private company, to help monitor the reading levels of individual students and for computer programs to score tests. Westinghouse Learning Corporation supplied digital lessons in reading, science, and math for a hefty price. Optimum

[18] Ronald Smothers, "Union-Backed Candidates Get 93 of 171 School Seats," *New York Times*, May 8, 1973, 47; Ronald Smothers, "Union Victory Claim in School Vote Disputed," *New York Times*, May 9, 1973, 32.

Computer Systems received a contract to provide a "management system" and curriculum diagnosis. Donaldson believed that the private sector was preferable to the public. This ideology attracted Barry. Donaldson had been embattled and disgraced *before* he was seriously considered for the Washington job, yet Barry maintained that he was ideal. Donaldson's outsourcing dovetailed with Barry's pro-business vision. Regime politics and fiscal crisis shaped Donaldson's policies. Barry saw an ideological ally.[19]

According to DCBOE member Mattie Taylor, Barry was motivated by what he believed was "politically stimulating." Barry's DCBOE was "not then talking" about "what, in fact, was good for children." Instead, Taylor suggested that Barry focused on "what will…build me a following." Barry needed a coalition that would "work and give support in a campaign." Focused on obtaining a higher office, Barry constructed an alliance with "vocal groups" in civic affairs. In exchange for supporting the DCBOE president, these private organizations were granted space to assert "their will" on "the school board."[20]

The DCBOE decided on three finalists: Sizemore, Donaldson, and John Minor, a consultant from Palo Alto. On July 31, 1973, Sizemore's interview was held. She outlined her radical ideas for educating poor and black students. Her opening soliloquy explored the lifelong process of learning, "I believe that a student is a learner, and teachers can be students, administrators can be students, board members can be students." Sizemore's dynamic educational community stressed that school was a "two-way dialogue," in which "when the teacher is teaching, he or she is also learning. And when the learner is learning, he or she is also

[19] Peter Kihss, "State Finds Wide Waste in Bronx School District," *New York Times*, May 21, 1974, 48.
[20] Arnez, *The Besieged School Superintendent*, 243.

teaching." Sizemore focused on students who were historically ignored by promoting experimentation. Teaching had to be reconceptualized to reach poor and non-white students.[21]

Standardized assessments, Sizemore asserted, were "not compatible with certain living styles and cultural differences," particularly those of urban students. In lieu of tests, inner-city school districts had to "design the kinds of methods that will expedite the talents and insights that our children bring to the teaching-learning situation." Sizemore's anti-testing call-to-arms emphasized that using tests to calculate ability contributed to the failings of Washington's public schools. The test-takers in non-white city districts were graded against students in white suburban schools. Furthermore, exam questions assumed a certain lifestyle and background experience more commonly found outside the urban core. Sizemore suggested, "the way one approaches problem-solving in a family of affluence" was "decidedly different" than the way a student who "requires a real-life approach to real problems at an early age" would solve the same questions. Comparing white suburbanites with non-white urbanites was a red herring. Sizemore rejected tests because they distracted from the real issues: understanding how urban students approached problems and designing curricula and assessments that served that population.[22]

Sizemore ended her statement by prophesizing that her educational philosophy incited conflict. "There is always comfort in what is," she said. The status quo kept people at ease. Normalcy remained intact because it benefited certain stakeholders. Sizemore implied that white students gained from the current structure of schooling—they were comfortable with testing that conformed to their socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Changing the normal would incite "the people who have the investment in what is…to complain." Because of this reality, Sizemore proclaimed, "whenever you want to talk about change, you have to talk about

[21] Richard Prince, "School Job List is Cut to Three," *Washington Post*, July 25, 1973, B1; Tapes of the interview held by the D.C. Board of Education with Barbara A. Sizemore, finalist for D.C. Superintendency, Washington, D.C., 31 July 1973.
[22] *Ibid*.

conflict." The two were inseparable. Restructuring the District's public schools would shift the emphasis away from the system's few white students and onto the black majority. Although logical, Sizemore prophesized that rationality did not magically trump custom. Some stakeholders would be furious.[23]

In response to questions, Sizemore specified that she would overhaul the school system through decentralization. Her vision guaranteed greater community, parent, and student involvement in day-to-day school operations and in big picture goal setting. She also recommended refashioning the District's curriculum, placing more emphasis on math and science. Finally, Sizemore said that Washington needed school communities that included students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Grouping grades together under one roof allowed older students to teach younger ones by modeling behavior and even classroom teaching.[24]

Sizemore concluded ominously by returning to her change and conflict equation. She said she would support radical teachers "so they won't be assassinated"—either in reputation by smear campaigns or physically harmed by fanatical zealots. Sizemore anticipated that change, of the magnitude that she was proposing, would engender stiff opposition. Schooling touched every resident's life. She did not deny the possibility that her radical policies would infuriate some stakeholders. On the contrary, she welcomed it.[25]

Following her interview enthusiasm for Sizemore surged. The DCBOE's liberal coalition latched onto the frenzy and by August 5, Cassell, Mason, Taylor and Bardyl R. Tirana (the only white progressive) all publically announced their support for Sizemore. Mason told Richard Prince that D.C. "needs this kind of educational leader. The time is right." Taylor concurred, saying, "there's no doubt in my mind. She knows so much about children and their needs."

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[23] *Ibid*.
[24] Richard Prince, "School Board Talks With Third Finalist For Superintendent," *Washington Post,* August 1, 1973, C2.
[25] *Ibid*.

Meanwhile, the *Post* reported that Barry continued to try to construct an anti-Sizemore majority.[26]

Sizemore's hiring was still not guaranteed. On the morning of August 7, Swaim circulated a memo to her colleagues. She argued that the District could not "afford the luxury of hiring a philosopher." She presented Sizemore as a thinker not a doer. Swaim's distaste for Sizemore was rooted in her love for "the children I represent," who "need a system for getting rid of those incompetent teachers NOW." Swaim's point of emphasis is revealing. As a middle-class white Democrat, she treaded carefully around the issue of race. She recognized that condemning Sizemore could be interpreted as white chauvinism. She argued that District teachers failed students and that she opposed Sizemore because she did not emphasize improving D.C.'s teaching corps. Reform had to target teachers. Because Sizemore proposed to work with existing educators, she should not be hired.[27]

Swaim's tract prompted the board's liberals to charge her with racism. In response to the memo, DCBOE member, James E. Coates, a black minister, pledged to support Sizemore. One vote away from the majority, the liberal faction mounted a campaign to convince Barry to join them. Barry was in a tough position. His closest ally and vice-president had drawn a line in the sand. But Swaim's outspoken stand infuriated her non-white colleagues. By supporting Swaim, Barry could be depicted as a black puppet. At the same time, Barry did not necessarily disagree

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[26] Arnez, *The Besieged School Superintendent*, 155; Richard Prince, "Mrs. Sizemore Favored For School Post," *Washington Post*, August 5, 1973, B1.

[27] Martha Swaim, "Statement to friends from Martha Swaim re: Barbara A. Sizemore as Superintendent, August 7, 1973, 1. Swaim's argument contained germs of neoliberal education reform. Neoliberal education ideology emphasizes competition, choice, efficiency, and a corporate-influenced business model. Neoliberals argue that schools must adopt business practices. For reformers, teachers—and teachers unions—are a chief target. They argue that teachers fail students and that unions protect bad teachers from being held accountable for their performance. Neoliberals ignore the mountain of other obstacles that stand in the way of urban students, and instead argue that great teachers generate great gains. In business, poor work leads to firing. The link is that simple. Neoliberals plead for schools to adopt the same metric. Part of the reason neoliberals so enthusiastically support the charterization of public education, therefore, is because teachers are not allowed to unionize. Without unions, teachers are unprotected, and C.E.O.s of charter schools can institute teacher efficiency rubrics. Graded annually, teachers are held accountable for not reaching benchmarks determined by standardized tests that their students take.

with Swaim's opinion. His political wheeling-and-dealing proved he was no fan of Sizemore. In addition, Barry had to account for public opinion and his own ambition. Should he betray his personal beliefs and vote for Sizemore and with the black working-class? Or would Sizemore flop and then her failures be used against Barry in upcoming political campaigns? Pressed by the *Post*, Barry admitted that the decision was akin to "wrestling with bears." Stuck between a rock and a hard place, he was running out of time.[28]

On the night of August 7, Sizemore was hired as superintendent of the Washington, D.C. public schools. She earned seven affirmative votes: Cassell, Mason, Taylor, Tirana, Coates, Delores Pryde, and Marion Barry. Three white board members—Swaim, Albert A. Rosenfield, and Revered Raymond B. Kemp—voted against her. In the end, the force of public opinion and his personal ambition convinced Barry to support Sizemore. The 7-3 vote shielded the heated ideological split that characterized the hiring process. Even though the liberals won, the future of the D.C. schools remained up for grabs. Sizemore, the first black woman in charge of a major school system, graciously told the *Post*, "I'm going to work with this board. I intend to…be a credit to them." No one could have anticipated the chaos that would ensue.[29]

Sizemore's Honeymoon

Officially ensconced as superintendent, Sizemore went on a publicity blitz trumpeting shared accountability. She pledged to force District parents to rid themselves of their educational apathy. Citing Chicago activist Saul Alinsky as her inspiration, Sizemore said by "raising levels of anxiety," she could shock parents into educational "community involvement." She preached

[28] Richard Prince, "School Post Going to Mrs. Sizemore," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1973, A1.
[29] Richard Prince, "D.C. School Board Names Mrs. Sizemore by 7-3 Vote," *Washington Post*, August 8, 1973, C1.

community-wide mobilization; schooling was not merely a weekday relationship between students and teachers—entire neighborhoods had to work to improve the District's schools.[30]

Sizemore's specific vision for widespread community involvement involved "a different kind of attitude on the part of the adults," "student involvement in decision-making," and most importantly, decentralization. She proposed flattening out the school bureaucracy, which gave each neighborhood school the authority to make decisions for itself. Each school would create and elect a leadership organization—under the acronym PACTS (parents, administrators, community representatives, teachers, and students)—to control that school's operations. PACTS set curriculum, hired and fired teachers, and determined the budget. PACTS enabled all stakeholders to "participate in…discussions that will affect their lives." By providing "everyone [with] a task," Sizemore encouraged participatory democracy and cultivated local leaders.[31]

Armed with surging public support and exciting ideas, Sizemore clarified her progressive ideology and shared accountability. She expanded her vision of schools that included students from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Not only would these multi-age buildings encourage young students to model their behavior after their "big brothers and sisters," but Sizemore also stipulated that these schools should be organized through "continuous development." She planned to eliminate traditional understandings of grades tied to age. Students would be grouped by ability. In her mastery learning system, students took "a subject when he was able." Without grades denoted by age, both advanced and slower learners gained. Students who demonstrated a particular talent in a subject could constantly be challenged. Struggling students would receive "more structure."[32]

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[30] Donald Baker, "Mrs. Sizemore Predicts School Chaos," *Washington Post*, August 13, 1973, C1.
[31] Richard Prince, "School Chief Seeks Local Leadership," *Washington Post*, August 15, 1973, C1.
[32] Andrew Barnes, "New Superintendent 'Willing to Try' Ideas, *Washington Post*, September 2, 1973, B1.

Sizemore's first few months as superintendent matched her astronomical expectations. She received funding to build a new school without traditional grade levels in Southeast D.C. She convened a curriculum council that recommended new requirements and expectations for District classrooms. She urged PACTS to institute interdisciplinary humanities courses, which would break down the barriers between art, history, music, and literature. Sizemore told the *Post*, "you could be born at 10th and U with the potential to be a second Beethoven and be completely ignored." Interdisciplinary courses promised that no student would slip through the cracks. In addition, Sizemore set in motion plans for bilingual education beginning in kindergarten. Sizemore's multilingual and multicultural vision of instruction promised to have widespread appeal. She proposed to decentralize the District school by creating six sub-regions and appointing one regional superintendent per district. A PACTS committee at every school would "set policy" and determine "how the school's budget is spent." Sizemore told the DCBOE, "a lot of school systems take ten years to achieve what we're trying to achieve in a shorter [time].[33]

Sizemore continued to rail against high stakes exams. She repeatedly stressed that she had "a problem with test scores" because exams were norm referenced "on the population of Palo Alto…that's neither black nor poor." Sizemore's bold anti-testing rhetoric challenged the increasing national reliance on quantifiable measures of excellence. Sizemore urged the school system to rethink educational success. When the *Post* pressed her to explain how she would judge achievement divorced from exams, Sizemore explained that she was looking "for an improvement in the mastery of skills: reading, writing, listening, speaking, computing, singing, drawing, painting, driving a car, whatever skills that student was expected to learn." Washington needed to switch its emphasis from content to skills. Only by rethinking the purpose of

[33] Richard Prince, "Board Sets Change in New School Plan," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1973, C15; Richard Prince, "City School Emphasis Shift Seen," *Washington Post*, February 1, 1974, B15; Richard Prince, "D.C. School Shake-Up Proposed," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1974, A1.

schooling, could the system distance itself from tests. The District had to decide what it wanted students to "know how to do." Sizemore recalled that when she graduated from Northwestern in 1947 with a degree in Latin "there was no one knocking on my door asking for someone to translate Horace!" Sizemore's experience taught her that students needed to have the skills for the late-20th century. Schools had to "prepare those kids for the life they're going to live, instead of the life we live." Traditional curriculum "neglect[ed] numbers, we neglect images, we neglect notes…as valid modes of access to the empowering tools of the culture." The monolingual and monocultural orthodoxy of education needed updating. Education had to match the "multilingual, multicultural environment." Schools could not and should not teach for the past; they had to educate for the future. An ever-changing society required cutting-edge schooling.[34]

In May 1974, the DCBOE unanimously approved all of Sizemore's plans for structurally reorganizing the District. By June, the system was decentralized and six regional superintendents had been hired. D.C. residents were urged to form PACTS. In line with the ideological ethos of decentralization, Sizemore refused to take an active role in generating PACTS—she wanted these committees to emerge organically from the community and not be top-down impositions from the administration. The *Post* rosily editorialized that "the spirit of the system is different—and that the image of District public schools is improving." Sizemore's "good ideas are being converted into results" and "inject excitement into the learning experience."[35]

Sizemore's achievements pleased Washington's working-class residents. Krystyna Edmondson, a divorced parent of two students in the public schools, wrote to the *Post* that "I am convinced that we have an outstanding leader." She celebrated Sizemore's "daring and

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[34] *Ibid*.
[35] Richard Prince, "D.C. School Revamping Approved," *Washington Post*, May 31, 1974, C1; B.D. Colen, "Six Division Leaders Get Posts Today," *Washington Post*, June 7, 1974, C1; B.D. Colen, "PACTS Plan for D.C. Schools: 'A Process of Consensus," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1974, D1; Editorial, "Innovation in the City's Schools," *Washington Post*, May 12, 1974, C6;

innovative blueprint for change." J.W. Haywood, Jr., a father of three, wrote to the newspaper that Sizemore's moves were "compelling." The *Post* published the results of a District-wide survey of parent attitudes towards the public schools. 68% of non-whites living in Washington expressed satisfaction with the direction of public education. Given that the District's system was almost entirely working-class black and Latino, this survey illuminates that Sizemore had strong support amongst her constituents. As *Post* reporter Jay Matthews deduced, "respondents with children living at home [*i.e.* in school] are more likely to judge the schools 'good' or 'very good.'" Working-class students were benefitting. Sizemore's base felt assured that the schools were improving.[36]

Amidst the public optimism tensions erupted between Sizemore and Barry. Two petty clashes occurred during the winter, but their mutual animosity roared to the forefront in early July when Sizemore provided an exclusive interview to the editors of the *Post*.[37] The first question aimed directly at the Sizemore-Barry tension: "What happened to you and Marion Barry?" Sizemore responded, "I don't know. I just think we have a philosophical difference." When the interviewers pushed Sizemore to unpack the ideological contrast, she obliged. "Well, I think Mr. Barry believes you should contract out the school system to other people." Barry supported a policy that paid outside "organizations" to work in Washington's schools. Sizemore accused Barry of preferring to use the school budget to hire non- and for-profit companies to do various tasks of the school system, whereas Sizemore asserted that her "belief is that you have to

[36] Krystyna Edmondson, "Mrs. Sizemore and the D.C. School System," *Washington Post*, March 24, 1974, A21; J.W. Haywood, Jr., "Letter to the Editor 1," *Washington Post*, March 25 1974, A21; Jay Matthews, "Survey Finds Range of Opinions on Schools," *Washington Post*, April 30, 1974, C1.

[37] Previously Barry and Sizemore fought over student ID cards and a system-wide boycott of apartheid South Africa. See: Richard Prince, "Student ID Card Idea Spurs Row," *Washington Post*, January 17, 1974, C1; Richard Prince, "Boycott of S. Africa Weighed: D.C. School Board Concerned With Apartheid Issue," *Washington Post*, February 9, 1974, A13.

build up the public school system." Sizemore argued that D.C.'s budget should be spent on strengthening existing structures.[38]

Sizemore then burst into a rant that illuminated the philosophical battle that, unbeknownst to the public, had continuously raged between Barry and her:

> I think that the great commitment of this country to universal education is one of its finest characteristics…and to abandon it, just at the time when we are producing more high school graduates than ever before in the history of this country, at a time when technological change requires more educated and knowledgeable workers, to abandon this idea now, when there is a high concentration of blacks and other minorities in public schools, seems disastrous. And so my philosophical bent is to build up these alternatives *within* the public school system and make it really compatible with human growth and development so that it can reach all human beings no matter their difference or handicaps or conditions…And Mr. Barry is a very political person. So when I come to the table, I want to talk about the goals and objectives of the educational system and how it's going to profit the student, you know, within the total socio-economic domain, and he's got this whole political agenda out here that sometimes I know about and sometimes I don't know about. When I know about it we have a fight. When I don't know about it we get taken.[39]

While Sizemore's tirade lacked specifics—those would be revealed two days later—the interview contoured the ideological battle at hand: Sizemore's vision of shared accountability versus Barry's corporate management. Sizemore believed that globalization, technological modernization, and stagflation were significantly altering the United States' political economy in the early 1970s. In the face of such changes, public education had to reinforce its founding ideals—to embody Horace Mann's proclamation that schools were "the great equalizer" that functioned as the "balance wheel of the social machinery." For poor and black students it was more important than ever to bolster public education—to fortify and protect the institution against opponents that sought to shortchange it. With city coffers leaking money and politicians increasingly concerned about the ever-rising price of public schooling, Sizemore argued that public schools had to be protected. Urban education in modern America required greater, not

[38] Editorial, "Changing our Schools: An Interview With Barbara Sizemore," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1974, B1.
[39] *Ibid*.

smaller, financial commitments. Money had to be funneled into the school system in order to support such progressive, but fundamentally necessary, measures like PACTS, decentralization, new schools, more teachers, better training, and additional programs that dealt with student health, social work, athletics, visual and performing arts, and technical arts. Strong financially sound schools and publically run systems were the key to achieving success in cities mired in urban decline. The commitment had to be intensified and the entire District population had to be energized. Shared accountability could effect change.[40]

Marion Barry, on the other hand, practiced black regime politics. Barry had inordinate power over the city's financial and political trajectory since he controlled the only democratically elected body in the District. His maneuvering in D.C. marked one of the earliest examples of any black regime politician in any city contracting out part of a public school system to private interests.[41] He believed the business practices of private interests were preferable to the public sector. He aligned himself with corporate and civic powerbrokers who could support and finance future campaigns and invest in the urban core. Dwight Cropp, Barry's executive assistant while he was on the DCBOE said, "When [Barry] was president of the board, his interest was not education. His interest was…growth [and] expansion."[42]

Barry's pro-business bent was evident from the relationships he cultivated with wealthy private donors. He courted residents associated with the powerful Metropolitan Board of Trade (MBT). The MBT, a network of entrepreneurial leaders, helped funnel money to Barry's campaigns. In 1971, for example, Barry's largest individual donations came from some of the MBT's leading personalities. The director, Jean Sisco, donated $600. Theodore Hagans, Jr., a

[40] Horace Mann, *Life and Works of Horace of Mann: Volume III* (Boston: H.B. Fuller, 1868), 699.
[41] Barry's decision to outsource aspects of the public school system was akin to choices made by "technocratic mayors" in other cities that led to the privatization of municipal services. See: Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug*; Stone, *Regime Politics*; Thompson, *Double Trouble*.
[42] Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 99.

real estate mogul and one of the MBT's few black members, gave $150. William Cafritz, a former MBT director and developer, contributed $300. Barry's 1971 war chest had a whopping $16,000. This total dwarfed every other victorious DCBOE member from 1971-1975. Winners in those three elections fundraised an average of $2,438. Nancy Arnez, a former Dean of Education at Howard University, speculated that the "sizable contributions" from the MBT "influenced his [Barry's] perception about the use of public monies for private enterprises."[43]

While Barry certainly adhered to corporate-influenced politics, it is also critical to recognize that he was responding to a distinct fiscal reality. Barry headed a system in financial and educational crisis. Sizemore's first few months were an improvement, but her changes were expensive and had yet to be proven—only time would tell whether her radical vision would work. Barry lacked the luxury of time. Congress and the president controlled D.C.'s purse strings and were not eager to appropriate huge sums of taxpayer cash to the District to fund the radical education schemes of a black female superintendent who was trying to resurrect an African American dominated school system. The Southern Democrats who wielded disproportionate power in Congress—although they were quickly being replaced by Southern Republicans who shared many of the same ideals—were reluctant to finance D.C.'s educational experiment. The national fiscal crisis only constrained Congress more. In addition, Barry was in the midst of campaigning for a seat on the newly created City Council. The Washington, D.C. Home Rule Act, passed in December 1973, provided the District with an elected City Council and Mayor. Barry intended to run for a council seat. The last thing he wanted or needed was a fight with his rock star superintendent. A fight was what he got.

The DCYOP Crisis

[43] Arnez, *The Besieged Superintendent*, 246, 255.

The clash between Sizemore and the DCBOE over the DYCOP demonstrates the ideological tension between the superintendent's shared accountability model and the board's regime politics. In terms of dollars and pedagogical impact, the DCYOP was a small factor in a massive educational system. But the ideological significance of contracting out the orchestra to the private sector had major implications. The pro-business policies of the DCBOE set a symbolic precedent. Sizemore fought bravely to protect public education. Her failure in this controversy set in motion the corporate restructuring of Washington's public education system.

Sizemore's interview with the *Post* highlighted an ongoing quarrel with Barry over an application submitted to the board by the Friends of the D.C. Youth Orchestra (FDCYO), a non-profit paid by the board to train and conduct a free system-wide orchestra for accepted students. Sizemore lobbied the DCBOE to reject the application; Barry stood strongly in favor of it. Sizemore despised the D.C. Youth Orchestra Program (DCYOP) for a number of reasons. First, she argued that District music teachers could easily organize an orchestra. She felt that contracting out this service exemplified fiscal irresponsibility. Ostensibly, the FDCYO was paid to teach the same thing as D.C.'s existing music educators. Second, Sizemore believed that the DCYOP violated the basic premise of the Wright Decree—it provided greater resources to students who already had educational advantages. The DCYOP principally served "students from the middle-class areas of the District," who were disproportionally white. Working-class African Americans gained little from the program. Third, Sizemore railed against the DCYOP because it included a number of students that attended school in the Virginia and Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. She could not fathom spending precious dollars from the budget to educate middle-class students that lived outside the city limits. Fourth, Sizemore felt that the DCYOP ostracized unionized teachers. Instead of supporting the system's existing teachers, the DCBOE

hired an outside contractor. Sizemore feared the repercussions of such a precedent. Fifth, although the DCYOP's teachers were volunteers, the program pushed students into hiring these volunteers for expensive private lessons. A real profit motive existed. Finally, Sizemore argued, "the basic assumptions of the program are racist." Sizemore believed that the DCYOP's standards were "based on symphonic music field needs where the European creative genius holds sway." In an overwhelmingly African American system, non-western music needed to be taught because it was part of the cultural heritage of black students. Sizemore sarcastically asked, "Does the degree of excellence of a superior McKinley [high school] stage band performance of Scott Joplin's 'Maple Leaf Rag' differ from a comparable degree of excellence in a superior DCYO performance of Mozart's 'Violin Concerto No. 3?'"[44]

Washington, D.C.'s working-class residents supported Sizemore's stand against the DCYOP. It was obvious that the program failed to teach poor and non-white students as effectively as middle-class whites. Ruth Goodwin, a prominent black activist in Washington especially on issues relating to education, frequently spoke in public board meetings to express the public's disgust with the DCBOE for ignoring their (and Sizemore's) wishes. Goodwin proclaimed that the FDCYO's control over the orchestra program was "a monopoly." She scolded the DCBOE for engaging in "dirty tricks" that resulted in the FDCYO's contract. In line with Sizemore's decentralization emphasis, Goodwin declared that the "community" should "deal with the resources" associated with the orchestra. Granting control of the program to a private interest was at odds with the "concern[s] of these parents."[45]

Sizemore and Goodwin's concerns had been voiced before. In 1971, five years after the DCYOP received its first contract, Barbara White, a local resident, and Rosanna Saffran, a

[44] Richard Prince, "D.C. Youth Orchestra Contract Renewed," *Washington Post*, July 9, 1974, C1.
[45] Arnez, *The Besieged Superintendent*, 335.

District music teacher, investigated the program. Their results presaged Sizemore's worries. They argued that the orchestra "duplicated the instrumental music program in the public schools." They noted that between half and two-thirds of all of the program's beginners dropped out after a year. In addition, White and Saffran concluded that only twenty-eight of the District's forty-two secondary schools were represented in the DCYOP, along with seven schools in Maryland and one in Virginia. They concluded, thus, that the DCYOP was "depriving inner-city talented District children…access to the program."[46]

White and Saffran used hard numbers to prove their points. In January 1969, only thirty members of the DCYOP were from Southeast, Northeast, or Lower Northwest D.C., the poorest areas of the city. In November 1970, 164 participants in the DCYOP out of 735 (or 22%) went to school outside of the District. The FDCYO claimed that it cost the organization only 42 cents per hour to educate its students, but White and Saffran estimated that number was closer to $51 per hour. The duo's muckraking also revealed that although the program was free, students were encouraged to hire DCYOP teachers to provide private lessons, yet again marginalizing poor students. This lucrative possibility made volunteering for the DCYOP a cash cow. The volunteeristic ethos that may have attracted teachers to the DCYOP was muddied by the possibility of significant financial gain for their services. White and Saffran also questioned the skyrocketing cost of the program. During the 1966-67 school year, the DCYOP's first year, the orchestra cost $5,131. By 1971-2, the program cost $35,000. The next year the price tag leaped to $90,000. White and Saffran admitted that the increasing number of participants from 445 to 750 explained part of the cost, but they sought a clearer explanation of the DCYOP's finances.[47]

[46] Barbara White and Rosanna Saffran, "The D.C. Youth Orchestra Program and the Morale of the Public School Instrumental Music Teachers," July 16, 1971, in Arnez, *The Besieged Superintendent*, 310-320.
[47] *Ibid*.

In the months leading up to Sizemore's *Post* interview, the DCBOE fractured into two factions: a pro-Barry, pro-DCYOP coalition and a pro-Sizemore, anti-DCYOP group. On June 14, the DCBOE and Sizemore met to discuss whether to continue contracting the orchestra program to the FDCYO. Sizemore urged the board to reject the FDCYO. Barry was unmoved. He said, "I think that it is possible to publicly finance educational programs, so that they can be privately, through non-public organizations, administered." Barry succinctly encapsulated the fundamental ideological dispute raging between the superintendent and him. Sizemore insisted that public education was a civic good that had to remain public, more so in times of economic downturn. Barry argued that corporate private interests were a preferred option—privatizing the public sector was a positive good. Barry was practicing "coalition-based politics." Unfortunately, for his working-class constituents, Barry's coalition was with "white and black business leaders." As Arnez argues, Barry "supported white private interests in maintaining board contracts with the Friends of the D.C. Youth Orchestra."[48]

On July 8 the DCBOE approved a $151,000 contract for the FDCYO, over the objections of Sizemore and her board supporters Barbara Lett Simmons (elected in 1973) and Therman Evans (elected in 1973). The next day, Sizemore's ideological opponents pilloried her in the *Post*. Responding to Sizemore's comments that renewing the orchestra was a mistake, Barry retorted that saying, "if you're for the youth orchestra you're opposed to public education is putting a red herring in the game." Albert Rosenfield, no longer on the DCBOE but a strong ally of Barry's, told the *Post*, "all I know is that we have a good program and that we ought to leave

[48] Marion Barry, "Transcript of the Third Annual Meeting for Students, D.C. Board of Education Meeting," Washington, D.C., June 14, 1971, 1; Ronald Walters and Toni-Michelle C. Travis, eds., *Democratic Destiny and the District of Columbia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 74; Arnez, *The Besieged Superintendent*, 255.

it alone." The battle lines were drawn. The DCYOP became a lightning rod. The debate boiled down to the ongoing ideological debate: corporate management versus shared accountability.[49]

Instead of heeding the board's orders and drawing up the FDCYO's contract (which the board demanded by July 31), Sizemore suggested in a memo to create a bidding process for the orchestra contract. She ironically proposed that if the board insisted on outsourcing the orchestra, the school system should get the best deal possible by allowing for free-market competition. Sizemore argued that the DCBOE needed to improve its corporate practices by using competition between bidders to drive the price down. In this way, Sizemore tapped into the emerging neoliberal impulse of the DCBOE.[50]

A drastically different board received Sizemore's note. Barry and Swaim had resigned to run for the City Council. Without these opponents, Sizemore gleefully told the *Post*, "this board is a much more cooperative board…The old chairman [Barry] worked like a congressional chairman worked," implying that he was power hungry. Sizemore hoped that Virginia Morris, a former member of the D.C. Chamber of Commerce, and new DCBOE president, would be easier to work with. Rosenfield worried, "there's nobody on the board who's going to step to her [Sizemore]."[51]

Sizemore was wrong. The new DCBOE battled her in a big way. Morris's board immediately asserted itself. On August 13, the DCBOE voted 4-3 that Sizemore submit the FDCYO contract by August 19. More importantly, Raymond Kemp, a longtime Sizemore adversary, leaked to the *Post* that Sizemore had outsourced two previous educational contracts for teacher training and curriculum development totaling $422,445 without authorization from

[49] Marion Barry, "Transcript of the Fourteenth (Special) Meeting, D.C. Board of Education," Washington, D.C., July 8, 1974, 7; Richard Prince, "D.C. Youth Orchestra Contract Renewed," *Washington Post*, July 9, 1974, C1.
[50] Richard Prince, "D.C. Youth Orchestra Contract Renewed," *Washington Post*, July 9, 1974, C1.
[51] Richard Prince, "New Members May Alter School Panel," *Washington Post*, August 10, 1974, D1.

the DCBOE and without putting the contracts up for bidding.[52] Kemp charged Sizemore with insubordination, hypocrisy, and a power grab. He told the *Post* that the DCBOE had to "regain control" over the "educational process" in the D.C public schools. Kemp publically apologized for giving "carte blanche" to Sizemore. He declared that the "superintendent is a problem." What Kemp did not reveal was that one of the contracts, for just over $400,000, had been paid to Howard University to conduct teacher professional development.[53]

Sizemore responded that Kemp's slander was part of a larger attack launched by reactionaries against the changing school system. Disregarding the fact that she had blatantly ignored a direct DCBOE order and refused to create the FDCYO contract, Sizemore framed Kemp's defamation as a cheap attack against progressivism. She spun Kemp's mudslinging as an example of her pre-hiring prophecy coming true. Change generated conflict. First, Sizemore proclaimed that the two contracts questioned by Kemp were ordered by the DCBOE and did nothing to affect teachers. Her actions simply followed DCBOE precedent. Second, Sizemore told the *Post*, "the people [of Washington, D.C.] are being fooled by these four board members. The issue is not the power of the superintendency. The board can fire the superintendent. The issue is the power of the private [non- and for-profit] organizations and institutions in the powerful education lobby."[54]

Again the basic battle between corporate practices and shared accountability took center stage. The issue revolved around the role of private interests restructuring, and influencing, urban public education. Kemp, claiming Barry's mantle, presented contracting out portions of public education to private organizations as a necessity. Sizemore's actions, he argued, proved that

[52] Richard Prince, "Official Assails D.C. School Pacts," *Washington Post*, August 15, 1974, C1; Richard Prince, "Pay in Doubt on 2 Pacts For Schools," *Washington Post*, August 16, 1974, B1
[53] Richard Prince, "Official Assails D.C. School Pacts," *Washington Post*, August 15, 1974, C1.
[54] *Ibid*.

contrary to her public façade, she was in favor of pro-business regime politics. With a budget constantly in flux, a city barely scratching by, and schools that had yet to yield evidence of widespread improvement, contracting services, Kemp believed, made sense. The DCYOP was just the beginning. Sizemore remained steadfastly opposed. The two contracts under question, she said, were forced upon her by the DCBOE. Furthermore, they bolstered the public sector.

Sizemore preferred to conduct the DCYOP in house, allowing the District's central office to carefully control, manage, and operate it. Again, the irony was evident. Sizemore believed in decentralization but not at the expense of a district system. She believed in shared community accountability, but that did not nullify the role of a superintendent. The superintendent had the final word on what students the program served and what curriculum was offered. This protected the students. By contracting out the service, regulation was taken out of the hands of Sizemore and the central office. Although Sizemore could set some basic guidelines, the FDCYO had considerable leeway. The FDCYO could continue to marginalize poor and non-white students by quietly demanding private lessons and teaching only European music. Kemp, as the pro-growth mouthpiece of the DCBOE, presented the FDCYO as the only way for the D.C. school system to financially *and* educationally succeed. He had the votes. Sizemore did not.

By mid-September 1974, relations between the DCBOE and Sizemore had soured even more. Sizemore still stalled on the FDCYO contract (the board eventually bypassed Sizemore and signed the contract directly with the non-profit). Amidst this standoff, William Raspberry, an influential black columnist for the *Post*, devoted a series of columns to questioning the efficacy of Sizemore's reforms. To make matters worse, test results from the 1973-74 school year showed

the lowest reading and math scores in three years. Sizemore dismissed the results as "culturally biased," but important voices, like Raspberry, grew tired of that "cop-out explanation."[55]

The DCYOP crisis irrevocably ruined relations between the board and the superintendent. Practically the moment after the contract was officially signed, Sizemore, who was boycotting board meetings in protest, told Richard Prince that being an "effective superintendent was incompatible with the whipping boy role needed by future politicians." Julius Hobson, Jr., the board vice-president, told the newspaper, "for the last two months, I thought she wanted to be fired." Virginia Morris stated that Sizemore's inflammatory rhetoric and intransigent behavior "did a great deal to destroy" her relationship with the superintendent.[56]

Stagflation briefly placed the war between the superintendent and the DCBOE on the backburner. Congress slashed the budget for fiscal year 1975-76 while the estimated price of operations continued to spike. The cost of supplies skyrocketed. Sizemore publically admitted that the system's finances looked "pretty bleak." She pledged to ask Congress for emergency aid. With a huge budget deficit, Sizemore imposed a hiring freeze in an effort to save money. Her decision enraged parents and students. Uncontrollable fiscal constraints sullied her reputation. In November, Sizemore announced that she had to fire 211 teachers (cutting $9.2 million from the budget) in order to balance the books. The plan drew the ire of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). WTU president, William Simons, blasted decentralization by demanding that the superintendent cut the regional leaders to "save money." Implying that Sizemore's plans had

[55] Richard Prince, "Scores Drop in Read, Math," *Washington Post*, August 21, 1974, D1; William Raspberry, "Reading, Math, and 'Cultural Bias,'" *Washington Post*, August 26, 1974, A27; William Raspberry, "Test Results and Teaching Methods," *Washington Post*, August 28, 1974, A17; William Raspberry, "Tests Are the Keepers of the Gate," *Washington Post*, September 2, 1974, A27; Richard Prince, "School Chief, Board Clash Flares Again," *Washington Post*, September 2, 1974, C1.
[56] Richard Prince, "School Board Signs Contract for Orchestra," *Washington Post*, September 19, 1974, C4; Richard Prince, "School Chief, Board Split Is Widened," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1974, C1.

generated the problem, Simons posited, "the union feels teachers should not have to suffer for someone else's mistakes."[57]

The DCBOE sensed Sizemore's plummeting popularity after the proposed teacher cutback plan and supported Simons. Morris convened a public meeting headlined by the WTU president. In front of 350 onlookers, Simons roared, "No one seems to know what the hell is going on." Sizemore's cutback was counterintuitive: "You're talking about quality education and that begins with the relationship between the teacher and the student. We must put as many teachers as possible at the classroom level." Sizemore did not disagree. Unfortunately, she was faced with fiscal disaster. Her hands were tied. She could not control timing.[58]

The DCBOE took steps to further discredit the reeling superintendent. The board seized budgetary and spending control, rejected her decision to increase the role of PACTS in school decision-making, and denied her teacher cutback plan. The pro-Sizemore minority on the DCBOE—Barbara Simmons, Therman Evans, and John Warren (elected in 1974)—attacked the majority faction in the *Post*. Simmons said that the board majority was guilty of "sexism…racism…elitism…[and] classism." In a matter of months, Sizemore had gone from community darling to District enigma. The anger stemmed from the struggle over the DCYOP. Two different visions of reform clashed. Things were about to take a turn for the worst.[59]

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[57] Richard Prince, "Cut Back, City School Panel Told," *Washington Post*, October 5, 1974, A15; Richard Prince, "Rise Likely in Budget for Schools," *Washington Post*, October 23, 1974, B5; Barbara Bright-Sagnier, "School Systems' Dilemma: The Cost of Writing Climbs," *Washington Post*, October 8, 1974, C5; Richard Prince, "D.C. Payroll Snarls Rapped by Teachers," *Washington Post*, November 5, 1974, C1; Lee A. Daniels, "2 School Board Victors Call Parents 'Angry,'" *Washington Post*, November 7, 1974, C7; Richard Prince, "D.C. Teacher Shift Is Set for Midyear," *Washington Post*, November 8, 1974, C1; Richard Prince, "Schools Heavily in the Red," *Washington Post*, November 14, 1974, C1; J.Y. Smith, "Please from Anacostia: 'Give Us 5 Teachers,'" *Washington Post*, November 15 1974, C9; Richard Prince, "D.C. Schools May Ask Hill for Aid," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1974, C9; Martha Hamilton, "Teacher Cutback Plan Hit," *Washington Post*, December 1, 1974, D1.
[58] Richard Prince, "Board Bars Teacher Cutback," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1974, C1.
[59] Richard Prince, "Mrs. Sizemore Loses Power: Board Takes Control of Spending," *Washington Post*, December 7, 1974, A1; Martin Weil, "Sizemore Refuses Board Directive," *Washington Post*, December 11, 1974; Martha Hamilton, "Mrs. Sizemore's Try to Expand Panel Rebuffed," *Washington Post*, February 5, 1975, A24; Richard Prince, "Eliminating Teachers Board: Board Rejects Sizemore Plan," *Washington Post*, February 11, 1975, C3; Eric Wenworth, "Board Rift on Mrs. Sizemore Widens," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1975, C3; Ron Shaffer, "Sizemore Cites Board Rebuffs," *Washington Post*, March 20, 1975, C15; Richard Prince, "Board Held Harassing Mrs. Sizemore," *Washington Post*, December 19, 1974, D3.

Running from Radicalism

On April 4, Sizemore provided the keynote address at the annual meeting of the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA) in Washington. In front of seventy-five black academics, Sizemore proclaimed that Washington's "white power structure…seeks to starve the city financially." She aimed this remark not only at D.C.'s local government but at Congress, as well. She believed Congress purposefully granted D.C. home rule amidst economic crisis (by April 1975 Washington was $31 million in debt) and belittled the United States government for not doing enough to economically support the majority-black city. She believed that D.C. continued to be the Capitol's puppet and that home-rule was "a cruel hoax perpetrated on the citizens of the District." Powerful whites insured that that black governance was a flop. Sizemore's conclusion was simple: "a racist white culture will try to rid itself of black rule. White racists must prove that black leadership is immoral, incompetent, and inferior."[60]

Her second indictment was more incendiary than the first. She declared that the "black members of the D.C. school board" that opposed her were "duped by the whites." The DCBOE was majority African American, but Sizemore was outnumbered (with only Simmons and Evans consistently supporting her). Sizemore was unwilling to accept the reality of black regime politics. The black members of the DCBOE were not lackeys, rather they had a distinct ideology—modeled by Barry and reinforced by D.C.'s financial and urban crisis—that conflicted with Sizemore's shared accountability agenda. They fundamentally disagreed with the superintendent on the school system's administration. The corporate-bent of the DCBOE rang the death knell for the superintendent's program.[61]

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[60] Barbara Sizemore, "Education: Is Accommodation Enough?" *The Journal of Negro Education*, Volume 44, Number 3 (Summer, 1975), 233-246; Richard Prince, "Sizemore Assails Power Structure," *Washington Post*, April 5, 1975, B1; Editorial, "Mrs. Sizemore's Tirade," *Washington Post*, April 11, 1975, A26.
[61] *Ibid*.

Sizemore believed that the DCBOE had aligned itself with "white Washington" to achieve "the long-range plan" of luring "the young white middle class marrieds back into the city." The DCBOE sacrificed shared accountability in an attempt to prove to white gentrifiers that the system was stable. The DCBOE halted progressive reform and agreed to rely on a wave of whites seeking homes in the urban core. Once they settled in the city, these white newcomers would fix the schools on their own. Sizemore declared that the "white liberal" who was "supported by the former black board president" cultivated this scheme. This duo, Sizemore bellowed, "initiated…the blueprint for actions of the present policy-making majority of the D.C. Board of Education." The white liberal was Martha Swaim. The former black board president was, without a doubt, Marion Barry.[62]

Sizemore still resented Barry for his victory in the DCYOP quarrel and used her AHSA speech to pummel him. Sizemore argued that Barry's policies marginalized Washington's working-class and black residents and appealed to white intruders. In her mind, the former DCBOE president was responsible for:

> The abolition of tenure so that black teachers can be fired easily upon the return of whites to the city. The contracting out of sizable sums of money to white organizations and institutions for services to black students, especially in areas where black expertise is superior, *i.e.* dropouts and music. The election of supporters of this viewpoint to the school board. The promotion and maintenance of the idea that blacks are incompetent and/or inferior. The rotation of the superintendency so that there will be no continuity of effort toward the improvement of the quality of education for the black poor. The prevention of any change in the age-graded, monolingual, monocultural hierarchical structure of the public schools, which benefits affluent whites of European descent.[63]

Sizemore described black regime politics. When he headed the DCBOE, Barry attempted to improve the schools while contending with an abundance of forces—the urban crisis, stagflation, white flight—outside of his control. These circumstances cultivated in him a distinct

[62] *Ibid*.
[63] *Ibid*.

ideological perspective. Barry's vision for D.C.'s school system stressed corporate restructuring. He thought that given the financial straits of the city business influence and business practices could improve the schools. His reforms placed the private sector as the solution for the public sector. Brokering partnerships with powerful private organizations, deregulating central control, and streamlining education placed him firmly in the pro-business fold. Barry's DCBOE predecessors continued to walk on the path that he had forged.

The reaction to Sizemore's AHSA rant was swift and harsh. Barry said, "if she spent as much time teaching kids to read and write as she does attack people, the city would be much better off." Morris stated, "I am just stunned." The *Post* opined, "anyone who questions her policies or administration in any way, it seems, is serving the calculated cause of white racism." The editorial concluded, "if Mrs. Sizemore cannot recognize the insensitivity and wrongheadedness of her remarks or the damage that such statements can inflict on the entire community's efforts to improve its schools, she is not fit to continue in office." Raspberry suggested that Sizemore's "racial rhetoric is designed less to build success than to rationalize failure—including the superintendent's own."[64]

In late spring, the DCBOE held a closed-door meeting to evaluate Sizemore's tenure. Forty protestors marched in front of the District Building, holding placards that read "The School Board Must Go." They sang "We Shall Overcome." After four and a half hours, Morris announced that the board had voted 7-4 to initiate the firing of the superintendent. The central grievance cited by the DCBOE was the protracted controversy "over the D.C. Youth Orchestra."

[64] *Ibid*; William Raspberry, "Barbara Sizemore's Racial Rhetoric," *Washington Post*, April 23, 1975, A19.

The majority faction included three African Americans—Morris, Hobson, and Mason—and all of the board's white members—Kemp, Treanor, Elizabeth Cooper Kane, and Carol Schwartz.[65]

Sizemore's racially charged rhetoric in her AHSA speech prompted a fierce back-and-forth between the superintendent and the editors of the *Post*. In the wake of the DCYOP debacle, the *Post* had begun disseminating an anti-Sizemore slant. The *Post* editorialized that "the superintendent and concerned citizens [*i.e.* Sizemore supporters]" should "repudiate further efforts by some to stir up racial tensions on an issue that should not focus on the color of skin." Sizemore responded in a letter to the editor claiming, "the *Washington Post*…inflamed feelings by misrepresenting the speech [to the AHSA] to the public." Sizemore argued, "according to these editors, the disappearance of blacks from Southwest, Foggy Bottom, Georgetown, Capitol Hill, Adams Morgan and Dupont Circle is a coincidence of the economic condition, completely unplanned and certainly not conspiratory." Sizemore's sarcasm revealed her belief that the *Post* wanted D.C. to gentrify and slandered Sizemore in an effort to accelerate that process.[66]

Sizemore's letter to the editor galvanized her local supporters. On May 5, two hundred people rallied in support of the superintendent at the Montello Ingram Baptist Church. Yango Sawyer, an African American activist for prisoners' rights, said, "We have something to fight for and we're going to fight to keep her." William Jones, a black activist, told the audience, "we're not here asking that Mrs. Sizemore be given a chance. We're here to demand that the board cease its persecution of her." The next day, 125 Sizemore followers forced the DCBOE to cancel a meeting by shouting during the procedures. When Sizemore exited, she was greeted by jubilation. As she hugged her supporters, they chanted in unison "protected by the people."

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[65] Martha Hamilton and Athelia Knight, "Sizemore Evaluation Set Tonight," *Washington Post*, May 1, 1975, C1; Martha Hamilton, "Board Set to Fire Sizemore," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1975, A1; Martha Hamilton and Lee A. Daniels, "D.C. Supt. Sizemore Called Poor Manager," *Washington Post*, May 3, 1975, A1.

[66] Editorial, "The Move to Fire Barbara Sizemore," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1975, 38; Barbara Sizemore, "Letter to the Editor," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1975, 39.

Sizemore vowed to keep fighting. Morris, reached at home for comments, insisted that the DCBOE would receive police protection and then would fire the superintendent.[67]

The *Post* conducted a District-wide survey about community support for Sizemore. The reporters concluded that "by 3 to 1, District residents overwhelmingly oppose" the DCBOE's efforts to fire Sizemore. In total, 75% of Washingtonians approved of her. Unsurprisingly, the newspaper noted that Sizemore's "support is strongest among blacks" and "among those with low incomes." While the poll bolstered Sizemore's resolve, Morris commented that she was "not discouraged" in her effort to fire the superintendent.[68]

On June 1, after setbacks, cancelled meetings, demands for a police presence, and dozens of pro-Sizemore rallies, the DCBOE officially announced it would provide Sizemore with an opening hearing before firing her. In response, a fierce pro-Sizemore barrage exploded in the press. John Warren targeted Virginia Morris's "bias and prejudice" as reasons for the firing. Yango Sawyer called Morris "a black Hitler." Julius Hobson, Jr.'s constituents called him a "traitor" at a ward meeting. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference publically backed Sizemore, and Ralph Abernathy led a rally on her behalf. Meanwhile, the anti-Sizemore DCBOE faction asked Herman Benn, a retired judge from Suffolk, Virginia, to preside over the process.[69]

After two months of delays, the hearings began on August 1 under the watchful eye of almost fifty police officers. The proceedings attracted national attention. In addition to the *Post*, reporters from Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles were on hand. Jimmy Breslin, a noted New York-based columnist, wrote that during the hearing "the last thing anybody mentioned is the

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[67] Lee A. Daniels and Martin Weil, "Sizemore Rally Draws Over 200," *Washington Post*, May 5, 1975, C1; Lee A. Daniels and Martha Hamilton, "Closed Board Session Cancelled," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1975, C1.
[68] Martha Hamilton and Thomas Lippman, "Firing of Sizemore Opposed 3-1 in Poll," *Washington Post*, May 11, 1975, 1.
[69] Douglas B. Feaver and Martha Hamilton, "Sizemore Firing Set By Board," *Washington Post*, June 1, 1975, 1; Lee Daniels, "Sizemore Firing Action is Delayed," Washington Post, June 17, 1975, C2; "Citizens Rap 'Persecution of Sizemore,'" *Washington Post*, June 18, 1975, C6; Martha Hamilton, "SCLC Vows to Back Sizemore," *Washington Post*, June 19, 1975, B7; Martha Hamilton, "School Board Picks Judge, Sizemore Supporters Erupt," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1975, C1.

people who go to the schools." Breslin's observation confirmed an unspoken truth. The ideological battle between Sizemore and the board damaged the reputations of people on both sides, it embarrassed Washington, D.C., but worst of all, it hurt students. The school system was in limbo. Students were the biggest losers.[70]

As the hearing lurched on, the *Post* picked up where Breslin left off. The paper argued that if the imbroglio between Sizemore and the DCBOE was "written as a parody, it would be rejected as too far-fetched." The beginning of the school year was "approaching rapidly" and yet "this nonsense has made everything chaos: no schools have been painted…[the] central warehouse is empty, textbooks won't get in until October, teacher assignments still haven't been made." The entire system was mired in "a sorry state…immobilized and certainly demoralized by the petty politicking at the top." No longer did ideology drive the agenda of either side. The conflict had become a clash of competing personalities, devoid of the initial intellectual underpinnings. The original purpose had vanished.[71]

The hearings contained little value in and of themselves. Shouting matches between pro- and anti-Sizemore DCBOE members frequently disrupted proceedings. Ardent Sizemore supporters were repeatedly arrested for disturbing the peace. Herman Benn accused the DCBOE of breaching their contract with the superintendent. Rather than address the judge's concerns, the anti-Sizemore faction summarily fired Benn and replaced him with Herbert Reid, Sr., a law professor from Howard University. Sizemore continued to lob volleys at the board in the press, jabs that were always returned by her ideological opponents or the *Post's* editors. Barbara

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[70] Lee Daniels, "Sizemore Offered $50,000 to Quit," *Washington Post*, July 9, 1975, 1; Noel Epstein, "Sizemore Sets $46,666.66 as Price to Quit," *Washington Post*, July 22, 1975, A1; Noel Epstein and Stephen Lynton, "Sizemore Dispute Reaches Impasse," *Washington Post*, July 23, 1975, D6; Noel Epstein and Stephen Lynton, "Offer to Quit is Withdrawn by Sizemore," *Washington Post*, July 25, 1975, A1; Editorial, "Some Lessons in the Sizemore Case," *Washington Post*, July 30, 1975, A14; Martha Hamilton, "Sizemore Hearings Open Amid Disputes," *Washington Post*, August 2, 1975, 1; Ernest Holsendolph, "School Hearings Public in Capital," *New York Times*, August 3, 1975, 24; Jimmy Breslin, "In the Capital, a School Fuss Misses the Point," *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1975, D7.

[71] Editorial, "The Sorry State of the D.C. Schools," *Washington Post*, August 13, 1974, A12.

Simmons wrote a fiery letter to the editor that argued that the DCBOE was an "outlaw organization" and that the hearings demonstrated that Washington was "cloaked in colonialism." The hearing was chaotic.[72]

On October 8, the tragic comedy came to an anticlimactic end. After more than a month of hearings, Reid found that thirteen of the DCBOE's seventeen charges were sustained. In his seventy-four-page report, Reid zeroed in on Sizemore's decision during the DCYOP conflict not to draw up a contract. He argued, "Sizemore not only failed to do what she should have but that she had no intention of doing so." Her refusal to submit the paperwork for the DCYOP was a flagrant denial of her contractual obligations. Based upon Reid's conclusions, the DCBOE, unsurprisingly, voted 7-4 to fire the superintendent. She was the fourth superintendent fired in less than ten years. In a statement after hearing the verdict, Sizemore proclaimed that the board was "propelled by racism, sexism, duplicity, and chicanery."[73]

Conclusions

Barbara Sizemore's firing was over a year in the making. Although her hiring revealed deep ideological schisms in the DCBOE, Sizemore's early results provided hope. Preaching shared accountability, she rethought urban education in order to effect change in the schooling of the District's poor and non-white students. Through decentralization and PACTS, she offered community control; through multicultural and multilingual instruction, she offered relevance to the students; and through new assessments and grades grouped by ability, she offered a paradigm shift on accountability. Sizemore demanded excellence from the schools—she never shied away

[72] Martha Hamilton, "Sizemore Hearing 'Illegal,'" *Washington Post*, August 20, 1975, A1; Martha Hamilton, "Police Arrest 4 Supporters of Sizemore," *Washington Post*, August 21, 1975, A1; Martha Hamilton, "School Chief Defends Her Programs," *Washington Post*, August 28, 1975, C1; Martha Hamilton, "Board Votes New Action on Sizemore," *Washington Post*, August 29, 1975, C1; Martha Hamilton, "Clashes Flare at Hearings on Sizemore," *Washington Post*, August 30, 1975, B1; Martha Hamilton, "Sizemore Hearings Restart, 3 Arrested," *Washington Post*, September 9, 1975, C1; Barbara Lett Simmons, "The *Post's* Commentary on the Sizemore Case," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1975, A23.

[73] Martha Hamilton, "Sizemore Firing Approved," *Washington Post*, October 9, 1975, A1; Ernest Holsendolph, "Sizemore is Dismissed as Chief of Washington Schools," *New York Times*, October 10, 1975, 14; "Sizemore Fired by D.C. School Board," *Chicago Tribune*, October 10, 1975, 8.

from her belief that all of Washington's students could learn. But she argued that excellence was rooted in shared accountability—the entire community had to be invested and mobilized—and was not measured through high stakes standardized exams. Although Sizemore never quite articulated what her new measure for academic excellence would be in Washington, it was clear that tests were not an option.

The lessons of the Sizemore story are numerous and intertwined. First, Sizemore's superintendency was a lost promise for Washington, D.C.'s public school system. She proposed cutting-edge ideas, which had the potential to fundamentally alter perceptions of, and experiences in, D.C.'s schools. The DCBOE cut short her innovation. She never wielded the necessary control and autonomy to effect long-lasting change. The system that she was fired from did not educate poor and African American students any better than the one she had been hired to lead. Sizemore certainly deserves some of the blame for this failure. Her combativeness and her unwillingness to compromise certainly contributed to her marginalization. With that said, the board, from the outset, was never fully behind her. The DCBOE, specifically Barry, never gave Sizemore the chance to revolutionize the schools.

Second, the Sizemore story reveals the overpowering influence of timing. Sizemore's tenure coincided with the entrenched urban crisis. It coincided with the beginning of District home-rule, which completely reshaped local politics in the nation's capital. It coincided with the stagflation, which choked the appropriations that the city received from Congress and initiated budget crunches, inflation, and salary disputes. Sizemore took the reins of D.C.'s schools at a moment of tectonic shifts in the city's financial, demographic, and political landscape. As superintendent, Sizemore contended with this movement, but it also overwhelmed and constrained her. Decentralizing schools, for example, was made more complex by the lack of

funds, the various fledgling politicians interjecting their opinions into the fray, and rising costs for everything from pencils to teachers.

Lastly, the Sizemore story demonstrates the effect of black regime politics on urban education. The ideological cleavage between the superintendent and D.C.'s local political leaders derailed Sizemore's vision for the school system. In the post-Civil Rights Movement era, urban politicians, inspired and catapulted by the advances of the 1950s-60s, assumed public office. In power at the moment of financial disaster and determined to rescue cities on the brink of collapse, these politicians adopted pro-business policies that marginalized the urban working-class. The urban regime injected corporate tenets into city administration, seeking to deregulate and privatize the public sphere. This ideology seeped into public education. The schools, just like social and municipal services, became a proving ground for pro-business politics. The DCYOP crisis was rooted in this tendency.

During the Sizemore era, Marion Barry epitomized the black regime. As president of the DCBOE, Barry's education politics celebrated the private sector. He believed that the antidote for Washington's failing public schools could be culled from business interests. The DCYOP typified Barry's philosophy. He thought this non-profit organization could successfully operate a music program at a decreased cost. Removed from the influence of the central office and with a streamlined curriculum, Barry believed the DCYOP was a cheaper and more efficient option. Sizemore's vision, on the other hand, conflicted with the DCBOE president and his likeminded colleagues. She wanted to rebuild the schools, strengthening the system and solidifying the public sector. For her, the DCYOP challenged the fundamental importance of a district school system.

The DCBOE replaced Sizemore with Vincent Reed, a veteran of the D.C. public schools and the first black principal at the predominately white Wilson High School. Reed was Sizemore's antithesis. He divulged that he would not let the District's non-white students use "racism as a crutch." He insisted that structural obstacles were not an excuse for educational excellence. In addition, he argued that standardized tests were acceptable "as long as we let students know what they measured and what role they play." The *Post* labeled Reed an educational "traditionalist." In anti-Sizemore rhetoric, Reed, speaking to the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for the District of Columbia in December 1975, said, "we're not trying to do anything fancy."[74]

In March 1976, the DCBOE formally hired Reed as superintendent. He quickly rolled back Sizemore's remaining programs: he decreased the role of PACTS, eliminated the regional superintendent posts (undermining decentralization), and created a new high school with extensive tracking. Sizemore attacked Reed saying he was chosen by the DCBOE because he was "a person they feel will not challenge the system," and instead "turn it over to white people to control." Sizemore said Reed was a puppet "whose strings are held by wealthy white folks." "By 1980," she predicted, "there'll be no more Chocolate City." Washington, D.C.'s white population was growing (at roughly 30% in 1976). The gentrifiers were coming. The end of Sizemore's school reforms ushered them back in.[75]

The march to Michelle Rhee was officially underway.

[74] Lee Daniels, "Reed: 'Our Children Can Learn,'" *Washington Post*, November 17, 1975, A1; Linda Newton Jones, "Reed Says He'll Push Basic Skills," *Washington Post*, December 12, 1975, B3.
[75] Peter Milius and Martha Hamilton, "Reed Actions Are Assailed by Sizemore," *Washington Post*, March 20, 1976, E1.

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