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by

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This foundational study was designed to track the decline of urban Catholic parochial elementary schools in the former steel-production center of Youngstown, Ohio—a situation that I examine from historical, sociological, and philosophical perspectives. While my study employs standard historical research methods, it also features a strong theoretical dimension that draws on literature pertaining to American Catholic identity. The study will argue that Catholic disunity—a product of both sociological trends and religious reforms—played a significant role in the decline of urban parish schools.

While the fragmentation of U.S. Catholic identity has often been addressed in general studies of American Catholicism, it has been discussed less frequently in research concerning the decline of one of the Catholic community’s most iconic institutions: the urban parochial school. Hence, this study of Youngstown’s parochial schools draws upon two distinct bodies of literature—dealing with American Catholic identity and American Catholic education, respectively—in an effort to identify and interpret factors contributing to the decline of a once robust system of parochial education.

**Key words:** Urban education, private religious schools, Catholic schools, nonpublic schools, minority groups and education.
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Thomas G. Welsh, Jr.

April 2, 2009, Kent, Ohio
DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to the memory of Sister Virginia McDermott, O.S.U., a veteran religious educator who took a strong interest in this project. Among others, Sister Virginia agreed to discuss her experiences as an instructor at Immaculate Conception Elementary School and shared her views on the likely future of urban Catholic education. Her sanguine response to the dramatic transformation of her religious community in the decades since Vatican II served as a testament to her religious faith as well as her openness to change.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

On June 4, 1943, an area of northeastern Ohio—including Stark, Columbiana, Mahoning, Portage, Trumbull, and Ashtabula counties—was “canonically erected” as the Diocese of Youngstown. The new diocese, which comprised 3,404 square miles, featured several major manufacturing and steel-production centers as well as large stretches of agricultural territory. In *The March of the Eucharist from Dungannon*, a commemorative volume published eight years later, the Diocese of Youngstown claimed 110 churches, three hospitals, and two schools of nursing operated by religious orders. The volume’s author, the Most Reverend James A. McFadden, bishop of Youngstown, wrote with evident conviction that “[t]he Diocese of Youngstown is well established and is developing a vigorous Catholic life in opposition to the evil forces which would destroy our country.”¹ Among the instruments the diocese relied upon to develop this “vigorous Catholic life” was a parallel educational system comprising 50 parochial elementary schools with about 11,560 students enrolled.²

An especially vibrant pattern of parochial education could be found in the diocesan center of Youngstown, which alone boasted 18 parish elementary schools as well as a high school and junior high school. (A second Catholic high school opened in

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1954.) In 1961, a local newspaper reported that “[o]ne out of every three children in Youngstown will attend a Catholic elementary school or high school in September, as school boards estimate 13,318 in Catholic schools in the city.” However, in Youngstown, as elsewhere, an era of expansion overseen by “builder bishops” gave way to a long period of contraction and uncertainty. Urban Catholic educators were confronted “with crisis after crisis that shook the very foundation of American Catholic education and caused Catholic educators to question the viability and survival of the parish schools they had worked so hard to preserve.” Hence, by the spring of 2006, the local media reported that the last two Catholic elementary schools operating in Youngstown’s center city were closing their doors, leaving only one parish school within the municipal limits. Three years later, in 2009, the diocese, as a whole, retained no more than 36 parish schools, which were spread across Mahoning, Trumbull, Columbiana, Portage, Ashtabula, and Stark counties. In February of 2009, Youngstown Bishop George V. Murry reported that the Diocese of Youngstown had 40,000 fewer Catholics than it did in 2002 and called for an “orderly downsizing of the diocese.”

3 “Catholic Schools to Have Third of City’s Students,” The Youngstown Vindicator, July 14, 1961, 7.
5 Harold Gwin, “Final bell tolls for two schools: There were some long faces as children left St. Matthias on Tuesday,” The Vindicator, June 7, 2006, B-1.
bishop acknowledged that a “strategic plan” to deal with the situation would involve the closure of churches and schools throughout the diocese.\(^7\)

The expansion and decline of Catholic elementary schools in this Midwestern industrial town is an example of a larger phenomenon that is related to the question of Catholic identity in the United States. Therefore, an examination of Youngstown’s urban parish schools—from the post-World War II era to the present—will shed light on a significant national phenomenon: the fragmentation of American Catholic identity. While the fragmentation of U.S. Catholic identity has been addressed in general studies of American Catholicism, it has been discussed less frequently in research concerning the decline of one of the Catholic community’s most iconic institutions: the urban parochial school. Hence, this study of Youngstown’s parochial schools will draw upon two distinct bodies of literature (dealing with American Catholic identity and American Catholic education, respectively) in an effort to identify and interpret factors that contributed to the decline of a once vibrant system of parochial education.

The so-called “crisis” in the American Catholic church should be a familiar issue to any casual purveyor of the U.S. media. Over the past 20 years, it has been difficult to access a newspaper, television, or online news outlet without encountering some instance of discord or scandal within the U.S. Catholic community. In recent years, the polarizing actions and statements of Pope Benedict XVI have underscored an overall impression of fragmentation. In 2006, the Pope’s decision to read aloud a 14\(^{th}\)-century description of  

\(^7\) Ibid.
Islam as “evil and inhuman” drew criticism from Muslim leaders and raised questions about his commitment to interfaith dialogue.8 Less than a year later, in July 2007, the pope angered Protestants when he approved a document indicating that “other Christian community are either defective or not true churches and Catholicism provides the only true path to salvation.”9 A New York Times editorial on Benedict XVI’s earlier statements regarding Islam described him as “a doctrinal conservative” whose “greatest fear appears to be the loss of a uniform Catholic identity, not exactly the best jumping-off point for tolerance or interfaith dialogue.”10 The Pope’s firm stance against the ordination of homosexual priests—along with his refusal to discuss issues such as clerical celibacy or the ordination of women—has simultaneously alienated liberal American Catholics and rallied conservative ones.11

Several years earlier, in 2002, polarization of opinion among U.S. Catholics was even more apparent, as the church was rocked by widespread allegations of sexual abuse by members of the clergy. While revulsion over the nature of the allegations transcended ideological boundaries, liberals and conservatives responded differently to the crisis. Many liberals condemned the U.S. hierarchy’s “culture of secrecy” and accused diocesan administrators of placing thousands of children at risk by suppressing reports of sexual

abuse by priests. Others went so far as to raise questions about the long-term effects and implications of priestly celibacy.\textsuperscript{12} Meanwhile, leading conservatives (led by then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger) blamed the abuse scandal on a supposed prevalence of homosexuals in the American priesthood.\textsuperscript{13} Conservative Catholics also railed against what they termed as the permissive moral standards of mainstream U.S. society, citing them as a contributing factor in abuse cases. Overall, conservatives were more likely to accuse the U.S. media of anti-Catholic bias than to criticize the responses of bishops and other administrators who handled reports of abuse.\textsuperscript{14} In this climate of sometimes hostile disagreement, traditional images of a cohesive Catholic subculture appeared more remote than ever.\textsuperscript{15}

Amid the flurry of criticism directed at U.S. Catholic institutions in the wake of the clergy abuse scandal, many observers would have been surprised to learn that, five decades earlier, the U.S. media had generated almost exclusively positive images of U.S. Catholic culture. No less surprising is the fact that a large percentage of American Catholics accepted the authenticity of these idealized images. As historian and political analyst Garry Wills writes: “Nuns were played by the likes of Ingrid Bergman, Loretta Young, Celeste Holm, and Alida Valli. The priests were Barry Fitzgerald, Bing Crosby, Spencer Tracy, Frank Sinatra, and Montgomery Clift. The TV face of Catholicism was

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{13} Ibid., 213-214.
\end{thebibliography}
Fulton Sheen, completed with an angel as the eraser boy for his blackboard.”¹⁶ Within a decade, such positive characterizations had all but vanished. As Wills observed, “By the 1960s, this saccharine view yielded to new memories peopled with coercive nuns and creepy priests, not a single Bing Crosby type among them.”¹⁷ It was as though the price of Catholic assimilation into mainstream culture involved a sweeping disavowal of the Catholic “ghetto” and all for which it had stood. That said, negative characterizations of the “old” Catholic subculture failed to resonate for all American Catholics. Even a critical observer like Wills mused, “It was a ghetto, but not a bad ghetto to grow up in.”¹⁸ Indeed, the “ghetto,” with its residual “Old World” values, often smoothed the path for European immigrants as they struggled to accommodate themselves to a radically different culture. Catholic writer James Flanigan, in a reflection on the controversial film, *Doubt*, which deals with the issue of clerical abuse, observes that religious figures played a largely constructive role in the 1950s Bronx neighborhood of his upbringing. “The teachers [at neighboring Catholic schools] knew that their role was to bring their charges into the new land and the new society, ‘secular’ though that might be,” Flanigan writes. “It is poetic but accurate to say that the clergy and religious provided a passage to America for those students.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.
For all its insularity, the traditional urban Catholic enclave reinforced among its inhabitants a strong sense of collective identity. Through participation in a vast network of “replicated and parallel institutions,” U.S. Catholics were shielded from assimilation into mainstream American culture.\(^{20}\) Among the Catholic subculture’s most notable normative institutions was the urban parish school, which was occasionally praised but more frequently criticized by “ghetto” alumni.\(^{21}\) In more recent years, however, the steady decline of the urban parochial school has prompted a growing number of American Catholics to re-evaluate the importance of this institution.\(^{22}\) For many, the decline of urban parochial schools is merely one element in a demoralizing vista of institutional decay. “I think some of the anxieties and difficulties we see and feel express our sense that the infrastructure of the church, like that of the country, is going,” observes *Commonweal* editor Margaret O’Brien Steinfels, writing more than a decade ago. “For the past twenty-five years, we have lived on all the good things that people have done for the past two centuries, and I think we are simply unclear whether we are maintaining that kind of patrimony to pass on to the next generation.”\(^{23}\) For Catholics like Steinfels, the “identity question” has become central. “It has been raised about Catholic colleges and universities, about Catholic hospitals, about grammar schools where non-Catholic

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., 211-212.

children are educated,” she notes. “It is raised when we look at the declining number of priests and women religious, the decline of religious orders, the appointment of bishops seemingly committed to restoring a notion of authority that is not likely to be successful, at least in this country.”

What led to this impasse? Liberals and conservatives, despite their strongly held differences, appear to agree on one thing: a turning point in U.S. Catholic history came with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which culminated in the banning of the Tridentine (Latin) Mass and the weakening of longstanding cultural markers that sharply differentiated U.S. Catholics from other Americans. These reforms contributed to—or dovetailed with—a period characterized by divergent conceptions of Catholic identity and strong disagreement over the purposes, even the necessity, of Catholic education. Charles R. Morris, in his well-regarded journalistic treatment of U.S. Catholic history, notes that the “contested legacy” of Vatican II had profound implications for both Catholic identity and parochial education. Morris argues that, while the council “expressly did not approve the use of the vernacular in the entire Mass,” advocates of change took steps to ensure that “the use of the vernacular became general throughout the Church within just a few years of the Council’s close.” More significantly, and to the discomfort of many conservatives, “elementary school catechistics almost immediately reflected the most liberal versions of doctrinal and ethical teachings, as if they had been

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24 Ibid.
25 Morris, American Catholic, 324.
automatically endorsed by the Council.”\(^{26}\) Within a short period of time, the face of American Catholicism was transformed. Historian Philip Gleason, S. J., notes that the post-conciliar reforms reflected a wholesale rejection of Catholic “medievalism,” a development that influenced approaches to ethics, theology, and education as well as liturgical art, music, and architecture.\(^{27}\)

Catholic intellectuals were especially divided on the religious impact of the post-conciliar reforms. The liberal Wills, in his celebrated reflection on Catholic disunity, *Bare Ruined Choirs*, questions whether the reforms went far enough and describes pre-Vatican II religious practice as “pretense.”\(^{28}\) Wills criticizes an approach to religion that, in his view, depended heavily on symbolism while leaving little room for a sophisticated understanding of theology. “Faith bound one’s whole life up in ties of communal teaching, habits, discipline, authority, childhood assumptions, personal relationships,” Wills writes of the pre-conciliar church.\(^{29}\) Meanwhile, the traditionalist James Hitchcock, in his *Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism*, laments a “weakening of belief” in the wake of the council.\(^{30}\) Observers on both sides of the ideological divide, however, appeared to recognize that the reforms had contributed to the demise of a clearly defined Catholic subculture. “We spoke a different language from the rest of men—not only the actual Latin memorized when we learned to ‘serve Mass’ as altar boys,” Wills writes.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
\(^{28}\) Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs*, 268-269.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 32-33.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 261.
“We also had odd bits of Latinized English that were not parts of other six-year-old’s vocabulary—words like ‘contrition’ and ‘transubstantiation.’”

He adds that, for young American Catholics, “[t]o know the terms was to know the thing, to solve the problem.”

Such feelings of certainty were no longer evident among U.S. Catholic youth by the late 1960s. As theologian Chester Gillis points out, the “successful assimilation” of U.S. Catholics that came in the wake of Vatican II resulted in a “loss of group identity, lack of common vision, detachment from specific marks of identification, and appropriation of practices and values esteemed by the common culture, whether or not they adhere to Catholic principles.”

Likewise, Wills observes that, while the council “removed some ugly excrescences from the church’s long history,” it also resulted in the elimination of “many of the things that gave Catholics their sense of identity—the Latin Mass, the Friday abstinence from meat, the morning fast before communion, mandatory Sunday church attendance, mandatory annual communion (‘the Easter duty’), traditional liturgical music, the Legion of Decency (rating movies, and the Index of Forbidden Books.”

Moreover, parish school classrooms themselves became ideological battlegrounds, as parents and educators argued over aspects of the curriculum. Catholic educators appeared bereft of what Gleason called a “distinctive vision of an alternative culture to which the modern world should be converted,” and some promoted a “value-

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31 Ibid., 16.
32 Ibid.
33 Chester Gillis, Roman Catholicism in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 278-279.
35 Gleason, Keeping the Faith, 33.
based curriculum” that offended traditionalists, many of whom contended that parochial schools weren’t “doing enough to insure that their students had specifically Catholic values.”36 Meanwhile, the council’s theme of social engagement encouraged some Catholic educators to envision urban parish schools as vehicles of social uplift for urban youth, regardless of religious affiliation—a development that fueled an internal debate over the ultimate purpose of Catholic education.37

The debate over Vatican II was hardly the only controversy sending shock waves through the U.S. Catholic community in the wake of the 1960s. U.S. Catholics were deeply divided in their responses to the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the feminist movement, and the legalization of abortion. Catholic historian Mark S. Massa observes that rising levels of discord among Catholics represented a sharp departure from the atmosphere of the immediate postwar era. He adds that, while the mainstream Protestant community “had undergone a series of traumatic identity crises during the first third of the twentieth century over its ability to remain the ‘cultural faith,’” the U.S. Catholic Church maintained a “survival of innocence.”38 Massa writes that the U.S. Catholic community “had weathered both the Great Depression and the traumas of the world wars with its self-confidence and corporate spirit intact, proclaiming itself (and being viewed by others) as far more self-assured, cohesive, and vibrant than the much

larger and more established Protestant mainstream that had piped the cultural tune for three centuries.”

He attributes the “survival of innocence” he discerned within the Catholic community to the church’s anomalous sociological position. The U.S. Catholic Church, given its role as “both the largest religious group in the land” and “something of a distrusted outsider,” was not obliged to “make sense of the great intellectual and social crises of the twentieth century as it made no claims to speak for the culture as a whole.” Therefore, while American Protestants “fought like theological cats and dogs over evolution, biblical criticism, and the uniqueness of Jesus as savior,” their Catholic counterparts “worried over who would speak at the next Communion breakfast and what Catholic team would win the city-wide parochial high school championship.”

Within two decades, however, debates over values and educational goals among Catholics reflected not only larger societal forces, but also those at play within the Catholic community itself. Furthermore, disagreement over fundamental aspects of Catholic identity became increasingly pronounced over time. “The Catholic Church is on a fateful journey, and the gathering momentum is astonishing,” writes journalist John Cornwell. “Reminiscent of a river dividing at an estuary, the fragmentations, in a process

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 7-8.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 8.
of action and interaction, are reshaping the landscape of Catholicism.”\(^{43}\) Cornwell attributes this development, in part, “to a profound cultural change and the collapse of traditions, the rapid adoption of ideas under the influence of mass media, the mobility of people and money, the disappearance of ‘jobs for life,’ and the alteration and erosion of values and principles.”\(^{44}\)

Cornwell, a Briton, has been one of scores of international observers to comment on the apparent “identity crisis” facing Catholics worldwide. Others have focused specifically on the American scene. Writing in 2003, former \textit{New York Times} correspondent and \textit{Commonweal} editor Peter Steinfels observes that younger Catholics “are distanced from parish life and church institutions, have little sense of church authority, and are not sufficiently versed in the distinctive symbols, narratives, and vocabulary of Catholicism to articulate to themselves a coherent Catholic identity.”\(^{45}\) More recently, in 2008, Kerry Kennedy, daughter of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, notes that the institutional church in America appears unable to inspire confidence among a large percentage of Catholics. “Religion today is at a time of enormous change,” Kennedy writes. “When addressing such issues as immigration, the mishandling of the pedophile crisis, the notion of a just war in the post-9/11 world, the suppression of women, the intolerance of homosexuality, birth control, abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research, along with a host of other issues…Catholics express anguish, disappointment,

\(^{44}\) Ibid.  
\(^{45}\) Steinfels, \textit{A People Adrift}, 209.
frustration, anger, and despair.”

Frustration with Catholic leadership was exacerbated during the lead up to the 2008 presidential election, when influential Catholics—including a number of bishops—criticized co-religionists who supported then presidential candidate Barack Obama. In May 2008, Kansas City Archbishop Joseph Naumann urgently recommended that Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius, a close advisor to candidate Obama, decline the sacrament of Communion—a statement that created a firestorm within the U.S. Catholic community.

Any discussion of the fragmentation of U.S. Catholic identity, however, should include a brief overview of characteristics associated with the traditional model—one that held sway for nearly two decades after World War II, only to disintegrate in the mid-1960s. The following characteristics were among the more salient features of traditional U.S. Catholic identity: well-defined cultural markers, commonly shared values, clearly defined collective goals, common neighborhoods, common political affiliation, high levels of within-group altruism, united opposition to outside criticism, reluctance to engage with other religious organizations, and hierarchal notions of authority. This study does not argue for the resurrection of these characteristics of traditional Catholic identity, a project that is neither possible nor entirely desirable. Rather, this study contends that a widely embraced model of U.S. Catholic identity

48 Morris, American Catholic, 257.
became increasingly untenable. Furthermore, this study argues that the void created by the retreat of the previous model has not yet been filled by a model of identity capable of inspiring universal acceptance among U.S. Catholics. Consequently, U.S. Catholic identity has become a matter of passionate debate within an increasingly pluralistic community.

Significantly, the collapse of a more traditional model of American Catholicism was one of many developments that adversely affected Youngstown’s pattern of urban parish schools. Therefore, this examination of declining urban parochial schools shows how controversies within the U.S. Catholic community synthesized with post-World War II trends that contributed to the erosion of a wide variety of urban institutions. It takes into account some of the major social, political and economic trends of the postwar era, and their impact on Youngstown’s urban parochial schools. These trends contributed to—and in some cases, were driven by—a steep decline in traditional Catholic identity. Although this study is limited to 18 urban parochial elementary schools that operated in Youngstown, the developments identified in this research are representative of those found in urban centers around the country. Such trends include demographic change, deindustrialization, and urban depopulation. If the trends examined in this study affected both urban parochial and public elementary schools, their impact on Catholic schools was compounded by deepening fissures within the Catholic community. Hence, the study describes how these trends adversely affected Youngstown’s urban parish schools, while analyzing the ways in which they facilitated—and in some cases, reflected—the fragmentation of Catholic identity. Historical analysis of these urban trends, and their
impact on Youngstown’s parish schools, draws upon sources including census data, public records, diocesan and parish records, interviews, and secondary source material. Overall, this study has been designed to highlight the manner in which urban change and internal reform within the Catholic Church coincided to weaken a separatist model of U.S. Catholicism—a model that had inspired “a bold, expensive, and extremely successful strategy of creating a virtually self-contained urban Catholic social structure.”

To appreciate the severity of what happened to Youngstown’s parochial school system, one must examine its earlier history of rapid expansion. Therefore, the second chapter of this study, titled “Rise of a Parochial School System,” offers a concise historical overview of the city’s parochial schools. The chapter examines factors that led to the development of a robust pattern of Catholic parochial schools, including the prevalence of ethnic and religious tension within the city during the first half of the 20th century. Among others, it shows how religious identity was often deeply entwined with ethnic identity among Youngstown’s Catholics. This interdependence fueled the rise of so-called “national parishes” and contributed to the establishment of parochial schools that served the needs of specific ethnic groups. While ethnic divisions within Youngstown’s Catholic community could easily have prevented the rise of a system of shared values and goals, members of national parishes nevertheless participated in a broader “Catholic” culture. This culture was characterized by, among others, the

49 Morris, American Catholic, 257.
celebration of the Tridentine (Latin) Mass and the presence of commonly held social and political values. The Catholic community’s remarkable capacity to act collectively (in spite of ethnic divisions) was reflected in its establishment of a powerful voting bloc and its development of parallel urban institutions, including parish schools. Not surprisingly, these collective achievements reinforced the tendency of some critics to view the U.S. Catholic community in monolithic terms. As late as the 1940s and early 1950s, warnings that Catholicism posed a threat to democratic institutions emanated from the U.S. liberal establishment. Naturally, such instances of anti-Catholic fervor encouraged U.S. Catholics to see themselves as perennial outsiders in American society. As this chapter shows, the seemingly contradictory forces at play within Youngstown’s Catholic community—along with external factors such as anti-Catholic sentiment—bolstered a broad commitment to urban parochial schools among local Catholics.

The third chapter, titled “‘The Immaculate’: One School’s Experience,” tracks the progress of Immaculate Conception Elementary School, from its inception in the late 19th century to its closure in 2006. Readers will follow the parish school’s development as it moves from a vibrant, though insulated, Irish-American institution to a “mission school” dependant on fundraising initiatives to provide educational services to mainly non-White and non-Catholic students. A local newspaper observed that, by the late 1990s, the majority of Immaculate Conception’s students were “black, non-Catholic and from low-
income families.” Significantly, as the chapter shows, the “transformation” of Immaculate Conception School was made possible, in large part, by post-conciliar re-evaluations of Catholic education, which emphasized social justice initiatives that looked beyond the traditional borders of the Catholic community. Given its long history, and the variety of urban trends that affected the school, Immaculate Conception serves as an ideal choice for a case study intended to shed light on the rise and fall of the community’s pattern of parochial schools. Taken together, “Rise of a Parochial School System” and “The Immaculate’: One School’s Experience” highlight the unique circumstances in which Youngstown’s parish schools developed and, eventually, declined.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation, “Urban Exodus: Depopulation and Urban Parish Schools,” examines the impact of Youngstown’s steep population losses upon the city’s parish schools. Some observers have noted that, in many other urban centers, the effects of depopulation were postponed by circumstances arising from the organizational structure of the U.S. Catholic diocese. Catholic historian John T. McGreevy contends that the geographical nature of the Catholic parish was responsible for the relatively small percentage of White Catholic urban dwellers who abandoned American cities in the postwar era. “Crucially, the parish was immovable,” McGreevy writes. “While Jewish synagogues and Protestant churches could sell their buildings both to recover equity and to relocate away from the expanding African-American ghetto, Catholic parishes and their property were registered in the name of the diocese and by definition served the

52 Ron Cole, “Does bell for pupils also toll for school? The school has opened early; the new principal’s attitude is that it won’t be closed,” The Vindicator, August 30, 2002, B-1.
people living within the parish boundaries.”\textsuperscript{53} He observes that even national parishes “tended to have geographical boundaries” and operated “on the assumption that the vast majority of church members would live in the immediate area.”\textsuperscript{54} McGreevy argues that the continuing presence of churches, parish schools, and other Catholic institutions in the center city encouraged urban Catholics to view their neighborhoods as “holy ground”—that is, sacred territory which required their maintenance and protection.\textsuperscript{55} In time, however, more and more Catholics found their way to the suburbs, leaving behind financially strapped urban parishes and parochial schools, many of which were forced to close.\textsuperscript{56}

Given that urban depopulation in Youngstown was exacerbated (in a dramatic way) by deindustrialization, the fourth chapter goes on to examine the ways in which the collapse of the urban industrial sector affected the city’s parish schools. Youngstown, along with much of the industrial northeastern United States, witnessed a devastating economic downturn in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, some observers have argued that the community’s overwhelming dependence on steel manufacturing ensured that Youngstown would be more severely affected by the “Rust Belt” phenomenon than many other communities in northeastern Ohio. The 1977 closure of the primary plant of the community’s dominant steel producer, Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, ruined

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 24-25.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 83-84.
the livelihoods of thousands of urban dwellers.\footnote{Thomas G. Fuechtmann, \textit{Steeples and Stacks: Religion and Steel Crisis in Youngstown} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.} At the same time, subsequent (and catastrophic) increases in unemployment compounded pre-existing trends toward suburbanization and demographic change. In combination, these forces contributed to what many observers have described as the growing isolation of urban neighborhoods.

Naturally, urban economic decline had far-reaching consequences for urban parish schools. Urban Catholic institutions were hit especially hard, as depopulation and deindustrialization fueled the concurrent trend of shrinking enrollment and contributed to a steep decline in parish donations. Meanwhile, the loss of thousands of industry-related jobs depleted Youngstown’s beleaguered White, ethnic, working-class neighborhoods—the ground upon which urban parish schools had once flourished. McGreevy, among others, argues that heavily Catholic urban neighborhoods once reinforced traditional religious and ethnic allegiances among urban dwellers.\footnote{McGreevy, \textit{Parish Boundaries}, 22-28.} Whether conceived of as “sacred space” or as a re-creation of the European village in an American urban setting, the urban Catholic enclave is widely understood as a preserve of traditional social and religious values. McGreevy notes that urban Catholic neighborhoods were characterized by “an institutional structure of enormous magnitude.”\footnote{Ibid., 15.} Most parishes in northern urban centers “included a church (often of remarkable scale), a parochial school, a convent, a rectory, and occasionally, ancillary gymnasiums or auditoriums.”\footnote{Ibid.} Hence, the erosion of

\footnote{Ibid.}
urban Catholic enclaves deprived U.S. Catholics of their traditional milieu, a development that helped weaken a longstanding model of U.S. Catholic identity.

The fifth chapter of this study, “Demographic Change and Urban Parish Schools,” examines the material and ideological consequences of demographic change as it pertained to urban parochial elementary schools. Many observers of Catholic education have argued that the sharp decline in the urban White population—and subsequent rise in the non-White population—that began in the wake of World War II affected urban Catholic elementary schools on a variety of levels. The fact that few African Americans were Roman Catholic sharply reduced the chances that Blacks would play a dominant role in the financial maintenance of urban Catholic institutions such as parish schools. Although Black students became significant clients of urban parish schools in cities throughout the northern United States, the nominal tuition fees that many schools charged fell short of covering operational expenses, and these institutions often depended heavily on diocesan support. In Youngstown, relatively few African Americans were enrolled at urban parochial schools until the 1980s; and some Black students eventually shifted to charter schools and Protestant denominational schools following a rise of urban educational alternatives. Hence, sweeping demographic change ensured that the

61 Bryk et al., Catholic Schools and the Common Good, 52.
63 Dan Trevis, “2 charter schools OK’d for the city: The new schools, along with Eagle Heights Academy and Youngstown Community School, have a total enrollment of about 1,200 pupils,” The Vindicator, April 14, 1999, A-1.
majority of Youngstown’s parish schools would lose their traditional (largely White) patrons, a development that contributed to their growing insolvency.

Significantly, a number of urban parish schools responded to demographic change by broadening their mission and reaching out (in unprecedented ways) to non-White and non-Catholic students. In Youngstown, two urban parish schools—Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s—became associated with this trend. Members of the Catholic community, of course, differed in their responses to demographic change. In 1976, the diocesan school board, despite the vocal support of clerical leaders, narrowly defeated a proposal to implement a diocesan-wide tax that would benefit struggling center-city schools like Immaculate Conception, an institution that enrolled a large percentage of non-White and non-Catholic students. Not surprisingly, the hierarchy and laity were frequently at odds in their responses to this phenomenon. In communities throughout the country, episcopal leaders supported the church’s continued institutional presence in the center city and voiced a commitment to the education of urban students, regardless of race or religion. With the advent of school desegregation, the Diocese of Youngstown cautioned White urban residents against treating Catholic schools as “havens” from racially integrated public schools. In other settings, similar public positions by church leaders—along with diocesan support for parish schools that served

64 Marie Aikenhead, “Board Refuses School Funding: Votes Against Diocese Inner City Aid,” The Youngstown Vindicator, November 17, 1976, 1.
65 Bryk et al., Catholic Schools and the Common Good, 52.
mainly non-White, non-Catholic students—infamed some White members of the laity, who accused the hierarchy of being “out of touch” with their concerns. Ultimately, the local Catholic community failed to develop a unified response to urban demographic change.

The debate over support for urban parochial schools that no longer served traditional constituents became more complicated in the 1980s, when a series of high-profile empirical studies suggested that Catholic schools, especially those in urban settings, were more effective than public schools at boosting levels of academic achievement among students of minority backgrounds. Subsequent research suggested that urban Catholic schools fostered a sense of community that was conducive to lower dropout rates and the effective promotion of civic values. Taken as a whole, these conclusions raised questions about the public school system’s capacity to achieve one of its fundamental goals: the establishment of a common civic space for students of diverse backgrounds. Many Catholic educators, however, criticized the use of such findings to serve a conservative political agenda. Catholic educators James Youniss and John J. Convey, for instance, accuse educational researchers of complicity “in allowing Catholic schools to be used for ulterior purposes,” i.e., the promotion of a “school choice” agenda.67 Similarly, Youniss and Convey write that a “narrow focus on the Catholic versus public school achievement question directs attention away from more fundamental

issues about the survival and future structure of Catholic schools.”Ironically, growing support for urban educational alternatives—a partial byproduct of contested research that praised the effectiveness of urban Catholic schools—produced crippling challenges for urban parish schools that were already economically troubled. In Youngstown, one urban pastor publicly drew a connection between the closure of a parish school in the late 1990s and the establishment of a charter school in the same neighborhood.

The sixth chapter, “Out of These Ashes: Vatican II and Catholic Identity,” explores the debate over the values and educational mission of parish schools, which arose among participants in Catholic education beginning in the 1960s. American Catholics, as noted, were scarcely immune to changes that transformed—and polarized—mainstream U.S. society during the same period. Catholics, however, no longer had the luxury of retreating into a comfortable sanctuary of traditional values and practices, given that the Catholic Church was in a state of flux. Although numerous factors contributed to the unraveling of what might be described as an “American Catholic consensus,” this development was crystallized by the reforms of Vatican II. Anthony S. Bryk and his co-authors write that the Second Vatican Council “has been aptly described as a paradigm shift from medievalism to postmodernity in the images of the Church and its relationship with the world.” Unquestionably, the scope of issues addressed at the council was nothing less than breathtaking. As John W. O’Malley observes, the council “dealt with

68 Ibid., 2-3.
71 Bryk et al., Catholic Schools and the Common Good, 46.
the use of the organ in church services; the place of Thomas Aquinas in the curriculum of seminaries; the legitimacy of stocking nuclear weapons; the blessing of water used for baptisms; the role of the laity in the church’s ministries; the relationship of bishops to the pope; the purposes of marriage; priests’ salaries; the role of conscience in moral decision-making; the proper clothing (or habit) for nuns; the church’s relationship to the arts; marriage among deacons; translations of the Bible; the boundaries of dioceses; the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of worshipping with non-Catholics; and so, almost, it might seem, into infinity.”

The most relevant of the conciliar documents for U.S. parochial education was *The Declaration on Christian Education*. Although this document was largely a restatement of the church’s traditional commitment to religious education, it was broadly interpreted to conform to the council’s over-arching theme of social engagement. The U.S. National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), in response to the council’s recommendations on education, issued a directive of its own. In 1972, the NCCB’s statement, *To Teach as Jesus Did*, “fleshed out the council’s theme of active, publicly engaged schools.” Bryk and his co-authors provide a useful overview of this directive, noting that it articulated a threefold educational ministry: to teach the message of hope contained in the gospel; to build community “not simply as a concept to be taught, but as

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74 Bryk et al., *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, 51.
a reality to be lived’; and “service to all mankind which flows from a sense of Christian community.” Schools, then, were reconceived as instruments of social justice that would embody this commitment in every detail of their educational philosophy.

The “social justice” agenda advanced by Catholic educators in the post-conciliar era was not universally embraced, however. Morris notes that the liberal revamping of the mission and “catechistics” of U.S. parochial schools alienated many conservative Catholics, who constituted a substantial minority of parochial school subscribers. Traditionalists were no less concerned about the departure of teaching nuns from the classroom, a development that they feared would undermine the religious atmosphere of parish schools. Some observers noted that liberalizing influences within religious orders inspired thousands of nuns to abandon teaching in favor of more fulfilling types of community service. As former *New York Times* religion editor Kenneth Briggs observes, many American nuns felt that the status of women religious had declined because of the council’s emphasis on the role of the laity in the church. Scores of these women chose to leave their religious orders to pursue marriage, a career, or both. This development not only dramatically altered the atmosphere of parochial elementary schools; it also exacerbated a pre-existing pattern of rising costs. Lay teachers, who often supported families, were more inclined than members of teaching orders to demand higher salaries.

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75 Ibid., 51-52.
76 Ibid.
In time, some of these instructors bitterly criticized the U.S. Catholic Church for failing to live up to its own “social justice” rhetoric.\(^78\)

The seventh (and final) chapter of this study, “Conclusion: A House Divided,” offers a detailed overview of the controversies that swept the U.S. Catholic community in the decades following Vatican II. At the same time, the chapter describes the ways in which Catholic disunity weakened support for traditional institutions, especially schools. Furthermore, the chapter draws a strong link between the Catholic laity’s disagreement with the church’s official positions on controversial issues, e.g., birth control, legalized abortion, and women’s rights, and their conspicuously reduced levels of church-related giving. The chapter not only examines the fallout from the Second Vatican Council, but also the effects of the conservative retrenchment within the Catholic hierarchy, which became evident by the late 1970s. Finally, it outlines areas of future exploration for educational researchers. For instance, the U.S. church’s understated approach to evangelizing within the Black community during the post-Vatican II era, while it reflected a newfound respect for the Black Church,\(^79\) may also have ensured that urban Catholic institutions remained a “foreign presence” in heavily African-American neighborhoods.\(^80\)

\(^78\) Bryk et al., *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, 34.
Overall, this historical overview of Youngstown’s Catholic elementary schools examines how fissures within the Catholic community contributed to the decline of urban parochial schools. Earlier studies have argued persuasively that the social impact of Vatican II, along with certain Catholic responses to the controversies of the 1960s, set the stage for a model of Catholic schooling that was inclusive and civic-minded. This study shows, however, that the controversies that swept the Catholic community in the 1960s—including disagreement over the legacy of Vatican II—also had negative consequences for urban parochial schools. Although the Second Vatican Council was, in many ways, a liberating influence that enabled U.S. Catholics to broaden their concept of “social justice,” it left in its wake a deeply polarized community. In the decades following the 1960s, U.S. Catholics lost much of their cohesiveness as a community—a cohesiveness that once enabled them to establish and maintain a wide network of parallel institutions. This period of fragmentation contributed to (and was shaped by) a host of internal trends that injured urban parochial schools. Such trends included a sharp decline in religious vocations, falling parish donations, and weakened support for the enterprise of Catholic parochial schools.

At the same time, this study takes into account the impact of larger urban trends on Catholic parochial schools. Naturally, changes in the urban landscape created myriad challenges for a variety of urban institutions, including public schools. Although the impact of these larger urban trends on parochial schools has been thoughtfully examined

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81 Morris, American Catholic, 257.
in previous studies, much of this research has downplayed the role that Catholic disunity played in the decline of urban parochial schools. A number of studies have examined the interrelationship between urban change and the collapse of traditional American Catholic identity. These studies, however, tend to take a broader view of U.S. Catholic culture and institutional life, and they do not focus exclusively on urban parish schools. This study will argue that the Catholic community’s apparent inability to forge common goals that were rooted in broader societal commitments posed a serious threat to the church’s longstanding institutional presence in urban centers. This trend was evident in Youngstown, where urban parochial schools have all but disappeared and urban parishes wage a daily struggle for survival. If this trend is allowed to progress to its natural conclusion, the U.S. Catholic Church may squander a valuable opportunity for engagement with urban minority groups—including African Americans, whose relations with the institution have often been informed by distrust. It seems especially ironic that the exodus of parochial schools from central cities coincides with the emergence of the (largely urban) Latino community as a locus of growth and vitality within the U.S. Catholic Church. This widening pattern of institutional retreat, as indicated above, owes much to the impact of larger urban trends. This study shows, however, that a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of declining urban parish schools can be obtained by examining the ways in which urban change intersected with rising levels of disharmony within the American Catholic community.
CHAPTER II

RISE OF A PAROCHIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

On October 30, 1923, 1,500 women gathered in Youngstown’s Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church to listen as Dorothy Nickols, a former Roman Catholic, described abuses she allegedly suffered at the hands of nuns at Chicago’s House of the Good Shepherd. Nickols’ characterization of American Catholicism as a cruel, authoritarian, and anachronistic institution prompted bursts of enthusiastic applause from attendants who apparently needed little convincing on this point. As historian William D. Jenkins observes, the young speaker’s narrative was “a variant of the escaped-nun tales that arose during previous anti-Catholic crusades.” Jenkins adds: “Rumors also abounded: classic tales of Catholic fathers who purchased a gun to be placed in St. Columba’s basement whenever a child was born and of Catholic efforts to build a palace in Washington for the pope.”¹ The women who packed the church that autumn day were members of the Kamelias, a women’s auxiliary of the Ku Klux Klan, which flourished on a local wave of anti-immigrant sentiment. As the number of attendees at the event suggests, the Klan, along with its auxiliary organizations, was scarcely a fringe movement in 1920s Youngstown. The organization enjoyed the public support of respected Protestant leaders, and a pro-Klan candidate would soon emerge as the victor in

¹ William D. Jenkins, Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio’s Mahoning Valley (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1990), 48.
a hotly contested mayoral race.\textsuperscript{2} To understand the organization’s (relative) respectability, it is important to grasp that the northern Klan, unlike its violently racist southern counterpart, directed its tactics of intimidation at new immigrants, especially Catholics.\textsuperscript{3} In Youngstown, the Klan, in its haste to define a common enemy, blamed local Catholics for a sharp increase in the area’s crime rate. In addition, the nativist organization criticized the potential insulating effects of Catholic schools and called for legislation that would render attendance at public schools mandatory.\textsuperscript{4}

The growth of nativist organizations in the Youngstown area coincided with a demographic shift that occurred in the community between 1900 and 1920.\textsuperscript{5} As Jenkins notes, the city’s population was predominantly Welsh and German at the outset of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Both of these groups began to arrive in the Mahoning Valley in the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, and by 1900, they “had outstripped the older Scotch-Irish and English settlers.”\textsuperscript{6} The arrival of significant numbers of Irish immigrants during the same period apparently fueled the rise of local Catholic institutions. As Jenkins observes, “the area remained a missionary outpost of the Catholic church until after the Irish migrations of the 1840s and 1850s.”\textsuperscript{7} This influx of Irish Catholics inspired the development of some anti-Catholic organizations, including a local chapter of the American Protective Association. These earlier nativist movements, however, failed to attract the level of

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, 51-54.
\item\textsuperscript{3} Ibid, 1-3.
\item\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, 47-48.
\item\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, 19.
\item\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
local support that the Klan enjoyed decades later. The rise of the Klan came in the aftermath of a more dramatic change in the area’s ethnic and religious composition, which occurred toward the end of the 19th century. Jenkins notes that, between 1880 and 1900, “the arrival of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe dramatically altered the composition of Youngstown’s population and of the entire valley.” Most of these new arrivals were drawn by the community’s expanding steel industry. In 1920, two of Youngstown’s largest steel manufacturers, Republic and Sheet and Tube, “hired between 23,000 and 24,000 workers.” That same year, according to census reports, “two-thirds of the population was foreign-born or the children of foreign-born.”

While circumstances in the Youngstown area were particularly conducive to the rise of ethnic and religious tension, the local Klan’s opposition to Catholic influence, in general, and Catholic parochial schools, in particular, was consistent with trends that swept the country in the wake of World War I. In 1922, for example, the state of Oregon passed legislation that made attendance at public elementary and secondary schools compulsory. As Joseph Moreau observes, the Oregon law originated with a referendum sponsored by “a coalition of organizations that included the Ku Klux Klan.” In 1925, this legislation was overturned by the Supreme Court, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*,

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
which determined that “the Oregon law was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, for its effect would be to destroy all private and religious schools and thus deprive owners of this property ‘without due process of the law.’”\textsuperscript{14} While the Court’s ruling dashed “hopes among militant anti-Catholics that the struggle to close parochial schools could succeed anywhere in the United States,” the intolerant attitudes that inspired such legislation remained prevalent.\textsuperscript{15}

Youngstown-area nativists, like those elsewhere in the country, viewed parochial schools as insidious obstacles to the “Americanization” of immigrants.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, they were alarmed at the Catholic community’s achievements in the realm of institution building. Anxious Protestant leaders pointed out that, in the course of a few decades, a handful of rustic churches and schools had blossomed into an intricate network of agencies, providing Catholics with replicated services ranging from health care to education.\textsuperscript{17} This pattern of institution building reached its climax in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, but the roots of Catholicism in Youngstown can be traced back to the days of the Connecticut Western Reserve, a 120-mile stretch of land in modern-day northeastern Ohio that the state of Connecticut claimed as its share of the Northwest

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\textsuperscript{15} Moreau, \textit{Schoolbook Nation}, 133.
\textsuperscript{16} Jenkins, \textit{Steel Valley Klan}, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{17} Sara Varley, “Catholic Churches and Schools Take Big Part in Life of Youngstown: Had Beginning in One of First Log Cabins Built in Forest of Mahoning Valley—First Mass at Dungannon,” \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, June 29, 1931.
\end{flushleft}
For much of the 19th century, Catholics represented a small fraction of the population in the region, which was dominated by transplanted New Englanders and Scots-Irish migrants from neighboring Pennsylvania. As the number of Catholics increased, so did native resistance to their influence—and to their parallel institutions.¹⁹

**Origins of a Catholic Community**

Most historical accounts of the rise of Catholic institutions in Youngstown refer to pioneer Daniel Sheehy, an Irish-Catholic immigrant who accompanied the community’s founder, John Young, on a 1796 surveying expedition of the surrounding Mahoning Valley.²⁰ While Sheehy was supposedly devoted to his religion, he had few opportunities to participate in religious services during the early years of the “Young’s Town” settlement. Few priests were active in America at the time, and large stretches of the Connecticut Western Reserve were bereft of the handful of missionary priests who helped sustain Catholic religious practices in other remote regions of the country.²¹ Reliable pastoral ministry was apparently unavailable to Catholics in the Youngstown area until 1817, when Father Edward Fenwick, a Dominican priest, encountered the German-Irish settlement of Dungannon, which was located in neighboring Columbiana County.²²

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¹⁸ Ibid.
²² Ibid.
was not until 1831 that a log chapel was built in the community. Father Fenwick and other missionary priests reportedly paid subsequent visits to Dungannon to administer the sacraments, celebrate Mass, and provide limited religious instruction.

The first Mass to be celebrated in what later became the Diocese of Youngstown was held in the home of Daniel Sheehy’s daughter and son-in-law, a Mr. and Mrs. McAllister. Sparse historical accounts have suggested that the handful of Catholic families then living in Youngstown faithfully made the journey to Dungannon on those occasions when a priest was available to say Mass. Decades later, observers of the city’s thriving Catholic community contrasted the “prosperity” of the present with the “scarcities” of the past. As a late 19th-century historical text states: “The mustard seed of religion, planted by the Dominican Father, Rev. E. Fenwick, near Dungannon in 1817, has grown to a large and vigorous tree under whose shadow rest two hundred and twenty-five churches and many institutions, spreading their benign influence on behalf of religion, education and charity.”

In 1821, Father Fenwick, the scion of a distinguished Anglo-American family from Maryland, was appointed as the first bishop of the new Diocese of Cincinnati, which included much of northeastern Ohio. In the years preceding his appointment, Fenwick founded three parishes that were later incorporated into the Diocese of Youngstown. These included St. Paul and St. Philip Neri, in Dungannon, and

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24 Ibid.
26 George Francis Houk, *The Church in Northern Ohio and in the Diocese of Cleveland from 1749 to September, 1887* (Cleveland: Short & Forman, Printers, 1889, c1887), 219.
St. John, in Canton. It was not until 1826, however, that a Mass was celebrated within the present-day boundaries of Youngstown itself. The service took place at the home of another Sheehy in-law, one William Woods. Nine years later, Dungannon assumed the status of a permanent parish, with Father James Conlon as pastor. Although, at this point, Youngstown still lacked a parish of its own, Father Conlon reportedly served the religious outpost as a missionary priest who visited several times a month.

In 1847, the “nucleus” of Youngstown’s first parish was formed during a meeting at the home of William Woods. Plans to establish the parish developed under the guidance of an unnamed missionary priest. Ten years later, a permanent parish was organized on Youngstown’s north side, with Father William O’Connor as pastor. According to some accounts, land for the project was donated by local industrialist David Tod, who later served as governor of Ohio during the early years of the Civil War. Even before the parish’s official establishment, however, a simple frame chapel was raised and placed under the patronage of St. Columba, a medieval Irish monk who was revered for his missionary work in western Scotland. One newspaper account observed that the chapel that became St. Columba’s Church was built of “rough boards” by the parish’s charter members. As the articles stated: “Parishioners felled the trees, hewed the

27 McFadden, The March of the Eucharist from Dungannon, 11.
28 Varley, The Youngstown Telegram, June 29, 1931.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
logs, and using oxen and chain, logs were dragged to the church site."\textsuperscript{33} This frame church, completed about 1853, was replaced in 1868 by a more elaborate brick structure.\textsuperscript{34} The construction of a massive granite church building, which began in 1893, was delayed until 1900 because of a severe economic turndown. This impressive neo-Gothic structure was finally dedicated in 1903.\textsuperscript{35} Four decades later, with the establishment of the Diocese of Youngstown, it was designated as the city’s cathedral parish.\textsuperscript{36}

As Youngstown expanded, other Catholic parishes grew up around the city. Naturally, many of these churches were connected to the community’s premier parish, St. Columba’s Church. As an article in \textit{The Youngstown Telegram} observes, “While all the 20 or more Catholic churches in Youngstown are virtually the outgrowth of the original St. Columba’s parish, there are six parishes that have been organized directly from this parent Catholic church of the city.”\textsuperscript{37} In 1869, St. Ann’s Parish, “the eldest of the children of St. Columba’s,” was established (under the authorization of Cleveland Bishop Amadeus Rappe) for Catholics in the working-class Brier Hill district, an unincorporated village that was annexed by Youngstown in 1900.\textsuperscript{38} During this period, the growing diversity of the city’s Catholic community introduced new challenges arising from

\textsuperscript{33} “St. Columba’s Contributes Much to Catholicity’s Growth: St. Columba’s Parent Church of the City,” \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, May 3, 1919.
\textsuperscript{34} Albert Hamilton, \textit{The Catholic Journey Through Ohio} (Columbus, OH: Catholic Conference of Ohio, 1976), 65.
\textsuperscript{35} Varley, \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, June 29, 1931.
\textsuperscript{36} McFadden, \textit{The March of the Eucharist from Dungannon}, 22.
\textsuperscript{37} “St. Columba’s Contributes Much to Catholicity’s Growth,” \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, May 3, 1919.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
cultural and linguistic differences. In response to an expanding German-speaking population, the national parish of St. Joseph’s was established on Youngstown’s north side in 1870.\textsuperscript{39} The church, which served mainly German immigrants, also attracted parishioners who had emigrated from Austria, Hungary, France, and Lithuania.\textsuperscript{40} A commemorative history describes the circumstances leading up to the parish’s foundation. “In March of 1869, the Vicar General of the [Cleveland] diocese, Father Westerholt, came to Youngstown to meet with the German Catholics,” the document states. “This memorable meeting took place in the basement of St. Columba’s Church, on West Wood Street, where with great enthusiasm, they voted to separate from St. Columba’s Parish and to organize a parish of their own.”\textsuperscript{41} Significantly, St. Joseph’s congregation was not restricted to German-speakers living within clearly defined parish boundaries, and during its many decades of operation, the church drew parishioners from around the Youngstown area.\textsuperscript{42} This characteristic later became a source of controversy. As national parishes developed in the community, they sometimes found themselves in conflict with church leaders who favored a universal model of territorial parishes (those with well-defined boundaries), while warning against the potentially insulating effects of those parishes designed to preserve Old World languages and traditions. These conflicts

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Varley, \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, June 29, 1931.
\textsuperscript{41} “St. Joseph’s Church, 1869-1967,” commemorative history printed in 1967, reproduction, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
\textsuperscript{42} Elizabeth (Fleisher) Fekety, interview by the author, April 19, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
often pitted a heavily Irish-American clergy against representatives of other ethnic groups within the Catholic community.\(^{43}\)

For the most part, however, the city’s earliest Catholic parishes were territorial and “English-speaking.” The territorial parish of Immaculate Conception was established on the city’s east side in 1882, and a neighboring parish known as Sacred Heart appeared six years later. St. Patrick’s Church was organized on the city’s rapidly expanding south side in 1911.\(^{44}\) And three more English-speaking (and quasi-suburban) parishes—St. Edward’s (north side), St. Brendan’s (west side), and St. Dominic’s (south side)—appeared within the first quarter of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century.\(^{45}\) Yet, a growing number of national parishes also began to appear in the late 19\(^{\text{th}}\) and early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries. In 1896, Slovak immigrants organized Sts. Cyril & Methodius Parish; and four years later, the congregation completed the brick structure that now overlooks the onetime working-class neighborhood of Smoky Hollow, on the city’s north side.\(^{46}\) Three more Slovak-American parishes appeared in quick succession: St. Matthias (south side), Holy Name (west side), and St. Elizabeth’s (east side). Then, in 1898, St. Anthony’s Parish was organized by Italian Americans living in the northwestern district of Brier Hill. This community of about 100 Italian-speaking families had previously attended services at St. Ann’s and St.

\(^{43}\) Joan (Donnelly) Welsh, interview by the author, September 15, 2006, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.

\(^{44}\) “St. Columba’s Contributes Much to Catholicity’s Growth,” \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, May 3, 1919.

\(^{45}\) Varley, \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, June 29, 1931.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
Columba’s churches.\textsuperscript{47} Thirteen years later, St. Anthony’s was joined by another Italian-American national parish, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, which was built less than a block to the east of Sts. Cyril & Methodius Parish. During the same period, Croatian Americans built the brick complex of Sts. Peter & Paul Parish and School, which stood scarcely a mile from St. Anthony’s Church.\textsuperscript{48}

The early 1900s, a period of tremendous demographic change in the Mahoning Valley, saw a veritable explosion of national parishes. Among the earliest of these new ethnic parishes was St. Stanislaus Church, which was established by Polish immigrants on the south side in 1902.\textsuperscript{49} The parish’s approximately 80 families had earlier attended services in the basement of St. Columba’s Church.\textsuperscript{50} Five years later, in 1907, St. Casimir’s, another Polish-American parish, was organized in the vicinity of Brier Hill.\textsuperscript{51} Interestingly, the Brier Hill district alone boasted three Catholic parishes—St. Anthony’s, St. Casimir’s, and St. Ann’s. A fourth neighborhood church, St. Rocco’s, represented a faction within St. Anthony’s parish that broke off, formed a national parish, and became part of the Episcopal community in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{52} In 1907, Youngstown’s first Hungarian-American parish, St. Stephen’s, was established on the east side; and about 12 years later,

\textsuperscript{47} St. Anthony’s Church, “St Anthony’s Church 100 Year Commemoration Program,” commemorative program printed in 1998, Reuben-McMillan Public Library, Youngstown, OH.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} St. Stanislaus Church, “St. Stanislaus Kostka Church – Youngstown, 1902-1977,” commemorative booklet printed in 1977, Reuben McMillan Public Library, Youngstown, OH.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} “Bishop to Dedicate St. Casimir’s Parish Church and School,” The Youngstown Telegram, September 17, 1927.
\textsuperscript{52} Tony Trolio, Brier Hill USA (Poland, OH: Ciao Promotions, 2001), 47-53.
the parish of Our Lady of Hungary was organized in a Hungarian enclave on the west side. Churches of other national groups also appeared, including St. Maron’s Syro-Maronite parish (1903), St. Mary’s Roman parish (1910), and St. Francis’ parish for Lithuanian Catholics (1917). The city’s sole African-American parish, St. Augustine’s Church, did not appear on the city’s east side until 1943, the same year that the Diocese of Youngstown was established.

Emergence of a Pattern of Parochial Education

Many of Youngstown’s Catholic parishes, though not all, established elementary schools that were maintained primarily through parishioner donations. Catholic parochial schools began to appear in the city after 1860, and the first parish school on record was a small frame building staffed by two lay teachers. Four years later, a more developed school was established in the basement of St. Columba’s Church, again with lay teachers in charge. By 1868, teaching nuns had taken charge of the elementary school; and with the arrival of Ursuline nuns from Cleveland, who founded a community in 1874, Catholic education at the elementary level became firmly established. The Ursulines not only started a private school for girls and boys, but they also trained their sisters to teach in other parochial schools that appeared in the city later on. Among the most celebrated of these teaching nuns was a Scottish immigrant named Mother Columba Gettins, who

56 Ibid.
admonished her students as follows: “Be minding your lessons today, I tell you, for tomorrow you will have to help make the living.”\(^{58}\) The Ursulines were soon joined by other religious communities, including the Sisters of the Holy Humility of Mary, the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Notre Dame nuns, the Franciscan Sisters of Charity, the Vincentian Sisters of Charity, and the Sisters of St. Dominic. The Ursuline Sisters, however, were the only order to establish a mother house (a convent led by a mother superior) in the Youngstown metropolitan area.\(^{59}\)

Conditions in Youngstown’s earliest schools tended toward the rustic. In 1919, Monsignor John T. O’Connell, a Youngstown native who went on to become vicar general of the Diocese of Toledo, described early Catholic education in his hometown as follows: “It is true that in the earlier days, educational facilities were lacking; systems of heating, ventilation and devices for school room hygienics [sic] were not dreamed of in our philosophy; the ologies [sic] had not yet found a place in the curriculum of studies; and there is a lingering impression in the minds of older pupils that some of the instructors were none too familiar with pedagogy; but it is disparaging no one to say that difficulties and interruptions that would have destroyed other institutions only stimulated priests and people to more generous efforts.”\(^{60}\) These “generous efforts” were reflected in the steady growth of Catholic education throughout the Youngstown area. In 1874, Ursuline Academy was established as a co-educational institution, which offered classes

\(^{58}\) “Parochial Teachers Have Hands Full,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, March 27, 1938.
\(^{59}\) Varley, *The Youngstown Telegram*, June 29, 1931.
\(^{60}\) Ibid.
for both girls (to the eighth grade) and boys (to the fourth grade). Around 1905, two rooms of the Ursulines’ north side convent were set aside for a high school department for girls. This program continued to grow until the need for a larger building required the purchase of the former Chauncey Andrews estate, a vacant mansion located on the city’s north side. The Andrews homestead was used for several years as a school and, upon completion of the current high school facility, became a novitiate for nuns.61

Local Catholic efforts in education, however, were most conspicuous in the realm of elementary education. St. Ann’s, which operated in the working-class district of Brier Hill, opened its doors in 1869.62 St. Joseph’s parish school, which was designed to benefit the children of German-speaking immigrants, was established on the north side one year later. Finally, Immaculate Conception parish school opened on the east side in 1883.63 Scores of others followed, and for many observers, the growth of the city’s Catholic schools in ensuing decades was nothing less than spectacular. By 1871, a handful of Catholic pupils had swelled to 500; and less than 60 years later, the local media observed that 700 students were scheduled to graduate from local Catholic schools that year alone, a figure suggesting that students then numbered in the thousands. In 1937, The Youngstown Vindicator announced: “Nineteen parochial schools and one Catholic high school are making last-minute preparations for the opening of school here

61 Varley, The Youngstown Telegram, June 29, 1931.
62 “Parochial Teachers Have Hands Full,” The Youngstown Vindicator, March 27, 1938.
63 Ibid.
Tuesday, when nearly 7,200 children will resume their studies under 158 nuns, eight lay teachers and several priests.”

Another explosion of growth among Catholic institutions occurred in the two decades that led up to the establishment of the Diocese of Youngstown. In 1923, Youngstown’s Catholic community benefited from a trend toward expansion and modernization that was overseen by Cleveland Archbishop Joseph Schrembs, a gifted administrator and fundraiser. As historian Michael J. Hynes observes, Schrembs’ gift for organizational design facilitated a period of impressive growth in the Cleveland Diocese, which then included Youngstown. He notes that, “[o]f the 271 churches (in the Cleveland Diocese), and of the 180 elementary schools, fifty-eight per cent were built” during the nearly two-decade tenure of Archbishop Schrembs. He adds: “In the area now comprised in the Diocese of Youngstown seventeen parishes were started, eleven of them territorial; in the older parishes thirty-three new churches, nineteen new schools, eight new church-school combinations were put up and six buildings were refitted for Catholic worship.”

Much of the building within Youngstown’s city limits occurred in the rapidly expanding working-and middle-class neighborhoods that emerged on the west and south sides of the city. Hynes offers a detailed overview of church and school construction within the municipal limits:

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64 “Expect 7,200 Enrollment: Twenty Catholic Schools Prepare to Open with Bigger Rosters,” The Youngstown Vindicator, September 4, 1937.
In the city of Youngstown, at its western end, the parish of St. Brendan was organized by Father Andrew A. Crehan who completed a brick combination church and school in 1925… The Dominican Fathers returned to northern Ohio when Father Charles A. Haverty was appointed to organize the parish of St. Dominic in the Southern section of the city: he put up a frame church in 1923 and completed a brick combination church-school in 1929. The Magyar parish of Our Lady of Hungary, a division of St. Stephen’s, was inaugurated by Father Stephen Nyiri who directed the building of a brick basement church in 1929 and of a frame schoolhouse and hall shortly afterwards… In the older parishes in the same city much progress was to be recognized. In the Slovak parish of the Holy Name of Jesus a modern twelve-room school and auditorium put up under the supervision of Father John I. Moran in 1923. St. Casimir’s brick combination church and school put up by Father Ignatius L. Dembrowski was dedicated by Bishop Schrembs in 1927. The frame Church of St. Francis of Assisi was completed in 1925 under the direction of Father Dominic Alinskas. The fine brick Romanesque Church of St. Matthias was finished by Father Francis Kozelek in 1926; the old frame church was converted into classrooms. The imposing stone Church of St. Patrick, in the Spanish Gothic style, put up under the direction of Father William A. Kane, was dedicated by the Bishop in 1926; in the same year six class rooms and a gymnasium were added to the school. In the parish of Sts. Peter and Paul a modern two-story brick schoolhouse was completed by Father John A. Stipanovic in 1927. In the parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka a brick
combination church and school put up by Father John M. Zeglen was dedicated by the Bishop in 1925.  

Before the end of World War II, Youngstown’s vitality and growth made it a natural candidate as the seat of a newly created diocese. In 1943, St. Columba’s Church was designated as a cathedral (a church that contains the seat of a bishop), and six counties in northeastern Ohio were placed under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Youngstown. The optimism that accompanied the creation of the Diocese of Youngstown was generally reflected in the developments of the next two decades. As late as the mid-1960s, parochial elementary schools and diocesan high schools posted unexpectedly high enrollments.

Factors in a School System’s Decline

As the 1960s drew to their discordant close, however, diocesan schools entered a period of gradual decline—a pattern that was especially acute among Youngstown’s parochial elementary schools. The extent of this system’s deterioration seems all the more dramatic when one considers that its vigorous expansion in the early 20th century inspired fearful jeremiads from some of the city’s most respected Protestant leaders. As local parochial schools began to disappear, their image (ironically enough) began to improve, a trend that was evident across the country. Beginning in the 1970s and early 1980s, a period when urban parochial schools lost many of their traditional constituents,

66 Hynes, History of the Diocese of Cleveland, 311-312.
their administrators began to focus increasingly on non-White, non-Catholic student populations—often with impressive results. “Catholic schools most closely resemble the ideal of the common school model; that is, they educate children from different backgrounds and achieve promising academic outcomes,” Vincent C. Polite observes. “Research refutes the notion commonly held by the general public that inner-city Catholic schools educate a privileged group of African American students. Rather, these students have been shown to come predominantly from the African American working class, with 72% coming from families with household incomes of less than $15,000.”

Polite indicates that urban Catholic schools emerged as bastions of diversity at the very time when urban public schools appear to be “rapidly resegregating.” As Jonathan Kozol notes, urban schools in major metropolitan areas have become, if anything, more segregated than they were at the outset of the civil rights movement. Some urban parochial schools in Youngstown, though not all, followed the pattern that Polite praises in his article. Despite the fact that a number of these schools contributed to the educational development of disadvantaged students, all but five of them had closed by the opening of the 21st century. This study will closely examine many of the factors that contributed to this outcome.

CHAPTER III

“THE IMMACULATE”: ONE SCHOOL’S EXPERIENCE

On the afternoon of June 7, 2007, Sister Charlotte Italiano described “mixed feelings” as she watched 12 eighth-grade students participate in the final graduation ceremony of Immaculate Conception Elementary School. The ceremony marked the imminent closure of an educational institution that had prevailed for more than 120 years. Immaculate Conception’s physical plant, built 22 years after the school’s establishment, had been an east-side landmark for more than a century, a legacy of the parish’s second pastor, Father Michael P. Kinkead. Since 1905, the elegant and spacious brick building had towered above the same working-class neighborhood, as it changed hands from Irish to Italian immigrants and, then, more recently, to African Americans. “We have to close because of the lack of enrollment,” Sister Charlotte told a reporter employed by the Vindicator, Youngstown’s daily newspaper. “This is bittersweet,” she added. “We are very, very sad.”

Given the enormity of her responsibilities, however, the feisty and energetic principal of Immaculate Conception had little time to dwell on the poignant events unfolding before her. Sister Charlotte was, after all, responsible for closing down an institution that had been in operation since the late 19th century. Among others, she was charged with disposing of the detritus of Immaculate Conception’s lengthy mission.

2 Harold Gwin, “Final bell tolls for two schools,” The Vindicator, June 7, 2006, B-1.
Significant historical artifacts were transferred to the parish archives, and a faded volume of handwritten records was reserved for the recently established archives of the local Ursuline religious community, whose members had staffed the school from its inception and retained a presence until the end. Meanwhile, representatives of the Youngstown City Schools claimed materials and equipment they had provided to the school over the years.³

I had a chance to speak with the principal on Friday, June 9, 2006, one day after the school’s official closing. Security measures at Immaculate Conception’s school building remained tight, and it was necessary for me to confirm my appointment with an administrator via intercom before the main entrance was unlocked electronically. As I walked in, Sister Charlotte was hurriedly giving instructions to a half-dozen workers who carried crates, furniture, and other items marked for transport through the wide corridors of the school building. After a brief greeting, she gestured in the direction of a nearby classroom filled with overflowing cardboard boxes, jumbled cleaning supplies, and a bevy of pre-Vatican II religious images. “That’s most of what’s left, and it’s nothing compared to the load we moved out of here over the past few weeks,” she said. Sister Charlotte then ushered me into the only area of the building that remained partially furnished: a small office, where she, along with another administrator, organized what was left of the school’s voluminous files. Sister Charlotte rifled through a few items on top of a desk that sat in the middle of the office. She quickly located a worn scrapbook

³ Sister Charlotte Italiano, O.S.U., interview by the author, May 31, 2007. transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
filled with newspaper clippings and handed it to me. “These may be of interest,” she said. As I paged through the album, I scanned articles that ranged from a 1957 feature story on the parish’s 75th anniversary to more recent accounts of the school’s long struggle to survive.

For many, the closure of this urban institution was an occasion for sadness. Given the decades of news reports predicting such an outcome, however, it probably came as no surprise. An article marking the school’s closure notes that Immaculate Conception’s enrollment, which approached 700 pupils in the 1960s, fell to a record low of 63 students during the 2005-2006 academic year.4 Amid the school’s precipitous decline, many administrators showed patience and understanding, the principal explained. Sister Charlotte stressed that Monsignor John Zuraw, administrator of Immaculate Conception Parish and diocesan chancellor, “tried very hard to work with us,” even offering to keep the school open if 70 students were enrolled.5 She added that the institution’s closure was no isolated incident. On the morning that Sister Charlotte announced her school would suspend operations, another local Catholic institution held its final graduation ceremony. The Vindicator reported that the south-side parish school of St. Matthias, which had served a traditionally Slovak-American neighborhood since 1917, would not reopen for the 2006-2007 academic year.6 Media reports on the two school closings undoubtedly saddened many Youngstown-area residents, some of whom had come to

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5 Italiano, interview.
view parochial schools as a permanent (and desirable) fixture of the urban landscape. Others may have been shocked to learn that, as of June 2006, only one parish school continued to operate within the city limits. The surviving school was (and is) connected to St. Christine’s Church, a quasi-suburban parish that straddled the borders of nearby Austintown and Boardman townships.7

Of all the parochial schools that once operated in Youngstown, Immaculate Conception has the longest—and one of the most representative and interesting—stories to tell. Like most other “territorial” parishes (those with clearly defined geographical boundaries), Immaculate Conception maintained its school long after the bulk of the neighborhood’s Catholic residents had moved elsewhere.8 In addition, the parish school’s development intersects with all of the major urban trends examined in this study. While subsequent chapters will examine a number of these trends in greater detail, this chapter will illustrate the successive impact of developments like ethnic enclaving, anti-Catholic discrimination, urban depopulation, demographic change, urban economic decline, and sweeping internal religious reforms as it drew upon the history of one institution.

Origins of a Parish School

When Immaculate Conception Parish was organized in Youngstown’s Haselton district, on the east side, the area still possessed a distinctly bucolic flavor. In 1882,

8 Ron Cole, “Does bell for pupils also toll for school? The school has opened early; the new principal’s attitude is that it won’t close,” The Vindicator, August 14, 2002, B-1.
neighborhoods were just beginning to take shape in an area ringed with woodlands and family-operated farms. The majority of Haselton’s earliest Roman Catholics were Irish Americans, and few were far removed from the mud hamlets and rock-strewn fields of western Ireland. This period was revisited in a 1934 newspaper interview with a 97-year-old Haselton resident, who emphasized the Irish character of the neighborhood in the late 19th century, when it was “scarce built up at all.” The district was not only undeveloped; it was also curiously isolated. During periods of heavy rain, residents were cut off from the rest of the city by the Crab Creek Valley, a steep gulley with a creek that overflowed habitually. As another elderly Haselton recalled in a later interview, the nearest parish was St. Joseph’s Church, which had been “established…for German-speaking peoples.” Thus, before the construction of Immaculate Conception Church, Haselton’s Irish-Catholic residents were compelled to make the arduous trek across the Crab Creek Valley to St. Columba’s Church, the community’s oldest parish, which was located on the north side, a few blocks to the southwest of St. Joseph’s Church.

As the city’s industrial base expanded, the Diocese of Cleveland (which then encompassed Youngstown) came under pressure to establish more English-speaking parishes in the community. In 1881, Father Edward Mears, the pastor of St. Columba’s

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9 Joseph L. Heffernan, “City’s Oldest Irishman is Interviewed by Former Mayor on St. Patrick’s Day: John Slavin, 97, Says He was Born During the Year of ‘The Big Wind,’” The Youngstown Telegram, March 17, 1934.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
Church, donated $5,000 toward the establishment of Immaculate Conception Church, which Irish-American locals quickly dubbed as “the Immaculate.”¹³ Unlike St. Joseph’s Church, a national parish whose German-speaking members were dispersed throughout the area, Immaculate Conception was established as a territorial parish, one technically designed to meet the needs of all Catholics who lived in the surrounding neighborhood. The distinction between territorial and national parishes was crucial for many American Catholics. Not surprisingly, controversies surrounding these competing models heightened tensions between a heavily Irish-American hierarchy and those German immigrants who wanted their churches to serve as repositories of Old World culture.¹⁴

American bishops’ general preference for territorial parishes drew criticism from German Americans, who claimed that this policy tended to favor the Irish.¹⁵ Although German immigrants were as likely as their Irish counterparts to cluster in tight-knit enclaves, many of those who lived in smaller communities like Youngstown established a centrally located national parish that was designed to serve German Americans living throughout the community. Critics of the territorial model also noted that the overwhelming majority of Irish Americans spoke English exclusively. This circumstance practically ensured that their efforts to maintain ethnic identity would emphasize religious and political commitments, as opposed to concentrated efforts to preserve

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¹⁵ The “Americanist” controversy of the late 19th century pitted so-called “liberal” Irish-American bishops against those prelates who supported national parishes and, in some cases, resisted efforts to accommodate Catholicism to American democratic society.
language and culture.\textsuperscript{16} Irish-American pastors, on the one hand, promoted the cultural assimilation of immigrants and strongly emphasized American patriotic values. On the other, they instilled within Irish-American parishioners a strong sense of loyalty to their ancestral homeland, an emotion that found expression in political activities aimed at Ireland’s independence from Great Britain. As Kerby A. Miller notes, in his landmark study of the Irish Diaspora in North America, Irish-American nationalists of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century “made sincere but tortuous efforts to reconcile competing allegiances and identify Irish freedom with native American traditions and interests.”\textsuperscript{17} Perceiving a double standard, German-American Catholics were offended by Irish-American allegations that “these Germans were more interested in protecting their subculture than preserving their faith.”\textsuperscript{18} The debate over nationality and religion reached a climax in 1891, when German Catholic layman Peter Paul Cahensly delivered to Pope Leo XIII a letter drafted by representatives of a German emigrant aid society. The letter, among others, called for separate parishes for each nationality in the United States.\textsuperscript{19} While the pope declined to support the proposals outlined in the society’s letter, the nationality debate continued.\textsuperscript{20} Meanwhile, proponents of national parishes throughout the northern

\textsuperscript{16} Gabert, \textit{In Hoc Signo}, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{17} Kerby A. Miller, \textit{Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America} (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1985), 495.
\textsuperscript{18} Gabert, \textit{In Hoc Signo?}, 46.
United States remained keenly aware that “territorial” parishes like Immaculate Conception functioned as *de facto* Irish-American parishes.\(^{21}\)

One year after the establishment of Immaculate Conception Parish, an elementary school was set up in a portion of the wooden church. Seating at the institution was extremely tight, and a newspaper feature later reported that “there were about 175 boys and girls enrolled” at a school that took up the church’s first floor and a segment of the chapel.\(^{22}\) Eight years later, a new church was built, and the rooms of the older frame building were used exclusively as classrooms. A steady increase in enrollment, however, ensured that overcrowding would remain a problem, and the parish school was forced to lease (or borrow) space in nearby buildings, including the church itself.\(^{23}\) By modern standards, of course, the small frame school on Youngstown’s east side was severely overcrowded, and terribly understaffed. One alumnus observed, “We were a hundred strong in the old classroom—50 to a side of the old-time pot-bellied stove.”\(^{24}\) Yet, the school, for all its physical limitations, served as a locus of community activity and a source of neighborhood pride. The school’s teaching staff—including Mother Columba Gettins (the principal), three teaching nuns, and two lay teachers—encouraged high levels of student involvement in local, regional, and national events.\(^{25}\)

\(^{22}\) Grace Tracy, “Old Immaculate Conception Pupils Recall ‘93 Honors: Work from Little Frame School Won World’s Fair Awards—To Mark 50 Years,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, January 22, 1933.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
\(^{25}\) Tracy, *The Youngstown Vindicator*, January 22, 1933.
In 1893, the students assembled a prize-winning exhibit of their schoolwork for the Chicago “World Fair.” During the previous October, they helped to mark the 400th anniversary of America’s “discovery” by assembling a float for a local Columbus Day parade. A retrospective newspaper article reported that the float represented “a small schoolhouse” that featured a “group of Ursuline Sisters instructing the Indians.”

The “Indians” who waved and smiled atop the “Columbus Day” float, as it trundled through the streets of Youngstown on that October in 1893, bore names that were unmistakably Irish—Cregan, Lyden, and Murtha. Notably, the newspaper article that commemorated the event 40 years later suggested that Immaculate Conception’s ethnic orientation had changed little in all that time. Perhaps the parish’s location in the middle of a traditional Irish-American enclave had enabled it to preserve an essentially Celtic atmosphere.

Another likely factor, however, was the degree of hegemonic control wielded by Irish Americans within the U.S. church. Writing in the mid-1980s, Jay P. Dolan observes, “This Irish hegemony has remained consistent throughout the 20th century, so that by 1972, 37 percent of the American clergy and 48 percent of the hierarchy still identified themselves as Irish.”

Bolstering the Irish-American character of “mainstream” Catholicism during the early 20th century were images of the church presented by the film industry. “When Hollywood produced a film about Catholics, it often chose an Irish

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Dolan, The American Catholic Experience, 143-144.
priest as the hero,” Dolan writes. “There were Italian, Polish, and German Catholics, but the Irish were Hollywood’s Catholics.”

Significantly, the ethnically based segregation of many of Youngstown’s Catholics was reflective of a national trend. McGreevy notes that urban parishes with well-defined ethnic identities were commonplace in neighborhoods throughout the northern United States. Hence, McGreevy’s characterization of early 20th-century Catholic parishes in Chicago’s “Back of the Yards” district resembles the situation in Youngstown during the same period. “Each parish was a small planet whirling through its orbit, oblivious to the rest of the ecclesiastical solar system,” he writes. “The two Irish churches were the ‘territorial’ parishes—theoretically responsible for all Catholics in the area.” He adds, however, that “all churches—formally territorial or not—tended to attract parishioners of the same national background.” Indeed, many parishioners were inclined to purchase homes in the vicinity of churches and parish schools, thereby “helping to create Polish, Bohemian, Irish, and Lithuanian enclaves within the larger neighborhood.”

This dynamic was evident at the Immaculate, where St. Patrick’s Day was treated as a major religious holiday, and the details of Ireland’s long struggle against religious persecution were part of every student’s reservoir of knowledge.

Irish-American Hegemony at the Immaculate

At no time was the parish’s ethnic character more clearly defined than during the eventful 15-year tenure of Father John R. Kenny, an Irish immigrant who assumed the pastorate in 1910.\textsuperscript{32} Outspoken and charismatic, the six-foot, roughhewn pastor successfully pressured the municipal government to move forward on the long-delayed Oak Street Bridge, a project whose completion connected the east side to the rest of the city.\textsuperscript{33} Father Kenny’s obituary notes that he was an advocate of Catholic education who lobbied tirelessly for the establishment of Ursuline High School, the city’s first Catholic secondary school, which was located on the north side. Whether he directed his efforts toward improving education, infrastructure, or public morality, Father Kenny took a decidedly assertive approach.\textsuperscript{34} His obituary notes that, when children on the east side “were being forced to walk to Rayen School if they wanted a high school education, it was Father Kenny who led the campaign to get secondary facilities for his people.”\textsuperscript{35} Unlike more faint-hearted clergyman, the pastor of Immaculate Conception rarely hesitated to take sides on potentially controversial issues.\textsuperscript{36}

Father Kenny was especially outspoken on issues related to the political fate of his beleaguered homeland. A native of County Leitrim, Ireland, the pastor offered warmhearted tributes to Irish patriots, even when their actions were criticized by large

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
segments of the American public. Such was the case with the Easter Rising of 1916, a rebellion led by Irish nationalists at a time when the United Kingdom was embroiled in military conflict with Europe’s Central Powers. Ignoring the American public’s growing sympathy for Great Britain and its European allies, Father Kenny used the occasion of an Irish writer’s upcoming visit to laud the insurgents. “Folks may differ on the wisdom of the recent insurrection in Dublin, but who can shut his eyes to the fact that the men who died there and everyone who gave his life for Ireland lives in the heart of that nation and inspires the young men of every generation with hope and courage,” Father Kenny stated. “This means that from all these abortive uprisings the conscience of the Gael selects the central fact that the cause of the rebels—like Washington’s cause—was essentially just and noble, and therefore the men who made the supreme sacrifice should never be forgotten.”

Father Kenny concluded by stating that, so long as the story of the insurgents was preserved in memory, “the hearts of the scattered children of the sea-divided Gael will throb with pride and a hope of some day being able to avenge them.”

The pastor once again voiced support for Irish political independence at the height of the Anglo-Irish conflict, whose escalating violence dominated local and national headlines throughout 1921 and 1922. Among others, Father Kenny sharply criticized the policies of the British government in a series of local newspaper articles that ran under the heading, “Ireland at Valley Forge.” The series opens as follows: “The fact that nationhood is not denied to Ireland, except by those that have an obvious special interest

38 Ibid.
in the denial, makes it unnecessary to labor any proof.”39 From there, the priest devotes two densely packed columns to an inventory of such “unnecessary” proof, tapping sources as diverse as the essays of English writer G. K. Chesterton and entries from the now obscure “Cyclopedia of American Government.”40

The pastor’s activities on behalf of his homeland went well beyond editorial writing, however. Earlier that year, Father Kenny initiated at the parish level an Irish relief fund that raised $6,500. The priest stated in a newspaper announcement that the funds were distributed to leading Irish bishops as well as to several convents whose operations were “disrupted” by British auxiliaries known as “Black and Tans.”41 Perhaps not coincidentally, the pastor’s initiation of the relief fund came on the heels of a speaking engagement by Donal O’Callaghan, the newly elected lord mayor of Cork, who had arrived in the United States as a stowaway some time earlier.42 On the evening of March 2, 1921, the young mayor delivered an emotional address to a capacity crowd at Youngstown’s Moose Temple, where he condemned the excesses of British auxiliaries in Ireland. “Ireland does not grumble and does not whine at the loss of her sons in the fight,” O’Callaghan exclaimed, “but what Ireland does grumble at and does protest against is when that great army of England, with all their resources, finding themselves

40 Ibid.
41 “Irish Relief Fund: The Immaculate Conception Parish,” The Youngstown Daily Vindicator, March 5, 1921.
unable to meet and beat that Republican army in Ireland, turn their guns and their implements of destruction from the men against the women and the children and the homes and the factories of Ireland."

Not surprisingly, the same pastor who celebrated the Immaculate’s “Irish” identity also staunchly defended its territorial mission. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Father Kenny was angered over the tendency of non-Irish neighborhood Catholics to register at churches (and schools) located outside the parish boundaries. Among those who frequently ignored the pastor’s territorial recommendations were the district’s German Americans, scores of whom journeyed westward—often passing directly before the Immaculate—to attend services at St. Joseph’s Church on the north side. In a recent interview, a close relative, Joan (Donnelly) Welsh, described her German-American mother’s oral account of reprimands that she had received from the pastor of Immaculate Conception in the early 1900s. She recalled that her mother, the late Mary Wilma (Fitch) Donnelly, often recounted how the pastor “yelled” at children and adults as they made their weekly sojourn to the “the German church.” In Mrs. Donnelly’s account, the priest stood on the front steps of Immaculate Conception Church, jabbing his finger in the air, and bellowing, “You belong here, not there.”

There is no evidence that Father Kenny, or his predecessors, made similar appeals to Haselton’s Italian-American Catholics. As a product of his times, the pastor may even

\[43\] Ibid.
\[44\] Joan (Donnelly) Welsh, interview by the author, September 15, 2006, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
have discouraged them from joining the parish. Anecdotal accounts suggest that Immaculate Conception, like most Irish-American parishes, offered a cool reception to Italian immigrants—a response that reflected the prejudices of the era. Whatever the case, Father Kenny was undoubtedly aware of the rapidly expanding presence of Italian immigrants in the Youngstown area. A 1930 census report issued by The International Institute, a service bureau for immigrants connected to the local Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), observed that by 1920, there were 5,538 foreign-born Italian Americans living in Youngstown—a substantial 16.3 percent of the immigrant population. By contrast, the report indicated that the number of foreign-born Irish Americans living in Youngstown in 1920 was 1,578, a mere five percent of the city’s immigrant population. Moreover, the Italian-American population in the Mahoning Valley—which included Youngstown, Warren, and smaller communities like Struthers and Campbell—reached 30,000 in 1932, a development that led the Italian government to establish a vice-consulate in the area. In 1937, the Vindicator reported that more Italians “than members of any other nationality have become naturalized American

45 Attorney Robert E. Casey, interview by the author, February 13, 2007, transcript, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
47 Ibid.
citizens in Mahoning County since 1896.\textsuperscript{49} The article notes that, between 1880 and 1937, 4,634 Italian-born residents of the county were naturalized.\textsuperscript{50}

As the number of Italian Americans residing in the community continued to rise, the newcomers found themselves in periodic conflict with more established immigrant groups, particularly Irish Americans. Beyond commonplace ethnocentricity, the widely documented conflict between the Irish and the Italians appears to have stemmed from the two groups’ very different approaches to religious observance. Irish Americans, for their part, evidently feared that Italian Catholics, with their pre-migration experience of state-subsidized churches, would offer little in the way of material contributions to the parish, while reaping the full benefits of membership.\textsuperscript{51} Italian immigrants, on the other hand, were mystified over the central role that Catholicism apparently played in the lives of many Irish Americans. “With both the Irish and Polish—and other Slavic immigrants—the Catholic Church moved from center stage in Europe to center stage in America with little difficulty,” writes historian Paul W. McBride. “The Church belonged in their communities and they belonged in their Church.”\textsuperscript{52} The situation could scarcely have been more different in the Italian-American community. “So tenuous was the role of the village priest in Italy that only rarely did he venture to follow his parishioners to America,” McBride notes. “Even more rare was an Italian priest who spoke with any

\textsuperscript{49}“Italians Lead Nationalities in Naturalization in County: Record of 91 Years Shows 4,634 Became Citizens—Hungarians Second with 2,213, \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, April 18, 1937.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{52}Ibid.
authority for his people. The Church which he represented was a wealthy, distant landlord and feared authority figure to the adults and contadini who emigrated to America.\textsuperscript{53} The vast majority of adult Italian males attended church “on only three occasions—baptisms, weddings, and funerals,” and Italian families saw little sense in giving “precious money to the Church which was so rich and state supported.”\textsuperscript{54} Hence, when Italians immigrated to America “they did not rush to found their own parishes, they did not support the Catholic Church they found there, and they did not send their children to Catholic school.”\textsuperscript{55} Consequently, Italian Americans “became known as “the Italian Problem” among members of an Irish-dominated hierarchy, clergy and religious community.\textsuperscript{56} “The problem was far-reaching and complex,” McBride concludes. “It encompassed the meeting of Italians and Irish who understood little of each other, the efforts of Protestants to capitalize upon Italian disaffection with their Church and the very essence of the Italian concept of religion.”\textsuperscript{57}

Those Italian Catholics who were exposed to mainstream American Catholicism invariably experienced culture shock. As Rudolph J. Vecoli observes, most Italian immigrants were alienated by the unfamiliar brand of Catholicism they encountered in the United States. “Those Italians who ventured into Irish or German churches found them as alien as Protestant chapels,” Vecoli notes. “The coldly rational atmosphere, the

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
discipline, the attentive congregation were foreign to the Italians who were used to behaving in church as they would in their own house.”

Many recoiled from this less than congenial environment, and a distinctive brand of Italian-American religiosity prevailed for decades. Herbert J. Gans, in his classic study of Italian Americans residing on Boston’s West End, outlines the profound differences that separated Italian and Irish Catholics as recently as the early 1960s. “Irish Catholicism stresses, among other things, the Trinity, which is male, and the source of authority is patriarchal,” Gans writes. “But as Italian Americans are notably resistant to patriarchal authority, those who did give any thought to this matter had little sympathy for the stern and less permissive Irish Catholicism being taught to their children at church and in the parochial school.”

Significantly, this level of engagement with Irish-Catholic values was often difficult to achieve for many Italian immigrants who arrived in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period, “poorly dressed, sometimes unwashed” Italian immigrants were often “turned away” from churches established by other nationalities “or seated in the rear with the Negroes.” On occasion, Italian Americans “heard themselves denounced as ‘Dagos’ from the pulpit and told they were not wanted.”

Vecoli notes that, as a general rule, “American Protestants and Catholics agreed that the Italian immigrants were characterized by ignorance of Christian doctrine,

61 Ibid.
image worship, and superstitious emotionalism.” Ultimately, the disdain many Irish Americans directed toward Italian immigrants produced a bitter legacy, and relations between the two groups were characterized by tension and distrust. One alumnus of Immaculate Conception Elementary School, Attorney Robert E. Casey, recalled that Italian-American classmates often shared stories about the icy reception their ancestors had received at the “Irish church,” where they were often “told that they might be better served at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which was predominantly Italian.”

Not surprisingly, lingering resentment over the erstwhile insensitivity of many Irish Americans has found expression in literature by local Italian-American authors. An exceptional example is Carmen J. Leone’s work of creative non-fiction, *Rose Street: A Family Story*, which is based on stories passed down by his mother, the late Josephine Vitullo, and other close relatives. Leone’s narrative indicates that the Vitullos, like most Italian-American families of the era, preferred to send their children to public schools rather than parochial ones. This decision, he suggests, was rooted in the parents’ fears that their children would be ridiculed and marginalized at the nearby “Irish” school. “The Irish had come to Youngstown long before the Italians and the other Southern and Eastern Europeans,” Leone observes. “Though they were mostly Catholic themselves, many resented these ‘foreigners,’ who had come to take work in this city that they had

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63 Casey, interview.
built up from a coal and iron town to the thriving steel town it had become."\textsuperscript{64} Leone notes that his grandmother, Gesilda, “did not hesitate to worship at [Immaculate Conception Church], for she and her family could keep to themselves and did not have to deal with the parishioners, but she would not even consider sending [her daughter] Jo to that Irish school.”\textsuperscript{65}

Later in the narrative, the Vitullos’ concerns about the potentially hostile atmosphere at Immaculate Conception Elementary School are seemingly validated when their six-year-old daughter, “Jo,” is harassed by a group of Irish-American teenagers as she walks home from the nearby public school, a journey that leads her past the steps of the “Irish church.” The adolescents, who are gathered on the steps, descend upon the girl and bait her with ethnic slurs and other insults. “They completely surrounded her, shouting strange words and giggling and snorting,” Leone writes. “Cigarette smoke encircled her. They were giants in dirty white shirts, tails hanging, and blue trousers.”\textsuperscript{66} Leone’s dramatic retelling of family lore sheds light on the mutual antipathies that divided Irish and Italian Catholics in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and reverberate even today. At certain junctures, the rift between the two ethnic groups threatened to produce a full-fledged schism within the U.S. Catholic Church. As noted, one local Italian-Catholic parish took the momentous step of breaking ties with the Diocese of Cleveland, only to

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 12-13.
be embraced by the Episcopal community. Predictably, Protestant missionaries throughout the country sought to capitalize on Italian Americans’ alienation from the U.S. Catholic hierarchy as they looked for potential converts.

Tensions between Irish and Italian Americans were overshadowed, if only temporarily, by pressures exerted on the city’s Roman Catholic community by the local Ku Klux Klan, an organization that viewed “papists” in largely monolithic terms. Like most northern chapters of the organization, Youngstown’s Klan targeted local Catholics and Jews, while mostly ignoring the community’s relatively small Black community. Although the local Klan publicly supported a state bill that would ban interracial marriage, its representatives strongly discouraged the notion that their organization bore any relationship to the southern Klan, whose murderous racism shocked many White northerners. Shaping their platform to conform to local conditions, Youngstown’s Klan leaders promoted the maintenance of “a Protestant culture that was essential to the preservation of a moral society.” In line with this project, they criticized parochial schools as obstacles to assimilation. One local Klan leader, in a newspaper interview, expressed views that seemed specifically designed to offend local Catholics. “[The Klan leader] expressed grave concern that parochial schools taught children the principle of

67 Tony Trolio, Brier Hill USA (Poland, OH: Ciao Promotions, 2001), 47-53.
70 Ibid, 159-160.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid, 53-54.
73 Ibid, 47-48.
church rule, thus violating the constitutional principle of separation of church and state,” the article reports. “The best solution in his mind was the required attendance of each child…in a public school, where the values of Americanism and patriotism would be taught.”

The Klan’s characterization of parish schools as “un-American” outraged many of the community’s Catholics, especially the considerable percentage who patronized these schools. Yet, the Klan didn’t stop there. The group’s “law-and-order” rhetoric targeted the “corrupting” influence of southern and eastern Europeans. Thus, within a short period of time, the organization succeeded in alienating even those Catholics who avoided parochial schools, especially Italian Americans. Not surprisingly, the Klan’s wholesale condemnation of a deeply divided religious minority worked to its disadvantage, as Catholics of various backgrounds brushed aside their differences to confront the vigilante organization directly. The conflict between local Klan members and Catholics reached a climax on November 1, 1924, when regional chapters of the Klan planned a massive march through nearby Niles, Ohio, a town that hosted a large number of Irish- and Italian-American residents. In their often violent campaign to prevent the march, anti-Klan activists in Niles benefited from the support of Catholics in Youngstown and Warren, who helped establish checkpoints along roads leading into

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid, 31-32.
76 Ibid, 119-120.
77 Ibid, 138.
Niles. When the motorists halted at these checkpoints were found to be in possession of Klan robes, they were beaten—sometimes severely—and turned away.\(^78\)

Cooperation across ethnic lines was not restricted to the area’s Catholic laity. Significantly, when the vigilante organization attempted to secretly transport hundreds of reinforcements into Niles, the Mahoning Valley’s heavily Irish-American clergy played a crucial role in routing the Klan. On the morning of the heaviest fighting between Klansmen and (largely Italian-American) anti-Klan rioters, a young Irish woman “happened to be at the Erie Depot [in Niles], where she overheard the railroad agents discussing the scheduled arrival in the afternoon of a special train with carloads of Klan members.” The young woman promptly informed her local pastor, who, in turn, contacted Monsignor Joseph Trainor, the pastor of St. Columba’s Church in Youngstown.\(^79\) “No one knows how the information filtered down,” Jenkins observes, but the next afternoon, about 50 anti-Klan activists gathered at the depot, armed with “guns of all sizes, knives, clubs and even homemade bombs.”\(^80\) When the train pulled into the depot at Niles, “its train carriages full of 1,200 unsuspecting and untested Klansmen,” the Klan leader aboard quickly sized up the situation and shouted: “It’s no place for us. We go right back.”\(^81\) Finally, the Klan suffered a humiliating blow when, in response to the violence in Niles, Ohio Governor Victor Donahey imposed martial law, a

\(^{78}\) Jenkins, \textit{Steel Valley Klan}, 130.

\(^{79}\) Ibid, 136.

\(^{80}\) Ibid, 135-137.

\(^{81}\) Ibid, 137.
move that ensured cancellation of the planned march. As Jenkins concludes, the Niles riot was a rare, but compelling, instance of cooperation between Italian and Irish Catholics. “The public image of the Klan as an organ of prejudice, rather than of law enforcement, had drawn together the Italian community,” he writes. “Assisted by the Irish, it had successfully defied the Klan.”

Growing Ethnic Diversity at the “Irish Church”

Although it is difficult to gauge the long-term effects of Klan-era cooperation involving Irish and Italian Americans, there is evidence that the late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed a gradual opening up of Irish-dominated territorial parishes to less-established ethnic groups. This process did not always go smoothly. “Lines between ‘race’ and what is now considered ‘ethnicity’ were unclear,” McGreevy writes. “The assumption that Celtic, Polish, and German races existed was common; as was the belief that differences between these races and the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ race were deep and enduring.” Therefore, boundaries between various ethnic groups were carefully maintained, even in neighborhoods that appeared, on the surface, to be relatively diverse. As Dolan observes, neighborhoods populated by immigrants “were cultural ghettos, not residential ghettos.” In other words, members of different ethnic groups often ignored one another, even when they lived in close proximity to each other. Joellen McNerney Vinyard, in her study of Catholic education in Detroit, stresses that this pattern was well

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid, 138.
84 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 30.
85 Dolan, The American Catholic Experience, 201.
established by the late 19th century. “Irish and German families might live on the same block yet have little cause for serious interaction, because their private lives centered around the separate parishes they built,” she writes. “The right to ethnic rather than territorial parishes was an accepted reality in the American Catholic Church.”86

In Youngstown, as elsewhere in the northeastern United States, conservative Irish-American parishioners often resisted the efforts of liberal pastors to make parish schools available to “new arrivals.” This was especially true when these newcomers were associated with national parishes that failed to maintain schools of their own. Former north side resident Paula McKinney recalled her mother’s description of tensions that were unleashed during the “integration” of St. Columba’s Parish in the 1920s:

…St. Columba’s [Church] basically was an Irish parish, or had been. And of course, over the years, the neighborhood was changing. And the people were moving in. And quite a few of them were foreign born. We had Italian people, and Lebanese people, and Black people. And Monsignor [Joseph] Trainor, who was our pastor, said, “The school is open to all”—meaning all of our children…. He said: “The facilities have been paid for by those who came before you. The place was built where it was, which is in the neighborhood. And the children are welcome.” Now, some of the Irishmen didn’t want that…. [M]y mother said it

was pretty bad for awhile, I guess. But [the pastor] stuck to his guns, and…we all went to school together.⁸⁷

Tellingly, she added: “Of course, all these Italian people, and Lebanese people, and Black people sang, ‘All Praise to St. Patrick,’ with the rest of us…. We always had a real nice St. Patrick’s Day show and all that kind of thing.”⁸⁸ Evidently, the acceptance of non-Irish students at St. Columba’s Elementary School did not result in an immediate weakening of Irish-American cultural hegemony.

Once the city’s oldest “Irish” parish opened its doors to newer immigrant groups, it was a matter of time before Immaculate Conception followed suit. The parish’s diversification came about only gradually, however. As late as the 1930s, the bulk of Haselton’s Italian Americans continued to worship at the national parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and largely ignored the Immaculate’s school. Yet, a small but growing number of them became involved in what many local Italian Americans still regarded as the “Irish church.” In a 2007 interview with a Vindicator reporter, Immaculate Conception parishioner Kelly Stilson noted that her family’s affiliation with the parish traced back to the 1920s, when her great-grandmother, the late Catherine Carano, began attending religious services at the church. “My grandmother was 5 years old when

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⁸⁷ Paula (Lehnerd) McKinney, interview by the author, June 14, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
⁸⁸ Ibid.
started walking to church here…on her own,” Mrs. Stilson said. “And then she brought her siblings along.”

Perhaps the growing ethnic diversity of territorial parishes like Immaculate Conception owed something to the economic depression that followed the stock market “crash” of 1929. Although the subsequent muting of economic differences between Italian and Irish Americans probably heightened mutual tensions in some ways—as members of the two ethnic groups competed for a shrinking pool of resources—it could also have simultaneously weakened divisions that were rooted in perceived class differences. The Great Depression forced many U.S. Catholics to abandon their insularity and “to become more concerned about the welfare of American society.” The emergence of a broader social perspective might have contributed to a weakening of ethnic barriers within the Catholic community. No less significant, however, was the fact that legislation enacted in the 1920s bolstered restrictions on immigration from southeastern Europe. This development deprived Italian enclaves of large numbers of newcomers, who might have shored up the community’s collective sense of identity, while stiffening resistance to cooperation with “foreigners.” As many observers have noted, declining levels of ethnic identity among communities of “new” immigrants had a profound effect on race relations throughout the northern United States. David R.

89 Linda M. Linonis, “Diversity and friendliness make Immaculate Conception special: The church, which is marking its 125th anniversary Dec. 9, remains committed to the city,” The Vindicator, November 24, 2007.
90 Dolan, In Search of an American Catholicism, 152.
Roediger observes that the sharp reduction in immigration that came with the Immigration Act of 1924 contributed to the gradual emergence of a collective White identity among “in-between” immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.92 A weakening of traditional barriers between ethnic Whites was duly reflected in the growing number of Italian Americans who joined Immaculate Conception Church during the late 1920s and 1930s. Both parish and school emerged from the Great Depression as more diverse—and less affluent.

A Parish School’s Struggle with Economic Adversity

Former parishioners and staff members who lived through the lean years of the Depression and World War II continue to share anecdotes about Immaculate Conception’s financial difficulties.93 Many of these stories focus on the cost-cutting measures employed by the church’s long-suffering pastor. While most of the parish’s earliest debts (accrued through building projects) were paid off during the tenure of Father Kenny, a fire that devastated the school building in 1929 left the Immaculate about $89,000 in arrears.94 The parish’s financial predicament, if unusual in its severity, reflected the kinds of challenges that many parishes faced as they struggled to maintain schools amid shrinking contributions. During the Depression, of course, declining levels of giving were generally a byproduct of mass unemployment. Evidence that the problem was widespread among local parishes is found in news reports suggesting that some

92 Roediger, Working Toward Whiteness, 155.
93 Casey, interview.
parish schools were unable to cover even the modest salaries of religious instructors. In a 1935 *Vindicator* article, Monsignor William A. Kane, the dean of Mahoning Valley clergy, is quoted as follows: “State aid will be absolutely necessary to continue the work of the parochial schools in Youngstown…. The situation is very bad at the present time, although the parishes are doing their best to keep them going.”95 The article emphasizes that parochial schools were “unique in that [their] only source of revenue is through the contributions of parishioners.” The newspaper’s description of conditions at one particularly hard-hit local parish may refer to the situation at Immaculate Conception. “In one parish, where approximately 50 percent of the parishioners are now out of work, the contributions are 70 per cent less than they were four years ago,” the article states. “It has been impossible for the parish to pay the sisters, although the salary of each is but $50 a month.”96

While Youngstown’s steel-centered economy picked up dramatically after America’s entry into World War II, Immaculate Conception remained, in many ways, a struggling parish community. In 1941, the parish recorded about 800 families, most of whom were dependent on the modest wages of blue-collar workers.97 Former instructor Sister Virginia McDermott, O.S.U., recalled that close to 600 students were enrolled at the parish school in the early 1940s. She noted that their fathers were “[m]ostly working

96 Ibid.
in the mills, and rather poor.”98 The school’s mainly Irish- and Italian-American families were so inured to material deprivation, she added, that few of them even bothered to conceal their plight. “I always loved Immaculate Conception, and I loved the simplicity of it, and the openness of the people to you,” Sister Virginia recalled. “They would say: ‘We don’t have enough to eat. We don’t have this. We don’t have that.’ They were poor. And they were a wonderful example of how to live simply, because they all did.”99 By this time, she observed, the percentage of Italian-American students enrolled at the parish school had risen substantially.100

Demographic changes, however, did not discourage those elements within Immaculate Conception’s leadership who were committed to reinforcing the school’s residual Irish-American identity. Anecdotal accounts suggest that students of Irish ancestry continued to receive preferential treatment at the hands of some of the school’s teachers and administrators. Alumnus Robert Casey recalled that, as late as the 1950s, Italian-American students complained of ethnically based discrimination.101 He described one incident involving a close friend named Don Greco, who, despite his mixed Irish and Italian heritage, was widely viewed as an Italian American—and treated accordingly. Some weeks before an important religious service at which the bishop was expected to officiate, Greco competed for the position of “head” altar boy at the event.

98 Sister Virginia McDermott, interview by the author, May 31, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Casey, interview.
When he arrived at the church for the competition, Greco reportedly discovered that his main rival was an Irish-American classmate named Danny Lyons. Attorney Casey described Greco’s account of what happened next. “[H]e said, when he got over there, Danny Lyons had the assistant altar boys [that] looked like a well-practiced precision drill team,” Casey said. “[A]nd they brought over the ‘ne’er-do-well’ fellows, and they put them with my buddy, Don Greco.” Predictably, the inexperienced altar boys made a poor showing, and Casey’s friend “didn’t get that honor.” Casey concluded that, at Immaculate Conception Elementary School, “there seemed to be a bias…in favor of the Irish—and certainly not in favor of the Italians.”

Cases of ethnocentric bias were bound to decline, however, as the student body became more diverse; and this process was well underway in the 1950s. Within a decade of the incident Casey described, Italian Americans had emerged as the largest single ethnic group at Immaculate Conception Elementary School. Italian-American students were gradually joined by representatives of other groups that were traditionally underrepresented at the school, including African Americans.

Signs of Urban Change in the Postwar Era

Although Immaculate Conception emerged intact from the Depression and World War II, it was by no means a thriving enterprise. The parish’s postwar challenges included overwhelming debt and a decaying physical plant. Furthermore, the parish’s

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102 Ibid.
103 Internal Records for Immaculate Conception, 1969-1970, reproduction, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
104 Ibid.
financial tribulations had been alleviated only slightly by the frugal policies of Father Joseph McCann, who had assumed the pastorate in 1941. Anecdotal accounts suggest that Father McCann went so far as to dispense with the services of a custodian in order to save money. Sister Virginia confirmed, in an interview, that the Immaculate had no salaried maintenance workers in the 1940s. “Father McCann was a very hard worker himself,” she recalled. “He was also aware of the huge debt that the parish had. And he was trying to take care of that debt his way.” Sister Virginia added that, during her tenure as a classroom instructor, the pastor personally handled most maintenance issues, including plumbing. “He did any kind of work that had to be done—except the scrubbing,” she said. “The kids did that.” The retired instructor recalled that Father McCann “disapproved” of students participating in the school’s maintenance. “But you can’t stand a dirty classroom,” she added. Sister Virginia’s recollections were corroborated by those of Robert Casey, who attended the school in the early 1950s. “I remember [that] we cleaned the blackboards after school; certain students were designated,” he said. “We swept the classroom floors.” Casey recalled that students threw cornmeal on the hardwood floors and polished the planks with their feet, which were often wrapped in strips of cloth. “But the good part of this is that we felt it was our school,” he added.

106 McDermott, interview.
107 Casey, interview.
While this sort of “communal” maintenance was commonplace among local parochial schools during the 1930s and 1940s, the tradition was maintained at Immaculate Conception well into the 1950s. Despite such cost-cutting measures, however, the parish was unable to pay off debts that traced back to the period of the Great Depression. When a weary Father McCann announced his retirement from the pastorate in 1954, Bishop Emmett Walsh replaced him with a much younger priest, Father Arthur B. DeCrane, the popular chaplain of Youngstown College’s Newman Club, a campus organization for Catholic students.  

To the alarm of the retiring Father McCann, Father DeCrane’s first pastoral decision was to seek forgiveness for the years of back wages that the parish owed to the Ursuline religious order. Decades later, Sister Virginia recalled this episode, which had been a topic of discussion within her religious community. “I remember Father McCann speaking…to Sister Alice and me,” she stated. “He said that he owed a debt to the Ursulines that…was a huge debt from years back.” Sister Virginia confirmed that Father McCann was deeply upset about the new pastor’s request that the religious order to “write off” the debt. “And Father McCann said, ‘I will not go to my grave without paying that debt to those sisters,’ which he did,” she added.

After persuading the Ursuline community to “write off” the parish’s longstanding debt, Father DeCrane set about raising funds for the repair of the school and church facilities, which had suffered from decades of haphazard maintenance. The new pastor showed a rare aptitude for fundraising, and it soon became apparent that Immaculate

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109 McDermott, interview.
Conception’s physical plant would be presentable for the parish’s 75th anniversary in September 1957. As the Vindicator reported, “rejuvenation” of the Immaculate’s physical plant had been Father DeCrane’s “principal occupation” in the three years since his appointment. 110 By the time of the anniversary celebration, the young pastor had “succeeded in painting and decorating the church, modernizing the rectory, remodeling the school to add classrooms and kitchen facilities in the original building as well as constructing an addition.” 111

Despite such material improvements, however, Father DeCrane must have sensed that his parish faced long-term challenges. The Immaculate was starting to lose its most precious resource—its parishioners. This trend may have escaped the notice of less involved observers, given that the neighborhood’s declining Catholic population was not immediately reflected in the parish school’s enrollment levels. In 1955, Immaculate Conception Elementary School was holding its own with 535 students enrolled, thereby retaining its place as the city’s third-largest parish school in terms of enrollment. 112 Yet, this figure, while only slightly lower than enrollment figures described in the 1940s, appears sobering when one considers that the postwar “baby boom” fueled explosive growth elsewhere. During the mid-1950s, enrollment at St. Patrick’s Elementary School, another urban parochial school, rose by one-third, as student numbers escalated from 800

111 Ibid.
to 1,204.\textsuperscript{113} The relatively high numbers recorded at St. Patrick’s, however, were no less deceptive. As historian Glen Gabert, Jr., observes, the percentage of Catholics who were sending their children to parochial schools declined sharply, even as enrollment figures were pushed upward by the population increase of the “baby boom.”\textsuperscript{114}

For those who looked closely, Immaculate Conception revealed clear signs of a parish in transition. A 1957 newspaper article intended to highlight the Immaculate’s 75\textsuperscript{th} anniversary festivities inadvertently called attention to the fact that Haselton was losing many of its long-time residents. “Informality will prevail during the day-long event which is expected to bring together many former parishioners who have moved to different portions of the Youngstown district or away from the area altogether,” the \textit{Vindicator} reported. “Reminiscing will substitute for a program of speakers. No formal addresses will be made at either the dinner or the dance.”\textsuperscript{115} As the 1950s progressed, a growing number of former east-side residents settled in the relatively affluent neighborhoods of the south side as well as neighboring suburban communities like Boardman, Poland, and Canfield. This mobility was fueled, in part, by a government-subsidized building boom, which enabled White working-class families across the country to purchase affordable housing in outlying areas.\textsuperscript{116}

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\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Gabert, \textit{In Hoc Signo?}, 94.
\textsuperscript{115} Wirtz, \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, September 29, 1957.
\end{flushright}
Undoubtedly, the depopulation of Haselton was partially driven by the concerns of White urban dwellers about demographic changes taking place on the east side. By the 1950s, the district had a growing African-American population, and oral accounts suggest that Blacks and Whites living there interacted only sparingly. Notably, there is little evidence that community leaders took steps to bridge the social gulf that separated Blacks and Whites who were living together in Haselton. Robert Casey, who spent most of his childhood and adolescence on the east side, could not recall a “single effort” on the part of Immaculate Conception’s leadership to reach out to the neighborhood’s growing African-American population. “Now, in the ‘40s and the ‘50s, I believe a large number of African Americans had come up from the South and had settled in the streets between Immaculate Conception and the Oak Street Bridge,” Casey said. “And yet, I remember there [were] no African Americans in my class, the class before me, or the class after me, or most classes, almost all classes.” During the same period, Casey observed, scores of visiting priests entered classrooms “to talk about their missions in Africa and other places, and asking for donations from the parishioners to spread Catholicism around the world.” It seemed “ironic,” he added, that Catholic missionaries would “go halfway around the world to spread Catholicism,” while the parish took no effort “to make Catholicism known to the African-American families” in the vicinity of the Immaculate. The reticence towards Blacks that Casey described was common within

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117 Casey, interview.
118 Ibid.
119 Casey, interview.
urban Catholic enclaves throughout the northeastern United States. As recently as the late 1950s, when their neighborhoods were threatened with extinction by urban renewal projects, White Catholics who remained in the city continued to view demographic change as the single greatest threat to their way of life.120

Although racial prejudice was a factor in the cool response many Blacks received as they moved into traditionally White neighborhoods like Haselton, material considerations also came into play. The district’s White residents, like their counterparts in larger northern cities, were undoubtedly concerned about the economic implications of demographic change. During the postwar era, Whites throughout the urban North perceived a strong relationship between racial diversity and the depreciation of residential property values.121 Most of them found it hard to grasp that the isolation of poor Blacks in undesirable residential areas owed much to the policies and practices of the White establishment. Nevertheless, amid unparalleled levels of Black migration from the South, institutionalized racial discrimination in housing markets played a crucial role in the postwar transformation of northern cities.122

Urban Whites were not alone in their concerns about the implications of demographic change. In an ironic twist, a large number of established Black urban dwellers became alarmed when scores of southern migrants arrived in their

neighborhoods. Ronald P. Formisano, in his analysis of Boston’s “bussing wars,” notes that the postwar migration of southern Blacks proved especially destabilizing for those African Americans who had settled in northern cities decades earlier and, in many cases, were poised to move into the middle classes. Formisano contends that the migration of thousands of impoverished southern Blacks to northern cities “caused the black population as a whole to lose status and the quality of schools in black neighborhoods to plummet.”¹²³ The plight of urban Blacks, who found themselves in increasingly overcrowded neighborhoods, was compounded by a network of legally sanctioned obstacles that consigned them to older housing stock in declining areas.¹²⁴

In his magisterial study of postwar Detroit, Thomas J. Sugrue describes challenges that urban Blacks faced in any number of northern communities. “Although Detroit had a stock of well-built if modest homes that blue-collar workers could afford, blacks were systematically shut out of the private real estate market,” Sugrue writes. “White real estate brokers shunned black clients and encouraged restrictive covenants and other discriminatory practices that kept blacks out of most of the city’s single-family houses.”¹²⁵ Meanwhile, financial institutions “seldom lent to black home buyers, abetted by federal housing appraisal practices that ruled black neighborhoods to be dangerous risks for mortgage subsidies and home loans.”¹²⁶ As a result, many Black urban dwellers

¹²⁴ Ibid, 34.
¹²⁵ Ibid.
¹²⁶ Ibid.
found themselves “trapped in the city’s worst housing, in strictly segregated sections of the city.”127 Such discriminatory policies “set into motion a chain reaction that reinforced racial inequality,” while appearing to confirm northern Whites’ longstanding prejudices against Blacks. At the outset of this “vicious cycle,” disadvantaged Blacks “had to pay more for housing, thus deepening their relative impoverishment.”128 To make matters worse, these home buyers were consigned to urban properties “in most need of ongoing maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation,” but they “could not get loans to improve their properties.”129 The inevitable deterioration of Black neighborhoods, in turn, “offered seemingly convincing evidence that blacks were feckless and irresponsible, fueling white fears that blacks would ruin any white neighborhood that they moved into.”130 In the final stage of this vicious cycle, the poor condition of these neighborhoods “seemed definitive proof to bankers that blacks were indeed a poor credit risk, and justified disinvestment in predominantly minority neighborhoods.”131

Black residential patterns in Youngstown generally conformed to patterns that Sugrue identified in postwar Detroit. As Thomas G. Fuechtmann observes, Youngstown’s neighborhoods became increasingly homogeneous in the decades that followed World War II. He notes that, while “[s]uburbanization tended to scatter steelworkers’ places of residence over a wider geographical area around the urban

127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid, 34-36.
130 Ibid, 36.
131 Ibid.
The limited housing options available to African Americans belied the fact that Blacks had begun to settle in Youngstown in the early stages of its industrial development. Indeed, Blacks residents were well established in the community by the mid-19th century, decades before the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Moreover, the African-American community expanded dramatically in the early 20th century, when thousands of Black workers were drawn by opportunities in the steel industry. Fuechtmann notes that the steel industry brought several thousand southern Blacks to Youngstown as strikebreakers during the 1919 steel strike. “Steel employment did provide an avenue for upward economic mobility,” Fuechtmann adds, “but, except for company housing, their residential location had been limited largely to the old ethnic neighborhoods of inner-city Youngstown, the largest concentration of blacks in the Youngstown-Warren area.”

Not surprisingly, the fact that 5,000 Black laborers had arrived in Youngstown at the height of the national steel strike of 1919 was deeply etched upon the collective memory of the area’s White working classes. During the strike, White steelworkers were often demoralized at “the sight of smoke rising from the mills and the sound of whistles announcing the change of a shift” at the peak of the conflict. There is no doubt that resentment over the industry’s use of Black laborers as strikebreakers inflamed racist

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133 Ibid, 24.
sentiment among ethnic Whites, who comprised a significant percentage of the work force in the early 20th century. This tense atmosphere may have compounded the so-called “shortage” of housing available to African-American workers.

That said, it was inevitable that White Catholic urban dwellers would come to fear the prospect of demographic change, given that northern Whites, on the whole, linked Black migration to urban decay. McGreevy observes that, for urban Catholics in the 1950s, “the stakes remained high,” and the timing of changes that undermined the viability of their neighborhoods could not have been worse. “Exactly at the point of triumph, having weathered the Depression, built the school, and finished the church,” McGreevy writes, “Catholic churches in the northern cities confronted the possibility that generations of painstaking work might be rendered obsolete in a few years.”

Nevertheless, Youngstown’s center-city neighborhoods were spared the jarring racial tension and violence that accompanied demographic change in many other northern communities during the 1950s. Some local observers attribute the city’s relatively calm racial climate to its modest size. Father Joseph Rudjak, an urban pastor who grew up in the multiracial north side neighborhoods of “Monkey’s Nest” and Brier Hill, aptly expressed this view. “What…made Youngstown great is that [we were] too small to isolate ourselves,” Father Rudjak said. He went on to describe harmonious relationships among residents of the diverse, working-class neighborhoods in which he spent his youth. “We got along well,” the urban pastor said. “Our attitude as a family was just

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135 Fuechtmann, *Steeples and Stacks*, 17.
enjoying…the people…. The D’Nunzio family yielded to the Futkos family—the Hungarian family. The Futkos family yielded to the Puerto Rican family.”  He referred to close and enduring friendships with African-American and Hispanic neighbors. As Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo point out, however, “some of that community harmony was facilitated by careful maintenance of ethnic identities through churches, civic groups, and informal networks.”

Even so, diverse neighborhoods like Brier Hill were bound to experience some conflict, particularly among adolescents. Youngstown-area resident Tony Trolio recalled high levels of competition among members of the various ethnic and racial groups who made their home on the city’s north side. In his popular history, Brier Hill, USA, Trolio notes that rivalries among Italian, Jewish, Irish, and Black teenagers occasionally degenerated into “fisticuffs.” The author treats these incidents lightly, however, attributing them to adolescent high spirits. He adopts a humorous tone when admitting to countless fights with the medigones (non-Italians). Trolio recalls that he often returned home “all bloodied and banged up,” much to the consternation of his mother, who smacked him with a broom.

137 Father Joseph S. Rudjak, interview by the author, June 22, 2008, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
138 Ibid.
140 Trolio, Brier Hill USA, 74-76.
141 Ibid, 76.
On the other hand, some observers have seriously challenged the claim that postwar Youngstown was characterized by high levels of tolerance, especially where matters of race were concerned. African-American author Mel Watkins, a onetime resident of the city, suggests that racism in Youngstown, while subtle, was practically ubiquitous. “[D]espite the well-publicized gangland flare-ups, a prevailing sense of tranquility cloaked Youngstown’s quietly restrictive social arrangements,” Watkins writes. “Conformity reigned among both blacks and whites. It was as if everyone had determined to grasp and tenaciously hold on to a brief moment of calm and apparent order.”¹⁴² This code of conformity was reinforced, Watkins suggests, by widespread fear over the probable alternative. “Peace, security, prosperity, and a superficial equanimity held sway,” the author continues. “Somehow, at least unconsciously, everyone seemed to understand that the illusion or fabrication, like an inexpensive knit sweater, would completely unravel if even one loose strand were pulled too forcefully or examined with any real intensity.”¹⁴³ In other words, the surface amicability which existed between Blacks and Whites in postwar Youngstown depended upon the maintenance of well-defined social boundaries.¹⁴⁴

Watkins illustrates the fragile nature of local race relations when he describes an incident that occurred when he was enrolled at a local high school. As a student athlete (popularly known as “Pepper”), Watkins was on good terms with most of his White

¹⁴³ Ibid.
¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 149-150.
neighbors and classmates. One afternoon, however, a normally friendly Italian-American shoemaker happened to be watching as Watkins strolled home with a White female classmate. When the young man entered the shoemaker’s shop a few days later, the proprietor “took time to share a bit of his Sicilian folk wisdom.” Watkins “listened impatiently” as the shoemaker “wound through a seemingly friendly harangue, which ended with, ‘You know, Pepper, I love you people. Give you the shirt off my back. You can have my clothes, my liquor; my money—but don’t ever mess with my women!’” When Watkins responded in a manner that the older man interpreted as flippant, the shoemaker coldly turned his back on him. According to Watkins’ memoir, the man never spoke to him again. Watkins concludes that acceptance for Blacks in 1950s Youngstown came at the price of smiling acquiescence to the vigorously maintained conventions of the White majority. In postwar Youngstown, such conventions included the segregation of many public spaces, including swimming pools.

The Transformation of the East Side

By the late 1960s, the neighborhood surrounding Immaculate Conception Parish was “changing” in a multitude of ways. The construction of Interstate 680 virtually bisected the Haselton district, wiping out blocks of housing and accelerating an ongoing decline in the parish’s congregation. Between the late 1960s and 1970s, the parish’s

145 Ibid.
146 Linkon and Russo, Steeltown U.S.A., 33.
membership fell from 1,500 people to 700 people. At the same time, the district, which had emerged from the 1950s as an Italian-American enclave, appeared to be evolving into an African-American neighborhood. Most of the area’s newer residents were poorer than their predecessors had been; and with the advent of rising poverty, Haselton seemed destined to resume its former status as a neglected outpost of the city. These changes were apparent to many contemporary observers. In 1969, when Sister Teresa Winsen, O.S.U., was transferred from the south-side parish school of St. Patrick’s to Immaculate Conception Elementary School, she was startled by the differences she observed between the two institutions. At the Immaculate, endemic poverty, combined with demographic changes that reduced the number of Catholic residents, fueled a trend toward declining enrollment. As the decade came to a close, it was difficult to imagine that as recently as the fall of 1960, Immaculate Conception opened with a peak enrollment of 693 students. By the time Sister Teresa arrived, in 1969, enrollment had slipped to a paltry 411 students. Possibly, some more optimistic observers viewed the decline in Immaculate Conception’s enrollment as a temporary development. Over the years, the school’s sagging enrollment showed occasional signs of turning around, and administrators may have been encouraged by modest spikes that were recorded in the early 1960s. Between 1963 and 1964, for instance, student numbers rose from 645 to

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149 Sister Teresa Winsen, O.S.U., interview by the author, January 30, 2007, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
Such short-lived boosts in enrollment, however, did little to offset a rather insistent downward trend.\textsuperscript{151}

As she assumed her duties at Immaculate Conception, Sister Teresa took note of the school’s growing diversity. While relevant statistical data on the Immaculate are incomplete, an informal survey of parents who had children enrolled in the school was conducted by the institution’s administrators in the late 1960s. The results of the survey suggested that most of the Catholic students enrolled at the school were Italian Americans, while those of Irish ancestry comprised the second-largest ethnic group.\textsuperscript{152} Only 14 percent of the 266 sets of parents who responded to the survey indicated they were African Americans; but this result may be misleading, given that about 35 percent of survey participants failed to respond to this question.\textsuperscript{153} Another (admittedly crude) indicator of the school’s diversity might be the shrinking number of parents who indicated they were Catholic. Only 162 (or 61 percent) of the male parents who responded to the survey described themselves as Catholic, while 187 (or 70 percent) of the female parents did so.\textsuperscript{154} (The reasons behind this apparent disparity in religious affiliation between male and female parents are unclear. Perhaps such disparity reflected a sharp rise in inter-religious marriages.) The apparent drop in the percentage (and absolute number) of Catholic families with children enrolled in the school underscored

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
another challenge facing the Immaculate—a decline in the number of parishioners, which, of course, translated into fewer donations at the parish level.

The challenges facing Immaculate Conception School didn’t stop there. These trends coincided with another development: rising operational costs among diocesan schools. At this stage, teachers’ salaries were probably a minor factor in the institution’s escalating expenses, given that most lay instructors were parishioners who received modest remuneration for their services. Salary agreements were often worked out between teachers and the pastor, and lay teachers at schools like Immaculate Conception were paid little more than their religious counterparts, whose salaries were practically stipends. Still, the growing percentage of lay teachers ensured that expenses required to meet instructors’ salaries would continue to rise. Furthermore, salary increases at diocesan secondary schools intensified pressures on parish schools to boost their teachers’ salaries. As the Vindicator reported in 1969, diocesan high schools were paying lay teachers “95 percent of the public high school salary schedule.” The same article notes that the modest salaries of teaching nuns would be supplemented over time: “Salaries for nuns are to be increased from $1,400 to $1,800 as of Sept. 1, 1969, to $2,200 in September, 1970, and to $2,500 in September, 1971.”155

The astonishingly low rate of pay afforded religious instructors highlights the significance of a growing trend among Catholic elementary and secondary schools—a

substantial increase in the number, and percentage, of lay instructors.156 As Sister Charlotte Italiano pointed out, “the success of the Catholic school system in the United States…was on the backs of the nuns.”157 This is scarcely an exaggeration. According to a 1952 survey conducted by the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), 45 percent of the participating religious communities reported “that the cost of supporting a sister at a basic level exceeded the amount of her teaching stipend.”158 A close examination of this figure reveals that many religious communities “were subsidizing Catholic school systems rather than the other way around.”159 Thus, it should come as no surprise that the arrival into the classroom of large numbers of lay teachers, who required greater remuneration, placed a considerable strain on parish schools.

In 1970, Sister Mary Conroy, O.S.U., a faculty member at Youngstown State University, drew a strong correlation between declining religious instructors in the classroom and the upward trend of parochial-school operational expenses. She noted that diocesan school salaries, which totaled $917,000 in 1965, had risen to $1,882,000 in 1970.160 In an interview with the Vindicator, Sister Mary attributed this rise largely to the fact that a growing number of lay teachers received “95 per cent of the scale paid public school teachers in the district where the Catholic high schools are located.”161

157 Italiano, interview.
159 Ibid, 53.
161 Ibid.
Notably, this trend was hardly restricted to the Youngstown area. Its impact was felt throughout the United States. “There is a pathetic shortage of religious teachers caused by lack of vocations, those leaving the sisterhood, and religious sisters going into other fields of work,” observes historian Harold A. Buetow, writing in 1970. “Catholic schools must face daily the need to make savings brought about by the increased faculty salaries, of lay teachers in particular.” Buetow adds that, by 1960, “the number of lay teachers increased by 537% over the 7,422 lay teachers in the Catholic schools of 1948.”

A trend toward laicization of the teaching staff was clearly reflected at the Immaculate. Traditionally, the parish school’s staff had been dominated by members of religious teaching orders, who accepted what would be considered today as subsistence wages. By 1969, however, two-thirds of Immaculate Conception Elementary School’s teachers were members of the laity. Apart from longtime instructor Marion Steadman, a fixture at the Immaculate since 1929, the lay teachers were relatively recent hires. Only one of them had been teaching at the school for more than five years, and two of the lay teachers had been hired for that academic year. Perhaps the economic impact of such personnel changes was softened at the earliest stages by the fact that local parish schools were relieved of the responsibility of providing transportation to students. The provision of public transportation to students of non-public schools in the mid-1960s was

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163 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
an outcome of the 1947 Supreme Court decision, *Everson v. Board of Education*, which ruled in favor of the constitutionality of a New Jersey law that made such services available.¹⁶⁶ Financial pressures on Catholic schools were also mitigated by the Ohio State Board of Education’s decision in 1969 to provide salary assistance to instructors at non-public schools. This law, overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1975, stipulated that supplemental salaries would “not exceed $600 per classroom hour, $3,000 a year, or 85 per cent of the total nonpublic school aid from the state.”¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, growing operational expenses were taking a toll on many urban parochial schools, even those that provided modest salaries to lay teachers.

Given that the Diocese of Youngstown was initially unprepared to provide much in the way of additional funding to ailing urban parish schools, the principals of these institutions were compelled to resort to unorthodox strategies (including city-wide fundraising efforts and grant-writing campaigns) to maintain operations. A growing number of these institutions were also taking steps to ensure that educational services were available to underprivileged children in the neighborhood, many of whom had no connection to the parish. Sister Teresa seemingly had few rivals in the areas of fundraising and community outreach. Apart from raising money to establish a school scholarship fund, she visited homes to get a clearer picture of challenges facing Haselton’s poor families. “As an administrator, I found it necessary to provide donations and services to the poorer families in the area,” Sister Teresa recalled. “To get an idea of

the poverty that existed among those families, I really needed to visit the homes.” She was startled at the level of material deprivation she encountered in some households. “I remember visiting one home, and the children said to me, ‘We have no food,’” she recalled. “Well, I couldn’t believe that, so I said, ‘Let’s look in the cupboard,’ and there was nothing—absolutely nothing. I returned to the school and collected extra lunches for these children.”

During this period, Sister Teresa’s administration took an active interest in the surrounding neighborhood—a development that echoed Father Kenny’s tireless lobbying for the construction of the Oak Street Bridge in the early 20th century. At the beginning of 1970, the parish school became a force in municipal politics, when Sister Teresa helped to call attention to Haselton’s substandard infrastructure. Visits to students’ homes had brought her face-to-face with problems that demanded the city’s intervention. The principal recalled entering one home in which “there were no water lines and no lavatories.” When she inquired about a restroom, a resident “showed me a room with several buckets.” With a sense of urgency, Sister Teresa alerted Youngstown Mayor Jack C. Hunter and the local city council about the need to install sewer lines in some of the poorer neighborhoods surrounding Immaculate Conception Parish. The Vindicator reported that “she made a personal investigation of conditions in the area and found them appalling.” Sister Teresa said she found “some occupied homes without toilet facilities

168 Sister Teresa Winsen, O.S.U., interview by the author, January 30, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
of any type, others with defective septic tanks, and some without water, sewers, or toilet facilities.”171 The same article notes that Dr. William Greissenger, Youngstown’s health commissioner, presented a map to Youngstown City Council which revealed that “about a dozen streets” in the environs of Immaculate Conception Parish were “without sewers or water lines or…both.” Greissenger described the situation as “a health hazard.”172

Looking back on this episode, Sister Teresa praised municipal leaders for their response, in language that reflected her commitment to the neighborhood. She recalled that her first chance to alert the city to conditions in Haselton arose when Second Ward Councilman “Pete” Starks, a leader in Youngstown’s Black community, invited her to speak before a caucus of the City Council. “When I begged for sewer lines and water lines on the east side, the municipal government listened,” she said. “We had to be the advocates and voice for the poor.”173 Paradoxically, most of the homes in question had been built only a few years beforehand. For reasons that remain unclear, these newer homes were erected in areas that lacked access to existing water lines, and no attempt had been made to extend water lines to these neighborhoods. The east side residents who lived in these dwellings were overwhelmingly poor, and most of them were Black.174

In some respects, the social commitments reflected in Sister Teresa’s actions underscored a shift in the mission of American Catholic education. U.S. Catholic schools had already witnessed sweeping structural changes, which went into effect in the late

172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
174 Winsen, interview.
1950s and early 1960s. Monsignor O’Neill C. D’Amour, then assistant secretary of the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), proposed that “altered political and social realities called for separating the pastoral from the professional in Catholic schools and for establishing lay boards with policy-making powers.”\textsuperscript{175} In 1972, following the social and political upheavals that precipitated a reevaluation of the traditional model of Catholic education, U.S. bishops issued a pastoral letter titled, “To Teach As Jesus Did,” which outlined the “threefold purpose of Catholic education among children and young people” in the following terms: “1) to teach doctrine, the message of hope contained in the gospel; 2) to build community, “not simply as a concept to be taught but as a reality to be lived”; and 3) [to provide] service to all mankind, which emanated from the sense of Christian community.”\textsuperscript{176} This concept of Catholic education, with its emphasis on service to the larger community, was, to some extent, presaged by the activities of urban educators like Sister Teresa.

As the decade progressed, both the Immaculate and St. Patrick’s were categorized as “inner-city” parochial schools, a term that revealed less about the institutions’ respective locations than it did about the demographic characteristics of their surrounding neighborhoods. Over time, the term “inner city” was applied to more and more urban parish schools, as they showed qualities plainly evident at institutions like Immaculate Conception School. Such characteristics included declining parish contributions,

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, 34.
growing numbers of low-income neighbors, and a larger percentage of non-Catholic students from minority backgrounds. Amazingly, even as the Immaculate struggled with the material challenges that faced other urban institutions, the school gained positive attention for its innovative educational programs. In 1970, the year Sister Teresa had lobbied the municipal government for sewage and water lines on the city’s east side, she conferred with Dr. James Steele, a professor at Youngstown State University’s Department of Education, on a plan to implement a pilot program called Individually Guided Education (IGE).177 YSU had received a grant through the Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio, to train educators in urban schools. When the program was implemented two years later, Immaculate Conception was the only parochial institution out of six schools selected to participate in the program.178 Within a year, Sister Teresa became one of the community’s most visible proponents of the IGE program, an approach to curricula designed to help students learn at their own pace. In 1973, she secured a foundational grant to attend the third annual international seminar on individualized curriculum in Amsterdam, Holland.179 The following year, in 1974, the principal shared her experiences with local educators at a teachers’ workshop.180 Significantly, by the mid-1970s, Immaculate Conception Elementary School had gained regional recognition for its implementation of the IGE program. “Immaculate

177 Winsen, interview.
180 Ibid.
Conception became the model school for the city of Youngstown—and beyond,” Sister Teresa recalled. “People came from all parts of the state to see what we were doing at Immaculate.”\(^{181}\)

Overall, the IGE program was in sync with student-centered approaches to education that swept public schools during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Five years earlier, in 1969, Herbert R. Kohl’s groundbreaking handbook, *The Open Classroom*, questioned “authoritarian” approaches to teaching and student evaluation. “Tests are made to measure one student against another student or to measure a student’s performance against some standard which is expected of him,” Kohl’s text advises. “When a teacher abandons the notion that all students must live up to some given standards, or have their worth measured against the worth of another student, new means of evaluating a student’s work must be developed.”\(^{182}\) As she hastened to point out, Sister Teresa did not wholeheartedly embrace the trends that were then sweeping public education. “Now bear in mind, I didn’t apply every aspect of the [IGE] program,” Sister Teresa said. “I didn’t believe in tearing down walls. But I applied other aspects of the program, and the whole city knew about what we were doing.”\(^{183}\)

Given that Sister Teresa often worked closely with public school counterparts in local workshops, the parish school’s participation in the IGE program opened new avenues of cooperation between public and private schools. She later evaluated the

\(^{181}\) Winsen, interview.


\(^{183}\) Winsen, interview.
rapport among representatives of public and private schools as “excellent.” Sister Teresa stated that, in her view, Youngstown Schools Superintendent Robert Pegues “was concerned about the children, showing no bias against private religious schools.”

Viewed in the context of the period, the principal’s willingness to work closely with public educators suggests the extent to which parochial schools were influenced by their public counterparts in the wake of Vatican II. This is not to suggest that cooperation between public and private schools was nonexistent beforehand. Sister Mary Jerome Leavy, O.S.B., in her unpublished dissertation, contends that U.S. public and parochial schools had enjoyed a symbiotic relationship since the late 19th century. The U.S. hierarchy, Sister Mary Jerome argues, “created a school system which is parallel to the one created by legislators; they did not establish an alternative form of schooling in America.” Nevertheless, the interrelationship between public and private schools became more pronounced in the 1970s, as Catholic parochial schools—despite their image as bastions of traditional education—served as “laboratories” for innovative teaching strategies. The IGE program that Sister Teresa implemented at Immaculate Conception was introduced at other local parochial schools, starting with St. Brendan’s Elementary School on the city’s west side.

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184 Ibid.
Ultimately, Immaculate Conception’s much-deserved recognition for academic excellence served as a bright spot in an increasingly gloomy landscape for local parish schools. Schools operating in Youngstown’s oldest neighborhoods were particularly vulnerable, and some battled for their very survival. In the spring of 1972, the city’s premier parish school, St. Columba’s, was forced to close its doors when the surrounding neighborhood was practically eradicated by a combination of urban renewal projects. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, large swaths of the residential district north of Youngstown State University were razed to accommodate projects that included the construction of I-680, an urban beltway built as part of the national interstate highway development program.¹⁸⁷ As Linkon and Russo note, “The promised residential and commercial development resulting from the construction of I-680 never materialized, but the suburbs boomed.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the highway project virtually isolated the city’s traditional center, “directing drivers, and more important, shoppers to the new strip malls being built by two rising local families, the DeBartolos and the Cafaros.”¹⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, influential support for urban renewal and public works projects frequently trumped the concerns of neighborhood residents, nearby shopkeepers, and members of the clergy. In May 1971, when a public hearing was scheduled concerning a proposed ordinance that would close a large section of Elm Street (a main artery on the city’s north side) to facilitate an $11-million university expansion project, a Vindicator article

¹⁸⁷ Linkon and Russo, Steeltown U.S.A., 43.
¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 44.
¹⁸⁹ Ibid.
highlighted statements of support from the chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents and
the president of the Youngstown Area Board of Realtors.190 The same article made brief
mention of the fact that the proposal was “vigorously opposed” by north side residents.191
North side native Paula McKinney noted that, in the 1960s, her own mother was
approached by university representatives and pressured to relocate. “It was like she was
a two-year-old,” Mrs. McKinney recalled. When her mother sought the advice of an
attorney, he supposedly offered this blunt advice: “I think, if you’re smart, you’ll take the
money and run. They’ll pull eminent domain on you, either way.”192

Local Catholic leaders, who were apparently unwilling to criticize popular public
works projects, tended to downplay the impact of urban renewal on Catholic institutions.
Diocesan officials assured local Catholics that the needs of students affected by the
school’s closure would be addressed, and they announced that St. Columba’s would be
consolidated with Immaculate Conception and St. Edward’s schools.193 These officials
undoubtedly recognized that the problem of declining enrollment was not limited to
Youngstown’s center city. A newspaper article on the consolidation of St. Columba’s
with two other parish schools pointed out that enrollment among all schools of the six-
county diocese was dropping “because of a declining birth rate and tuition costs.”194 For
center-city parishes, such trends intersected with sweeping demographic changes (and the

190 “Set Elm Street Hearing June 9: Council Gets Millet Endorsement,” The Youngstown Vindicator, May
27, 1971, 37.
191 Ibid.
192 McKinney, interview.
194 Ibid.
unintended consequences of urban renewal) to produce overwhelming economic challenges.

The Parochial School Funding Crisis

Economic difficulties recorded at center-city parishes like Immaculate Conception were reflective of a larger trend. In an atmosphere informed by deepening economic strain, Monsignor Benedict Franzetta, the diocesan treasurer, released a financial report indicating that the Diocese of Youngstown was barely solvent. In February 1972, Monsignor Franzetta reported that the diocese had an income of $22,160,000 for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 1971, while it incurred expenses totaling $21,900,000. He emphasized that more than 50 percent of these expenses were related to the maintenance of the 73 elementary schools and six high schools then operating within the six-county diocese. In truth, pressures related to the rising cost of Catholic schools had arisen much earlier. Throughout the 1960s, diocesan officials actively pursued state funding and sought to strengthen their case by publicizing the extent to which Catholic schools alleviated the public’s tax burden. If Catholic schools were to suddenly close their doors, the officials argued, former students of these institutions would automatically enroll in neighboring public schools, a development that would drive up the cost of maintaining public education. In a 1969 fact sheet titled, “…On Catholic Schools,” the diocese reported that Mahoning County’s 30 Catholic schools (which served 17,090 students)...

196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
students in the 1968-1969 school year) saved taxpayers $9,672,940.00. According to the fact sheet, the six-county diocese’s 84 Catholic schools, with 41,909 students, saved taxpayers $23,720,494.00.\(^{198}\)

Initially, the diocese appeared to stand a good chance of securing state aid. In August 1969, the *Vindicator* reported that a bill passed by the Ohio General Assembly would deliver more than $2 million to Catholic schools in the Diocese of Youngstown over the 1969-1970 and 1970-1971 school years.\(^{199}\) “On the basis of an anticipated enrollment of 41,909 pupils in the six-county diocese,” the *Vindicator* reported, “the diocese will get $2,095,450 or $50 a pupil.”\(^{200}\) Monsignor William A. Hughes, diocesan superintendent of schools, lauded the bill’s passage, commenting that the Ohio Senate and House’s “bi-partisan” support for the legislation “showed a keen understanding on the part of our elected officials of the great contribution that parochial schools make in each community.”\(^{201}\) As a growing number of U.S. private schools received state and federal assistance, however, many observers began to question the constitutionality of this aid. In the fall of 1970, for instance, a front-page story in *The Wall Street Journal* cited Cardinal Mooney High School, on Youngstown’s south side, “as an example of a nonpublic school operating under state and federal aid.”\(^{202}\) The story warned that the

\(^{198}\) “…On Catholic Education,” factsheet, reproduction, Reuben-McMillan Public Library, Youngstown, OH.


\(^{200}\) Ibid.

\(^{201}\) Ibid.

wall between church and state appeared to be “crumbling,” while highlighting the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court was poised to hear “a landmark case in which the Constitutionality of Pennsylvania’s $20-million-a-year aid program to private schools is being challenged.” The article added that the “most heated opposition to public aid to nonpublic schools has arisen in states with sizable Catholic populations,” given that aid packages in these states “would amount to millions of dollars.”

Within six months of the story’s publication, the diocese’s efforts to shore up Catholic schools were dealt a serious blow. In May 1971, a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that state aid to nonpublic schools was unconstitutional raised questions about the continued viability of parochial and diocesan schools in the Diocese of Youngstown. Nevertheless, Youngstown Bishop James W. Malone stated publically that no schools in the diocese would be closed down “as a retaliatory measure to the U.S. Supreme Court decision,” and he vowed to honor teacher contracts. The bishop did, however, emphasize the need for extreme measures to preserve Catholic education. In July of 1971, Bishop Malone informed parents that a $100 tuition fee would be introduced at all diocesan schools to help them “meet the challenges of the immediate future.” In a meeting with almost 1,000 parents at Ursuline High School, on the city’s north side, Bishop Malone, Monsignor Hughes, and Assistant Superintendent John J. Augenstein

203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
“stressed the importance of maintaining levels of enrollment and expressed optimism over the chances of state reimbursement.”

Predictably, plans to introduce tuition at all diocesan parish schools met resistance from parents, many of whom warned that such a policy would drive down enrollment still further. Among these parents was Jack O’Connell, who attended a meeting led by diocesan officials at John F. Kennedy High School, located in nearby Warren, Ohio, in the summer of 1971. “I had five children at St. Rose [Elementary School in Girard, Ohio], at the time,” O’Connell said, “and tuition was quite a burden to me, and to many, many other people.” At one point, O’Connell stood up, addressed the bishop, and described what he considered a viable alternative to the introduction of tuition.

O’Connell recommended that the diocese require parents of parochial school students to make a direct (and tax-deductible) donation to the church. “Well…some other priest [at the meeting] said [he] didn’t think that was right,” O’Connell recalled. “That [plan] was a ‘charade’…. And, well, I don’t remember the whole conversation, but it was, shall I say…a spirited dialogue.” This response is not surprising, given that O’Connell’s plan, while ingenious, could have created legal problems for parishes across the diocese. Moreover, his recommendation conflicted with the diocese’s plans to promote legislation that was designed to alleviate the financial burden of parents with children attending parochial schools.

207 Ibid.
208 Martin John “Jack” O’Connell, interview by the author, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
In August 1971, diocesan officials publicly endorsed a bill to establish state grants that would reimburse parents who made “bona fide payments for their children attending parochial schools.”\textsuperscript{209} As the \textit{Vindicator} later reported, the legislation was expected to provide “reimbursements of $90 per pupil for parents of nonpublic school children.”\textsuperscript{210} The legal counsel of the Catholic Conference of Ohio (CCO), in an effort to facilitate the process, issued guidelines to guarantee the “constitutionality” of the proposed legislation. The CCO’s guidelines to safeguard “the principle of bona fide tuition payment by…parents” included the following: 1) parishes should “not lend money to the parents for tuition payment;” 2) parishes should “not take a special collection with the intent of giving the proceeds of the parents for their tuition payment;” 3) parishes should “not accept notes of promise to pay tuition in lieu of tuition payment;” 4) parishes should “not guarantee to return tuition paid by parents if the expected new state aid-to-parents legislation fails;” 5) parishes should “not arrange for the endorsement of parental grant checks from state funds;” 6) parishes should “not form a credit union with church money to parents for tuition payment.”\textsuperscript{211}

Despite pockets of resistance to such legislation, particularly from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), diocesan officials expressed confidence that the “present type of aid-educational grants to parents will meet the test of constitutionality both in

\textsuperscript{209} “All Catholic Students to Re-Register,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, August 13, 1971.
\textsuperscript{210} “Diocese Eyes Aid Solution,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, April 18, 1972.
\textsuperscript{211} “All Catholic Students to Re-register,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, August 13, 1971.
Ohio and with the U.S. Supreme Court.\footnote{DiSalvatore Confident on Catholic Pupil Aid, “The Youngstown Vindicator,” December 24, 1971.} In the wake of an ACLU lawsuit challenging the reimbursement plan, diocesan officials gained the influential support of Ohio Governor John J. Gilligan.\footnote{Diocese Eyes Aid Solution, “The Youngstown Vindicator,” April 18, 1972.} Governor Gilligan argued that, in the absence of additional public aid to “financially troubled” private schools, taxpayers in Ohio might be compelled to pay an additional $200 million a year, that is, “if they had to finance schooling for children currently in private schools.”\footnote{Ibid.} The governor’s vote of confidence, however, was not enough to guarantee the plan’s implementation—especially if serious questions arose about its constitutionality. In a decision rendered on April 17, 1972, the U.S. District Court in Columbus “ruled out reimbursements of $90 per pupil for parents of nonpublic school children.”\footnote{Ibid.} On the same day, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a federal court ruling in St. Louis, Missouri, that “a state is constitutionally entitled to forbid use of any public funds to support a school controlled by a religious denomination.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Diocesan officials responded to the rulings with expressions of shock and dismay. In a press conference, Monsignor Hughes stated that the federal court’s decision “was difficult to understand,” given that “the Supreme Court has in the past recognized the right of a parent to choose the school he wishes his child to attend and set standards
which the nonpublic system must meet.”

Monsignor Hughes added that he was especially concerned “for those with large families and the poor who will suffer most from the court’s denial of tuition reimbursement.” The diocesan superintendent affirmed, however, that the fight for public assistance would continue. He pointed out that “a federal income tax credit plan” had won the support of Arkansas Senator Wilbur Mills and then Michigan Senator Gerald R. Ford, the Senate majority leader. In addition, the Ohio governor’s administration, along with a number of Ohio legislators, was “considering a system of state income tax credits for parents of nonpublic school students.”

Conspicuously absent from the debate over public aid to private schools were traditional accusations that Catholic schools, in particular, posed a threat to a pluralistic democratic society. “The struggle over public funding for parochial schools in the postwar decades was calm and orderly compared with the previous three decades,” observes Catholic historian Timothy Walch. “Gone were the accusations that parish schooling was un-American and therefore unworthy of community support.” In Ohio, the ACLU’s legal battle focused squarely on potential violations of the First Amendment. Likewise, federal judges who reviewed the case restricted their comments to this issue. All parties in the legal struggle refrained from making allegations that parochial schools

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217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
were a divisive influence. Indeed, federal judges John W. Peck, Joseph P. Kinneary, and Carl B. Rubin, who determined that the reimbursement plan was unconstitutional, took pains to express their appreciation of the potential benefits of private schooling. In their 34-page decision, the judges made clear that their ruling was strictly based on their understanding of the Constitution’s requirements: “However much we may approve, however much we may respect, however much we may admire the role of nonpublic education, we cannot substitute such approval, respect and admiration for the plain language of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.”

Although the three judges acknowledged that “parochial schools offer only one hour a day in religious instruction, while providing five hours daily in nonreligious courses,” they reiterated their view that Ohio’s private sectarian schools “retain a substantial religious purpose and denominational character.”

The Ohio judges—citing a 1971 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on public aid for private schools in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island—revealed that they were “guided by three elements” the Court considered essential to justify assistance for nonpublic schools. These elements were as follows: 1) “The aid and its method of distribution must have a secular legislative purpose;” 2) “Aid must, as its primary effect, neither advance nor inhibit religion;” 3) “Assistance must not foster ‘an excessive government

223 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
entanglement with religion. 225 The court took issue with the main argument presented by the plan’s defenders, which asserted “that parents of nonpublic school students contribute to [the] overall economic benefit of the state.” The federal judges responded that, if economic benefit were regarded as “the sole and controlling factor of a statute’s constitutionality, any direct aid to church-related enterprises could be justified.” Under such conditions, the First Amendment’s “separation requirement” would become “a hollow shell,” they concluded. 226

While these legal battles over public aid to parochial schools were less acrimonious than those of the past, the effects of the court rulings nevertheless proved extremely problematic for many of Youngstown’s parish schools. The institution of tuition at all diocesan schools had the detrimental effect on enrollment that many observers had predicted; and in September of 1972, the Vindicator reported that parish schools in the six-county diocese expected 2,249 fewer students than were enrolled in the previous school year. 227 The article notes that diocesan elementary school enrollment, which was recorded at 23,473 in the fall of 1971, was expected to drop to 21,224 in the fall of 1972. 228 In Youngstown alone, elementary and secondary schools predicted a loss of 695 students, given that enrollment was expected to fall from 5,937 in 1971 to 5,242 in 1972. 229 The declining birth rate was evidently a substantial factor in this development,

225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
and the *Vindicator* reported that this decline was “indicated by figures showing that 2,993 eighth graders graduated last June and only 2,225 first graders are entering parochial schools in this area of Ohio this week, a drop of 768 students.” The article adds, however, that the drop in enrollment owed much to the introduction of tuition at all parish schools in the diocese.\(^{230}\)

The adverse effects of falling enrollment were most apparent among the diocese’s center-city parochial schools. Despite rising economic challenges, however, the diocese seemed reluctant to close these institutions. In February 1973, the diocesan school board announced its refusal to act on a tentative plan to shut down Sacred Heart Elementary School, located on the city’s east side. The board instead determined that it would develop “provisional resolutions to eliminate grades one through five of Sacred Heart.”\(^{232}\) The *Vindicator* reported that Sacred Heart was not the only ailing parish school operating in Youngstown. On the city’s deteriorating south side, once-vibrant St. Patrick’s Elementary School also faced severe financial difficulties.\(^{233}\) Within four days of the meeting on the fate of Sacred Heart, the board gathered to discuss the future of St. Patrick’s, one of two urban institutions in the diocese that stood on the brink of insolvency. (The other was St. Benedict’s Elementary School, in Canton, Ohio.) Youngstown Bishop James W. Malone, in an apparent effort to influence the board’s

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\(^{230}\) Ibid.  
\(^{231}\) Ibid.  
\(^{233}\) Ibid.
decision, stressed the church’s responsibility to the poor. Among others, Bishop Malone stated that there was an urgent need for Catholics to move beyond a concept of responsibility that focused exclusively on delivering services “where we live.”

“Geographical boundaries do not divide us ideologically,” the bishop said. In line with the bishop’s recommendations, the board voted unanimously in favor of a resolution to keep St. Patrick’s operational for at least three years, “subject to an annual review of the financial situation and enrollment.”

During the same meeting, the board indicated a stronger commitment to urban parish schools that were likely to serve the poor. Board members approved a resolution stating that the diocese would “have a commitment to continue to provide Catholic education in those schools of the diocese that serve poverty areas and provide this education as a missionary service of the church.”

In addition, the board agreed to set up a 15-member committee “to determine which schools are in poverty areas, what type of aid might be given and what students are to be served.” The committee was charged with recommending policy decisions “regarding schools with increasing proportions of non-Catholics; regarding schools in parishes no longer able to meet all of their financial obligations, and schools serving the poor in increasing numbers.”

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235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
As the diocese struggled to balance its economic concerns with its expressed commitment to support troubled urban parish schools, the new school superintendent, John J. Augenstein, continued his predecessor’s legislative battle for a share of Ohio’s educational funding. During Augenstein’s tenure, the diocese experienced greater success in this effort. Shortly after the state’s tuition reimbursement plan was ruled unconstitutional, Ohio lawmakers developed a funding plan to subsidize “auxiliary services” in the state’s non-public schools, and by the fall of 1974, diocesan schools were beginning to enjoy the benefits of the new plan. In September of that year, the Youngstown Board of Education accepted a check for $681,888 from the Ohio Board of Education, which was earmarked to support auxiliary services for the city’s Catholic schools. The Vindicator reported that the amount represented “just half the total $1,363,776 that will come to diocesan schools in the 1974-75 school year.”

As anticipated, the ACLU challenged the funding plan, claiming that it violated the First Amendment “by promoting an advancement of religion and by fostering an excessive entanglement between church and state.” This time, however, the ACLU’s efforts to block state assistance to private religious schools proved less successful. In 1975, the Vindicator reported that “the amount of money given for auxiliary services

242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
continued to grow throughout the year.”

The Vindicator article observed that, for the first time in years, “state funds may be used to purchase physical education equipment for non-public students as long as this equipment is for general use and not permanently attached to non-public buildings.” Notably, the efforts of Ohio’s Catholic educators to secure meaningful public assistance reflected a nationwide trend. “The unwillingness of the Catholic community to abandon its cause was evident in the number of church-state-school cases filed with the [U.S. Supreme Court] during the next decade,” Walch notes. “Legislatures in Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio persisted in passing legislation that granted goods and services to parochial school students; and in many cases, the Court passed judgment on the constitutionality of these services.”

Finally, in 1977, the Supreme Court ruled in Wolman v. Walter that the State of Ohio could legally provide “standardized testing, diagnostic services, therapeutic work, and remedial instruction to parochial school students if these services were provided away from school grounds.”

In the interim, the Diocese of Youngstown benefited from limited public assistance that targeted students from low-income backgrounds. In the mid-1970s, the diocese received educational assistance under the Title I provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which provided “special services to economically and

246 Ibid.
248 Ibid, 220.
educationally deprived children.” In June of 1975, Nicholas Wolsonovich, then
director of government programs and resource development for diocesan schools, noted
that the diocese reported 3,148 students from low-income families in the diocese’s 72
elementary and secondary schools. Nearly half of these students, he added, “reside
within Mahoning County, especially Youngstown City School District.” Wolsonovich
pointed out that “inner-city” Catholic school enrollments were “almost 100 per cent low
income and in some cases, half of them are non-Catholic and from various ethnic
backgrounds.” These figures, he concluded, reflected “the church’s strong
commitment to serve the poor and the many different races and ethnic backgrounds
which make up the community.” While supplementary aid alleviated the economic
problems of some urban parish schools, the fate of others remained uncertain. In time,
the future of beleaguered center-city parish schools like Immaculate Conception would
be debated by members of the increasingly divided diocesan school board.

The Fight to Preserve Center-City Parish Schools

The question of how the diocese should respond to economically strapped urban
parochial schools was complicated by a trend that overlapped with those of rising costs
and declining parish contributions. In 1977, the Vindicator reported that 8.2 percent of
the 10,408 students enrolled in Mahoning County’s Catholic schools were members of

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250 Ibid.
251 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
minority groups, and 8.2 percent were also non-Catholics. Again, most of the schools with large numbers of non-White and non-Catholic students were based in Youngstown’s center city. “Having the highest per cent of minority students are: St. Patrick [on the south side] with 68.2 per cent or 165 children, representing 145 blacks and 20 with Spanish surnames; Immaculate Conception [on the east side] with 43.0 per cent or 141,124 of whom are black and 17 have Spanish surnames; St. Stanislaus [on the south side], 37.7 per cent or 78 children, of whom 65 are black and 17 have Spanish surnames, and Sacred Heart [on the south side] with 32.4 per cent or 66 children, 43 of whom are black, 18, Spanish surnamed, four oriental and one, American Indian,” the article states.

According to the Vindicator, non-Catholic enrollment at Immaculate Conception was 43 percent, or 142 students. This compared to 52 percent (or 126 students) at St. Patrick’s, 40 percent (or 83 students) at St. Stanislaus, and 21 percent (or 44 students) at Sacred Heart. Immaculate Conception’s inclusion on a list of the diocese’s most diverse parish schools would have serious implications for its future. The fact that the school served a large percentage of non-Catholic students apparently influenced the diocesan school board’s decision in the autumn of 1976 to reject an appeal by the

254 Ibid.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
Immaculate’s pastor, Father John Summers, to secure additional funding. 

Earlier in 1976, Father Summers proposed a modest increase of taxes for parishes throughout the Diocese of Youngstown to benefit struggling center-city schools like the Immaculate, which served large numbers of underprivileged children. According to the plan, the heaviest tax burden would fall upon those parishes that did not maintain their own schools. Advocates of Father Summers’ proposal included former diocesan school superintendent and then Auxiliary Bishop William Hughes, who urged the board to adopt the plan immediately. “The church has an obligation to be interested in the minority and underprivileged peoples,” Bishop Hughes said. “How better to provide them help than to educate them rather than through other social programs.”

Opponents of Father Summers’ proposal outnumbered its supporters, however. Furthermore, the opposition was led by none other than the chair of the diocesan finance committee, Raymond Pelanda, a resident of nearby Canton, Ohio. Pelanda’s argument to reject the plan evidently boiled down to the following admonition: diocesan funding proposals should be designed to meet the needs of all parish schools, not specific ones. In this vein, he urged board members to weigh the idealism behind the Immaculate’s mission against the sobering economic realities then pressing down on other diocesan parish schools.

In the course of the meeting, Pelanda stressed that economic pressures had intensified amid increased salary demands by parochial school teachers and

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257 Marie Aikenhead, “Board Refuses School Funding: Votes Against Diocese Inner City Aid,” The Youngstown Vindicator, November 17, 1976, 1.
258 Ibid.
259 Ibid.
administrators. The diocese, he stated, should not lose sight of its obligation to “provide education for our children in all our churches, not only for those who are poor.” While he acknowledged a need to “be sensitive to the needs of all private schools,” Pelanda quickly added, “our backs are against the wall.”

The finance chair’s position enjoyed the prestigious support of the board’s former president, Father Robert Brentgartner, who cautioned, “Priests are all for helping the poor and non-Catholics, but we would like to see the people voluntarily do this, rather than have added tax imposed upon them.”

While Pelanda himself refrained from citing the large number of non-Catholic students at the parish school as a factor in his opposition to the funding plan, an ally on the board drew attention to this detail, observing that “of the 327 children enrolled at Immaculate Conception, 186 are Catholic and 144, non-Catholic.”

The finance chair presumably represented the position of other opponents of the proposal when he stressed that members of disadvantaged minority groups had access to public education. “If there were no public schools in Youngstown, I would think differently,” Pelanda said. “The poor and minorities can get an education in the public schools. We are backed up to the wall.”

The finance chair concluded his comments dramatically. “If the Lord has not provided for everyone, how can we?” he said. “I hear much rebelling.”

The undercurrent of frustration in Pelanda’s statement reflected his evident conviction that it

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260 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
262 Ibid.
263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
would be unreasonable for the diocese to ask parishioners to subsidize the education of non-Catholics when the future of the parochial school system itself seemed uncertain.

The finance chair and his allies were quickly challenged, however. Arguing in favor of Father Summers’ proposal was board member Ronald Garmey, who emphasized the diocese’s “responsibility” to reach out to the poor. A parish council president and father of four, Garmey perfectly fit the profile of local Catholics who would be most affected by a diocesan tax increase.\(^{265}\) If his suburban parish were made responsible for additional taxes to the diocese, this would leave fewer funds for the operation of the parish school his own children attended. Garmey insisted, however, that this was a small price to pay to further the cause of “social justice.”\(^{266}\) As the recently elected chair of the North Mahoning Deanery, a diocesan district comprising Youngstown and the adjacent suburb of Austintown, Garmey argued that the Immaculate required more assistance than the deanery alone could provide. He added that the center-city parish had taken all available steps to support its school, channeling 77 percent of its budget toward the school’s operation while charging “the maximum tuition of $250 to its pupils.” Still, the parish could not “continue to operate the school without going into debt.”\(^{267}\) A diocesan-wide pro-rated tax was therefore essential to keep the school open. Garmey concluded that spreading the tax thinly across the diocese would guarantee that individual parishes experienced modest increases of .5 to three percent. These rates would depend on

\(^{265}\) Ibid.
\(^{266}\) Ibid.
\(^{267}\) Ibid.
whether or not a parish maintained a school or provided support to diocesan high schools. The *Vindicator* summarized the taxation plan as follows: “Parishes with their own schools and also high school assessments, would pay .5 per cent increase, while those with schools, but no high school assessment, would pay one per cent; parishes without schools, but with high school assessment, would pay 2.5 per cent and those with neither schools nor high school assessments would pay 3 per cent.”

Despite the support of Auxiliary Bishop Hughes, and Garmey’s emotional argument that additional taxes were the only way “to pay for our missionary commitments,” the board rejected Father Summers’ proposal in a six-to-five vote. The issues that divided the diocesan school board were seemingly reflective of deepening discord among American Catholics over the purposes of parochial education. As noted, a growing number of urban Catholic schools in the post-Vatican II era showed a commitment to a brand of “social justice” that appeared compatible with liberal conceptions of civic virtue. Indeed, political theorist Stephen Macedo attributes the emergence of what he called “civic-happy” Catholic schools to reforms taken within the church after 1964. “After centuries of quite effective opposition to liberal democracy around the world, the Catholic Church reversed its position and became a positive force for democracy around the world,” Macedo writes. “Those changes within Catholicism were, in important respects, concessions to liberal democratic political values, and were

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268 Ibid.  
269 Ibid.
also in part a consequence of the Catholic experience in America.\textsuperscript{270} Hence, the efforts of certain urban Catholic educators to reach out to non-White and non-Catholic students were consistent with the post-conciliar church’s emphasis on serving the needs of the larger community. Not surprisingly, this model of Catholic education drew fire from traditionalists. “In the Roman Catholic Church, the reverberations of the revolution begun with the election of Pope John XXIII in 1958 remain deeply felt,” observes Buetow, writing in 1970. “A wave of questioning of all traditional structures, such as the parish church, is taking place. Those Catholics committed to the sacral aim of ‘saving souls’ have grave problems with a Catholic schooling which they see as providing an intellectual atmosphere in which the traditional faith does not seem to flourish sufficiently.”\textsuperscript{271} Apparently, the board, in its decision to reject Father Summers’ bid for additional aid to Immaculate Conception, tacitly supported a more traditional model of parochial education, one that focused mainly on the interests of the Catholic community.

**Unexpected Aid for the Immaculate**

In the wake of the board’s decision, Immaculate Conception School’s future appeared more uncertain than ever. Yet, the ground shifted in early 1977, when the school was granted a last-minute reprieve because of “conflicting recommendations from the Diocesan School Board and the Senate of Priests.”\textsuperscript{272} The senate, composed of local pastors and other diocesan clergy, strongly supported Father Summers’ proposal and

\textsuperscript{271} Buetow, *Of Singular Benefit*, 212.
\textsuperscript{272} “School to Remain Open 1 More Yr.,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, January 19, 1977, 40.
pressed the board to explore alternative means to keep Immaculate Conception’s school operating for at least another year. According to the *Vindicator*, Bishop James W. Malone met with “pastors of parishes sending pupils to the schools,” and secured their agreement to increase funding for the Immaculate. The article reported that Immaculate Conception’s school was to “remain open one year more,” while its anticipated operating deficit of $30,000 for the 1977-78 academic year was “met by increased payments from St. Columba and St. Casimir parishes of $8,000 and $16,000, respectively, and by a $6,000 payment from the home mission fund of the Youngstown Society for the Propagation of the Faith.” The same article highlighted the extent of the Immaculate’s economic difficulties when it reported that a $20,000 gift from the estate of late Youngstown-area industrialist Charles B. Cushwa enabled the school to remain open during the 1976-77 academic year.

Beginning in the late 1970s, the Immaculate’s proponents scrambled to organize annual public appeals and fundraising events, while soliciting the aid of individual philanthropists. Nevertheless, the institution teetered on the edge of economic collapse. By the end of 1977, the parish school once again faced the threat of closure, this time in the form of a diocesan consolidation plan. Immaculate Conception’s pastor took the lead in organizing yet another appeal, and encouraged pupils at the school to engage in a letter-writing campaign that targeted the diocesan school board as well as the city’s daily

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273 Ibid.
274 Ibid.
275 Ibid.
newspaper. As a member of a committee set up by the diocese to explore alternatives to consolidation, Father Summers advocated that the parish be treated “as a mission, as a stabilizing force in an older part of town basically made up of middle- and lower-income families.”

Father Summers observed that the school had raised $7,000 through “bake sales, raffles, carnivals and other special events,” but added that it would need a total of $40,000 to maintain the school’s operations.

To secure the remainder of the funds required, Father Summers’ visited other parishes throughout the diocese to “collect money and other forms of aid they can supply,” an approach that won the approval of Bishop Malone. In line with his “mission concept,” the pastor stressed that the school served a large number of students of other religious denominations. “To prove the school is a strong positive influence on the East Side, Father Summers points to the fact that 40 percent of the school’s 394 students are non-Catholic,” the Vindicator reported. “Non-Catholic parents send their children to school there because they believe the children will receive a better education and better values, he said.”

This overview of the school’s religious diversity was followed by a reference to the fact that “non-Catholic students get the same religious training the Catholic students receive.” The article’s conclusion includes quotes from an interview with Bob Jenkins, a White instructor at Youngstown’s Ursuline High School whose child

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277 Ibid.
278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
was enrolled at Immaculate Conception’s school. Jenkins stated that, in choosing to entrust his child’s education to the Immaculate, he was “setting an example to the rest of the diocese and the community.”

In the end, the parish’s well-orchestrated appeal to the community’s collective conscience paid off. When the *Vindicator* reported in early 1978 that Father Summers’ “mission concept” was working well, this proved to be an understatement.²⁸¹ By November of that year, the school’s fundraising campaign had exceeded its goal of $40,000 by a comfortable margin. The fact that this outcome coincided with the failure of public school levies throughout the Youngstown metropolitan area ensured that the Immaculate Conception’s success would become the subject of a newspaper editorial. “It was somewhat ironic that last Wednesday’s Vindicator should report both the defeat of many important school levies and the fact that more than enough money had been raised to avert the closing of Immaculate Conception school,” the editorial stated. “The Rev. John Summers, pastor, who led his parishioners in their own effort to raise money and who went out to appeal for help from more prosperous parishes, said the effort had yielded $52,000 when only $40,000 in additional funds was needed to meet the budget.”²⁸² The editorial went on to comment that diocesan finance chair Raymond Pelanda, the most vocal opponent of the plan to fund Immaculate Conception’s school through a modest tax hike, “said the parish’s action was vastly better as a ‘labor of

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²⁸⁰ Ibid.
²⁸² Ibid.
love.” The editorial concluded by musing that public school officials, in the wake of failing levies, might learn something from Father Summers’ successful appeal: “If school boards and officials could arouse that kind of devotion among parents and voters, fewer systems would be in danger of closing.”

The Immaculate’s high-profile success in the area of fundraising masked an array of other challenges facing the school, however. Like other parish schools operating in neighborhoods where few families could afford even minimal tuition rates, Immaculate Conception struggled to maintain even adequate enrollment. The Youngstown area was beginning to feel the impact of the collapse of its steel-manufacturing sector, a crisis that began with the 1977 closure of Youngstown Sheet & Tube’s massive plants in nearby Campbell, Ohio, and was exacerbated by the shutting down of U.S. Steel and Republic Steel’s facilities over the next three years. The loss of more than 10,000 jobs between 1977 and 1980 significantly accelerated the depopulation of urban neighborhoods like Haselton, while pushing up levels of poverty throughout the city. Flagging enrollment figures were consistent with census records that showed a sharp decrease in the Youngstown area’s population. In 1980, Mahoning County experienced an overall 7.1 percent drop in population, compared to a decade earlier. While 304,545 people lived in the county in 1970, only 282,813 remained in 1980. Still more dramatic was the 20.4 percent drop in Youngstown’s population, which plummeted from 140,909 people in

283 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
1970 to 112,146 in 1980. This trend continued unabated into the 1980s. A 1984 study released by the New York-based research firm of Dun & Bradstreet Corporation showed that Youngstown ranked 23rd on a list of the nation’s fastest-shrinking urban areas. According to the report, Youngstown’s population had experienced another 1.8 percent drop between 1980 and 1984.

By the fall of 1979, the diocesan school board’s already acute concerns about flagging enrollment deepened considerably. The board reported a decline of 511 students in Youngstown’s Catholic elementary and secondary schools, “a 2.2 percent drop from the official 1978-79 enrollment of 22,869.” Predictably, the most severe losses occurred among schools based in urban neighborhoods with shrinking Catholic populations. Along with St. Patrick’s and St. Dominic’s schools on the south side, and St. Edward’s on the north side, the Immaculate experienced among the worst drops in enrollment among Youngstown’s parish schools, recording 53 fewer students than during the 1977-78 academic year. Heavy losses at Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s (which had 41 fewer pupils) prompted Father Philip P. Conley, diocesan vicar of religious education, to comment, “That’s saying something about our outreach to the

As the Immaculate’s enrollment figures continued to fall into the early 1980s, the school once again faced the prospect of closure through consolidation.

Controversies Over School Consolidation

When the Immaculate opened for the 1981-1982 academic year, it welcomed a meager 235 students into its classrooms. Enrollment figures were still lower at Sacred Heart Elementary School, the only other parish school serving the city’s east side. At Sacred Heart, enrollment fell to 155 students. Although the diocesan school board recognized a need for immediate action, it chose to move with caution. Board members undoubtedly understood that the two schools were beloved institutions in their respective neighborhoods. Furthermore, both schools were connected to parishes with long, rich histories. The more recently established of the parishes, Sacred Heart, had been organized in 1888, just a few years after the founding of the Immaculate, and its school had served east side Catholics since 1924. Therefore, emotions at both parishes were bound to run high when the diocesan school board announced that the two schools were being considered for consolidation. One of the two schools would be relegated to the dustbin of history. As the Vindicator reported, the “reorganization” of Immaculate Conception and Sacred Heart schools “would entail closing one school and possibly laying off teachers.”

289 Ibid.
290 “Diocese May Close 1 School,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 15, 1982, 1.
291 Ibid.
Veteran diocesan officials, in particular, must have been inclined to move cautiously. Amid postwar urban changes, the diocese became well acquainted with the challenges involved in merging parish schools with established identities. In 1960, after highway construction forced the closure and razing of St. Ann’s Church and School in the north side’s Brier Hill district, diocesan officials responded by merging St. Ann’s with nearby St. Casimir’s Parish. To accommodate the merger, St. Casimir’s Elementary School opened two additional classrooms. As practical as this decision might have seemed on paper, it puzzled observers on the ground, given that St. Ann’s was an Irish-dominated territorial parish, while St. Casimir’s had been established by Polish immigrants. Father Joseph Rudjak, who was then a young parishioner at St. Casimir’s Church, recalled that, before the merger, Father William P. Dunn, the pastor of St. Ann’s expressed confidence that his parish would be “resurrected.” As it turned out, Father Dunn’s optimism was misplaced. Plans for a consolidation were quickly announced, “and the bishop said: ‘No Polish traditions. No Irish traditions. We’re all Americans now.’” Father Rudjak went on to describe a widely reported incident in which St. Casimir’s choir began to sing a traditional Polish hymn, only to be confronted by the pastor, Father Aloysius Rzendarski, and school principal, Sister Regina, who “[stormed ] the choir loft” and screamed “that this is not to be sung any longer.”

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293 Rudjak, interview.
294 Ibid.
Obviously, a consolidation involving the parish schools of Sacred Heart and Immaculate Conception posed fewer challenges than those that arose during the traumatic merger of St. Ann’s and St. Casimir’s parishes on the north side in 1959. The two east side schools, after all, were attached to territorial parishes that had become ethnically diverse over time. More importantly, the parishes themselves would be preserved. Nevertheless, the diocesan school board chose to move surreptitiously, in what some critics later interpreted it as an effort to outflank opponents of a consolidation.\(^{295}\) In the spring of 1982, Superintendent John Augenstein issued a press release stating that both Immaculate Conception and Sacred Heart schools were “plagued with declining enrollments and inflationary costs.” The press release added that the schools “were expected to run up a combined deficit of $100,000 by June 30, 1983.”\(^{296}\) An article covering the statement explains that, while parish schools were generally supported through parish collections and tuition, those of Immaculate Conception and Sacred Heart had received “additional voluntary support from other parishes in the diocese.”\(^{297}\) The article also notes that both schools had been exempted from “a diocesan tax that supports the services provided by the central office and from a quota payment that supports the diocesan high schools.”\(^{298}\) The gist of the press release was clear: the diocese had done

\(^{297}\) Ibid.
\(^{298}\) Ibid.
everything in its power to accommodate the two parish schools, and it was time for the diocesan school board to make tough decisions about the schools’ respective futures.

News of a possible consolidation involving the two schools was especially upsetting to parishioners and staff members at Sacred Heart, who had waged a decade-long “uphill battle” to keep the parish school open. Onetime parishioner Paula McKinney recalled that former pastor Father Edward Stanton threatened to close Sacred Heart’s school in the early 1970s but reconsidered the move in the face of stiff opposition. “[Father Stanton] went through all kinds of exciting programs…and remodeled the rectory and remodeled the basement of the rectory,” she said. “Well, then, the next thing you know, we didn’t have enough money to have the school. Well, the nuns and the parents fought it tooth and nail. And we won. Ten years we staved it off.”

By the spring of 1982, however, the school’s situation was more precarious than it had been in the early 1970s. Moreover, the institution’s fate was in the hands of the diocesan school board, not the parish council. While some observers at Sacred Heart were undoubtedly encouraged by the noncommittal tone of the diocesan press release, others recognized that the board’s upcoming decision was practically a foregone conclusion. It was clear to many of them that, in the eyes of the diocese, Immaculate Conception had decisive advantages over its sister school on the east side. Apart from the fact that Sacred Heart served a smaller student population, its one-story school building also offered less space than Immaculate’s two-story facility. In addition, Sacred

299 McKinney, interview.
300 “Diocese May Close 1 School,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 15, 1982.
Heart’s staff was less than half that of the Immaculate’s. While Sacred Heart employed four lay teachers, including its principal, Catherine Daley, the Immaculate retained eight lay teachers, along with one teaching nun, Sister Darla Jean Vogelsang, who served as principal. S01 Sensing the weakness of their school’s position, Sacred Heart’s parish council adopted a defensive tone early on, and the consolidation controversy quickly took on the atmosphere of a “turf war.”

Alert to the possibility of resistance from disgruntled parishioners, the diocesan school board struggled to find a way to prevent eclipsing the identity of the school that would be closed in the course of the consolidation. Hence, on April 28, the board announced that the “new” institution would be called “Bishop McFadden Elementary School,” an ostensible tribute to the diocese’s first bishop that was hoped to “avoid the perception that the action was merely the closing of one of the schools.” S02 In the end, this awkward recommendation pleased no one, given that it effectively terminated the identity of both schools. S03 The question of what to call the reorganized school barely came up at a meeting on the consolidation that involved diocesan representatives and parishioners and parents of both parishes. During this meeting, held at Youngstown’s Ursuline High School, the worst fears of Sacred Heart’s supporters were confirmed. Although media accounts of the three-hour meeting failed to describe its atmosphere, statements by several participants suggest that it was a contentious affair. Evidently, at

S01 Ibid.
S02 “Diocesan Schools Merger is Set,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 28, 1982, 12.
least some of the parents and parishioners who attended had earnestly looked forward to a
dialogue on the consolidation. They encountered something quite different. In the
course of the meeting, diocesan representatives announced that the school board had
already determined, in a vote of 9-3, that Immaculate Conception’s building would be the
site of the consolidated school. Diocesan officials reported that Catherine Daley, the lay
principal at Sacred Heart, would serve as the new school’s top administrator, while the
Immaculate’s principal, Sister Darla Jean Vogelsang, would act as director of religious
education. Participants then learned that the school’s combined staff would be reduced
from 12 to eight teachers, with appointments rendered on the basis of seniority. In
addition, James Boyle, director of marketing and development for diocesan schools,
revealed that a finance and development committee comprising representatives of both
schools would be set up “to make sure there is no instability in the system as a result of
consolidation.”

In public comments on the consolidation, Superintendent Augensteine described
the move as unavoidable and stressed that immediate steps needed to be taken “if
Catholic education were to continue on the East Side.” Members of Sacred Heart’s
parish council were apparently unconvinced, and many complained of negligible input on
a decision that profoundly affected their parish. Brian Cahill, president of Sacred Heart’s
parish council, expressed the frustration of others when he said: “We really felt we were
shafted and we weren’t consulted.” Cahill went on to imply that the school board’s

\[304\] Ibid.
\[305\] Ibid.
approach had been undemocratic. “If I could draw, I would have drawn a sickle and
hammer” to represent what happened at the meeting, he said. The parish council
president’s comments boded ill for the kind of smooth consolidation the board evidently
preferred. In May 7, the Sacred Heart Parish Council expressed its dissatisfaction
officially when it passed a resolution criticizing the diocesan school board’s decision to
use Immaculate Conception’s physical plant for the consolidated school. In a 9-3 vote,
the council also resolved that it would “refuse to cooperate” with the diocese in the
consolidation. Although Sacred Heart’s pastor, Father John Tully, stressed that the
resolution would have “no practical effect,” the council protest underscored the
challenges the diocese would face when seeking to consolidate schools with established
identities.

Yet, more was at stake in the consolidation of Sacred Heart and Immaculate
Conception schools than issues like “turf” and identity. Many east siders, including the
district’s shrinking pool of White residents, viewed parochial schools as vital alternatives
to troubled urban public schools. Given that public schools in Youngstown’s center city
served large numbers of African-American students, interpreting the motives of White
parents can be a complicated task. It is difficult to determine where racial prejudice ends
and legitimate dissatisfaction with the quality of urban public education begins. It would
be simplistic to suggest that schools like Sacred Heart and Immaculate Conception

307 Timothy Fitzpatrick, Council at Sacred Heart Hits Merger of Schools,” The Youngstown Vindicator,
May 7, 1982, 1.
functioned solely as “havens” for White parents seeking to insulate their children from integrated public schools. Both of these institutions, after all, served racially diverse student populations. In 1977, six years before Sacred Heart Elementary School closed in the consolidation, *The Vindicator* reported that 22 percent of the school’s 204 students were African Americans, while 40 percent of Immaculate Conception’s students were African American.  

At the same time, there seems to be a relationship between the closure of urban private schools and the accelerated flight of White residents from Youngstown’s center city. Paula McKinney recalled making this observation in the early 1970s, in the course of a public forum on the future of Sacred Heart’s school. “At an open meeting, I said, ‘Father, this will be the end,’” Mrs. McKinney recalled. “I said, ‘Close that school and…the “for sale” signs will go up, and people will move out. Why shouldn’t they, if there is no school for their children? Well, that’s exactly what happened.’” McKinney was not alone in her opinion. Her statement reflected the views of many Catholic observers in the 1970s, who stressed the role of parochial schools in “anchoring a portion of the white population” in urban areas. McGreevy outlines this position in his discussion of Catholic responses to those critics who contended that urban parish schools “prevented public school integration.” “Catholic schools clearly pulled substantial numbers of white students out of the public school system,” McGreevy writes. “Given

309 McKinney, interview.
that white families tended to abandon a neighborhood when the number of minority students in the public schools increased dramatically, however, the schools also enabled white Catholic families (at least in the short run) to remain in the city longer than their non-Catholic counterparts." 310 McGreevy concludes by pointing to studies suggesting that “Catholic schools fostered neighborhood integration even as they limited potential integration within the public schools.” 311

Given that Sacred Heart’s student population was relatively diverse, the dynamics at this institution differed from those McGreevy identifies in overwhelmingly White urban parochial schools. Nevertheless, the percentage of students from minority backgrounds at Sacred Heart was low when compared to Youngstown’s center-city public elementary schools. (For that matter, the percentage of minority students at Sacred Heart was lower than at Immaculate Conception Elementary School.) It is also significant that the mostly White parishioners who fought to retain the parish school apparently regarded the institution as essential, if they were to raise children in the neighborhood. Hence, developments at Sacred Heart conformed, in some respects, to patterns found in other northeastern urban neighborhoods. A vicious cycle soon became apparent: earlier waves of White migration to the suburbs severely hampered urban parish schools, and the closure of these beleaguered institutions ensured the departure of most of those Whites who remained behind.

311 Ibid.
An explosive intersection of issues—including territorial claims, efforts to maintain parish identity, and fears arising over demographic change—prompted Sacred Heart’s parish council to defy diocesan administrators. While the diocesan school board’s efforts to consolidate the two schools were ultimately successful, board members could not ignore that the move inspired bitter recriminations from parishioners. In the wake of the controversy that swirled around the closure of Sacred Heart, the school board proved reluctant to promote further consolidations among Youngstown’s parish schools. Even the board’s effort to make conciliatory gestures provoked criticism. The board’s attempt to placate all parties in the merger by naming the consolidated institution “Bishop McFadden Elementary School” drew fire from all sides, including representatives of Sacred Heart Parish. Brian Cahill and other council members repudiated the proposal, contending that the name “would have nothing about it with which the East Side could identify.” Thus, while Sacred Heart assumed a portion of financial responsibility for the consolidated school, most area residents exclusively identified the institution with Immaculate Conception Parish.

Not long after the consolidation, Immaculate Conception marked its centennial, an event that received extensive media coverage. A well-placed photo spread in the Vindicator touches on the consolidation, noting that the Immaculate and Sacred Heart “were reorganized as one school to keep Catholic education on the East Side.” On the

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313 “Centennial for East Side Church,” The Youngstown Vindicator, December 5, 1982, 4, photo spread with captions.
whole, however, the feature downplays the school’s recent challenges and focused instead on its lengthy history. Throughout, the consolidated institution is implicitly described as the descendant of the Immaculate’s earliest parish school. Few, if any, would have contended that the “spirit” of Sacred Heart somehow lived on within the consolidated school.

Strangely enough, news coverage of the school consolidation includes no references to the small number of African-American families who evidently came to depend on Sacred Heart Elementary School. Media reports also fail to indicate the number of former Sacred Heart students who made their way to the combined school at Immaculate Conception. The large percentage of non-White and non-Catholic students enrolled at Sacred Heart suggests that urban parish schools held a strong appeal for neighborhood residents of minority backgrounds. Many non-Catholic parents were apparently impressed with the orderly environment Catholic schools provided, especially at a time when a growing number of urban public schools were seemingly experiencing a breakdown in discipline. Ida Carter, an African-American public school teacher who sent each of her children to an urban parochial school, described a classroom environment that featured a pleasing combination of discipline and warmth. “Everybody knew each other, and it seemed like everybody cared about each other,” she recalled. “There was…total respect…. For whatever reason…when a sister walked into that room, the children

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314 Ibid.
stopped, stood up, and [said], ‘Good morning, Sister Mary’…. The kids all seemed to gel. So, the closest thing I can say is, it was really like a family.’”  

The growing perception that urban Catholic schools bolstered achievement levels among minority students owed much to research that surfaced in the early 1980s. In 1982, James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore’s landmark study, *High School Achievement: Public and Private Schools*, report that Catholic secondary schools provided relatively high levels of academic achievement, were less racially segregated, and created an academic atmosphere in which academic achievement was less dependent on family background. A preliminary draft of the study, *Public and Non-Public Schools*, served as the database for sociologist Father Andrew Greeley’s 1982 study, *Catholic Schools and Minority Students*. In his more specialized interpretation of the data, Greeley concludes that achievement levels of minority students enrolled in Catholic schools were significantly higher than those observed among minority students in public schools. He also contended that the most dramatic differences in the effectiveness of private and public schools were found among the most disadvantaged students. These findings led some researchers to conclude that urban Catholic schools were more in line

315 Ida Carter, interview with the author, May 4, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.  
317 Ibid.
with the “common school” ideal than their public counterparts. It was against the background of this contested research that urban parochial schools garnered increasing attention among non-Catholic observers, including urban Protestant leaders.

A New Superintendent Struggles to Save the System

Although the Immaculate had managed to survive the threat of closure through consolidation, questions about the school’s long-term viability surfaced with renewed force in the spring of 1985, when it was announced that retiring diocesan school superintendent John Augenstein would be replaced by a more assertive administrator, Dr. Nicholas M. Wolsonovich. The new superintendent, appointed by Bishop James Malone on the recommendation of the diocesan school board, came with credentials that included a bachelor’s degree from Catholic University, a master’s degree from Westminster College, and a doctorate in education administration from Kent State University. Dr. Wolsonovich pledged to emphasize the “religious identity” of the diocese’s parish schools, an agenda with questionable implications for urban schools that had moved beyond their traditional mission by serving large numbers of non-Catholic students. Speaking on the raison d’être of Catholic education, the incoming superintendent stressed that parochial schools “were not created to duplicate public school education.” Given that urban parochial schools in this period were widely praised for their work with at-risk, minority students, the superintendent’s restatement of a more traditional ethos may have

318 Ibid., 11.
319 Thomas Ott, “Dr. Wolsonovich promises direct involvement in schools,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 25, 1985, 53.
320 Ibid.
led some to question his commitment to schools like Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s, which were based in neighborhoods with shrinking Catholic populations.

As it turned out, however, Dr. Wolsonovich proved generally supportive of the mission of schools like the Immaculate. In 1990, five years into his tenure as superintendent, he addressed the issue of non-Catholics who attended urban parish schools. Dr. Wolsonovich observed that, among diocesan elementary schools, 11 percent of the students were non-Catholics. The percentage of such students, he added, was far higher among center-city schools.\(^{321}\) The superintendent specifically mentioned Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick schools. He pointed out that both institutions “have almost 90-percent non-Catholic” students, and speculated that urban parents, regardless of religious background, were “looking for a strong, faith-filled, value-filled education.”\(^{322}\) Dr. Wolsonovich neglected to add that, while the percentage of non-Catholic students in these schools was rising, overall enrollment had continued to drop.

Indeed, by 1990, Immaculate Conception Elementary School recorded a mere 122 students, while its budget deficit soared to tens of thousands of dollars. Instructor Lianna Scarazzo later recalled, “There were a lot of months that we weren’t sure what the situation would be for the next year—would we be here or not?”\(^{323}\) The following year, enrollment crept up slightly to 129 students, and the school once more faced the prospect of closure. In March of 1991, the Diocese of Youngstown announced that two special

\(^{321}\) “One on one with Nicholas Wolsonovich: We need to rethink financing, Catholic schools chief says,” *The Vindicator*, August 20, 1990, 1.
\(^{322}\) Ibid.
collections would be taken up at churches throughout Mahoning and Trumbull counties to benefit two urban parish schools, Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s. The diocese’s efforts were synchronized with those of a group that called itself the Mahoning County Center City Catholic Schools Task Force. Significantly, the task force included representatives of urban Protestant Christian churches who supported the two schools’ efforts to provide educational opportunities to center-city youth. One task force member, the Reverend Lonnie Simon, the Black pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church on the south side of Youngstown, sent a letter of appeal to Protestant churches throughout the area, noting that students from 59 Christian churches attended the two schools. Reverend Simon’s public comments on the benefits of urban Catholic parochial schools distinguished him from the majority of local Black ministers, who were more guarded in their statements concerning these institutions. There is no doubt, however, that a growing number of local Protestant clergy came to appreciate the quality of urban Catholic education, a development that paved the way for the eventual establishment of an ecumenical private academy on the city’s south side in the mid-1990s.

The task force’s stated goal was to raise $115,000 annually for the two schools over a five-year period. Group representatives predicted that about $78,000 would be generated in the two special collections held at local Catholic churches. Fundraisers also noted that similar campaigns would be held at local parochial schools, where students

325 Ibid.
326 Ibid.
were encouraged to participate in a fundraising effort called “Kids Helping Kids,” whose stated goal was to raise the equivalent of $3 per student. The task force indicated that, with the monies generated through the fundraising campaigns, it would establish an endowment fund “that will take over funding assistance at the end of five years of collections.”

Diocesan school superintendent Dr. Wolsonovich also issued a letter to diocesan school principals that praised the two schools in the following terms: “Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick Schools are a significant outreach to the community at large by educating with Christian values those students who are predominantly minority and non-Catholic.” At the time Wolsonovich issued the letter, 83 percent of the Immaculate’s students were African American, with the same percentage recorded as non-Catholic.

Less than a month later, news accounts reported that the fundraising campaign had reached its $115,000 goal, thus securing reprieves for the two schools. Youngstown Bishop James W. Malone announced that both Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s schools would remain open for the 1991-1992 school year. “We are encouraged in this mission by the support of the entire community, including individual donors, foundations, churches, and young students of other schools,” Bishop Malone said. The Vindicator reported that Mahoning Country parishes raised a total of $56,763, while the “Kids

327 Ibid.
328 Ibid.
329 Ibid.
"Helping Kids" campaign yielded $6,602. In addition, four urban Protestant churches—New Bethel Baptist, Elizabeth Baptist, Gospel Baptist, and First Presbyterian—donated a total of $660. Bishop Malone stressed, however, that the drive was only the first of a five-year program. As a newspaper article reported, “…the financial situation of the schools will be evaluated for each of the following four years.” As it turned out, the results of subsequent fundraising drives for the two schools were disappointing.

At the outset of 1992, the diocese again announced that special collections would be taken up at local churches to support the two “financially strapped” schools. Bishop Malone issued a written statement to churches throughout Mahoning County, which reads, “We have a mission to bring the good news and gospel values to everyone, especially to the poorer members of the community.” This time, the campaign goal was $125,000, and once again, advocates of the schools reached out to private donors, parochial school students, and urban Protestant churches. Despite these efforts, however, the campaign fell short of its goal by $60,000. Judging from a breakdown of the contributions, the shortfall owed mainly to flagging contributions from local Catholics. Donations raised among parishes in Mahoning County fell from the previous year’s $56,763 to $42,104, in 1992. Even donations among parochial school students witnessed

331 Ibid.
332 Ibid.
334 “Bishop: Catholic schools stay open: The fundraising efforts didn’t bring in enough money, but three diocesan schools will still be open,” *The Vindicator*, April 7, 1992, B-2.
a substantial decline, falling from $6,602 to $4,804. Meanwhile, the relatively sparse
contributions of urban Protestant congregations rose from $660 to $1,025.335

In the wake of the shortfall, diocesan school superintendent Wolsonovich issued
an appeal for broader support, stating, “Only with the entire community’s help can we
make these schools a viable solution to help young people rise out of the poverty they
were born into.”336 Although the diocese was able to keep the schools open through
contributions from anonymous donors, questions arose about the continued support of
local Catholics for center-city schools like Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick.337
How long would Youngstown’s Catholic community fund endangered schools whose
students were mostly non-Catholic, especially when traditional parochial schools were
showing signs of financial strain? In the face of this uncertainty, Immaculate Conception
not only maintained its operation, but to the surprise of many observers, experienced an
unexpected rise in enrollment. Within two years, the school’s student body grew from
179 to 246.338 This jump was consistent with a rise in enrollment among all diocesan
schools, which was recorded at 15,482—an increase of 249 over the previous year’s
figure. According to a newspaper report, parochial elementary schools saw their figures
rise by 108 students, while high schools recorded an increase of 141.339 A news report
indicates that Immaculate Conception Elementary School enrolled “a mostly black or

335 Ibid.
336 Ibid.
337 Ibid.
339 “Diocese’s schooling cost less than U.S. average—Other good news: School enrollment in the diocese
showed a healthy increase this year,” The Vindicator, November 30, 1994, B-3.
Hispanic, non-Catholic student body from low-income households.” The article notes that almost half of the students enrolled at Immaculate Conception came from “single-mother homes.”

While this temporary boost in enrollment may have been encouraging, it didn’t resolve the Immaculate’s longstanding financial difficulties. The school’s tuition—kept low to accommodate poorer families—failed to cover the cost of educating individual students. As the media noted, the school’s 246 kindergarten-through-eighth-grade students paid a yearly average of $750 in tuition, while the annual cost of educating each student ranged from $1,700 to $1,800. The remainder needed to be made up through fundraising efforts. Worse yet, the scope of diocesan fundraising campaigns had widened considerably as more and more of Youngstown’s urban parochial schools experienced financial difficulty. In early 1995, the diocese launched an 18-month, $451,000 fundraising campaign designed to create “long-term financial stability” to five struggling parish schools—Immaculate Conception; St. Patrick’s, on the south side; St. Anthony’s, on the lower north side; St. Edward’s, on the upper north side; and St. Dominic, on the south side. Sister Brendon Zajac, the diocese’s new assistant school superintendent, explained, “We’re trying to build an ongoing base of support so that we don’t have to keep going back again and again asking for money in a crisis situation to deal with our

341 Ibid.
342 Ron Cole, “Catholic schools launch fund drive: Diocese officials hope to know by March 15 if they can raise the money. If not, a school could close,” The Vindicator, February 12, 1995, B-1.
deficit.” A subtext of the fundraising campaign was the diocese’s threat that, if contributions fell short, one of the urban parish schools—most likely St. Patrick—would close. In its coverage of the campaign kickoff, the Vindicator observed that Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s “have teetered on the brink of closure for several years.”

The next month, the diocese announced that the fundraising campaign had fallen substantially short of its goal of $451,000, raising a total of only $100,000. In spite of this shortfall, Dr. Wolsonovich announced that St. Patrick’s Elementary School would remain open, though in a truncated form. To save up to $60,000 in operating costs, grades five through eight at St. Patrick’s would be eliminated, the superintendent said. The diocese announced that the change would force 75 students to seek education elsewhere, and also estimated that at least four teaching positions would be cut. “We just didn’t raise the money we needed to sustain everything as it is,” Wolsonovich said.

The diocese’s efforts to attract an additional $150,000 from 70 individual donors also proved disappointing. As a newspaper article reports, a mere 35 donors pledged $25,165. Wolsonovich explained that the diocese’s decision to “make changes at St. Patrick’s” rested on the fact that “Immaculate is the only Catholic school on the East Side.” These “changes,” as things turned out, would serve as the prelude to St. Patrick Elementary School’s closure at the conclusion of the 1995-1996 academic year.

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343 Ibid.
344 Ibid.
345 Ibid.
347 Ibid.
Looking back on the situation, Father Edward P. Noga, pastor of St. Patrick’s Church, suggested that the closure of most of the city’s parish schools was partly the result of resistance to strong diocesan recommendations that surviving schools consolidate.\(^3^4^8\) In the early 1990s, Father Noga recalled, a consultant advised the diocese to cluster the city’s surviving elementary schools into three groups, as a step toward future consolidations. “Turf issues” among local pastors and parishioners, however, worked against any substantial effort to “downsize” the school system. Father Noga described the response of many local Catholics to the issue of consolidation. “I think the essence of Catholic parishes and parish schools [is] their personal identities,” he said. “And I think the church promoted, and rightly so, that the parish become all-encompassing—social service, school, liturgy, social life, etc.” At the same time, Father Noga contended that, in the wake of “skyrocketing” costs, “the places that looked more regionally at schools met with…a little bit more success.” Still, the strategy of consolidation, which looked good “on paper,” was difficult to implement because parishioners could not accept the loss of a beloved school’s identity.\(^3^4^9\)

In what became a common practice, the building that housed St. Patrick’s Elementary School was put to use after the closure of the parish school. Father Noga explained that, in the late 1990s, the Diocese of Youngstown cooperated closely with the Lutheran bishop of Akron to establish at St. Patrick’s site an “ecumenical school that

\(^{3^4^8}\) Father Edward P. Noga, interview with the author, June 18, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.

\(^{3^4^9}\) Ibid.
would be Christian-based, but not denominationally based.”\textsuperscript{350} The enterprise, which was known as New Hope Academy, operated on the south side for five years and drew national publicity for its inclusive approach to Christian education. In 1998, Oprah Winfrey’s Better Life Foundation donated $25,000 to the school.\textsuperscript{351} Today, the former parish school building serves as the site of a charter school managed by Summit Academy, Inc., an enterprise that operates three charter schools in Youngstown—all of which are housed in former parochial school buildings.

The closure of St. Patrick’s Elementary School in 1996 raised questions about the long-term viability of other urban parochial schools, especially Immaculate Conception. Indeed, the Immaculate’s enrollment dropped to a mere 195 students in 1998. In the face of this trend, however, Immaculate Conception once again made headlines for its implementation of innovative educational practices. This time, however, the innovations came at the urging of the diocesan superintendent. Dr. Wolsonovich had, since 1996, actively promoted a year-round school calendar that increased mandatory school days from 178 to 181. The calendar also added 15 voluntary “enrichment” days and pared down summer vacation from 11 to six weeks.\textsuperscript{352} Dr. Wolsonovich’s recommendation that the diocese’s 48 elementary schools and five high schools adopt the year-round program was couched in a diocesan report, titled “Cornerstone of Excellence.” With the

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{351} “Oprah raises new hope at school: Oprah Winfrey’s For a Better Life Foundation has donated $25,000 to New Hope Academy,” \textit{The Vindicator}, September 17, 1998, B-15.
superintendent’s approval, the Immaculate became the second school in northeastern Ohio to adopt a year-round calendar in the late summer of 1998. Immaculate principal Patricia Yacucci’s decision to “take the plunge” and adopt the schedule echoed Sister Teresa Winsen’s openness to the IGE program in 1970. The new schedule did not elicit praise from all staff members, however. One disgruntled teacher called into question the practicality of holding additional summer classes in an older building without air conditioning. The same teacher also complained that hard-pressed parochial school instructors like herself were being asked to give up extended summer breaks with their children.353 Dr. Wolsonovich, on the other hand, expressed confidence that the year-round schedule was “the basis of what the future of education will be.”354

The Demise of Urban Catholic Schools in Youngstown

In the spring of 2002, Dr. Wolsonovich announced that he would step down as diocesan superintendent to accept a comparable post with the Archdiocese of Chicago.355 His successor, Dr. Michael Skube, did not share Wolsonovich’s enthusiasm for innovations like the year-round school schedule.356 But the new superintendent’s concern about the viability of Youngstown’s center-city parish schools became immediately apparent. In August of 2002, Dr. Skube, met with pastors of four parish schools in Youngstown, including Immaculate Conception, St. Brendan’s, St. Edward’s, and St.

353 Ibid.
354 Ibid.
356 Ron Cole, “Does bell for pupils also toll for school: The school has opened early; the new principal’s attitude is that is won’t be closed,” The Vindicator, August 14, 2002, B-1.
Matthias’. Given that the diocese had already closed three city schools in the previous decade—St. Patrick’s and St. Anthony’s in 1996, and St. Dominic’s in 1999—the Immaculate’s future, once again, hung in the balance. A newspaper article reports that the Immaculate, “where the majority of pupils are black, non-Catholic and from low-income families,” was “the most vulnerable.”

Such characterizations of the school were dismissed by the Immaculate’s new principal, Amy Ricci Ellis, who contended that “rumors of the school’s demise have become routine.” She expressed confidence in the school’s continued longevity. “You can have two attitudes,” she said. “I’m here for a year or I’m here for 10 years. The attitude I have is that the school is going to be here.” Amid optimistic forecasts by many of the school’s supporters, the Immaculate’s enrollment nevertheless remained at a dangerously low level, never rising about 120 for the remainder of its operation. Nevertheless, the school remained a focal point of fundraising campaigns; and in 2004, Father Edward Glynn, S.J., president of John Carroll University, served as keynote speaker at a local benefit that raised $23,000 for the school. Yet, these additional funds could scarcely compensate for a precipitous decline in enrollment, and during its final years, student numbers at Immaculate plunged to an all-time low. Within four years of Dr. Skube’s initial meeting with the pastors of Youngstown’s endangered public

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357 Ibid.
358 Ibid.
359 Ibid.
schools, all four of these institutions would be closed. Almost miraculously, Immaculate Conception Elementary School, whose closure seemed imminent as early as the 1970s, was among the last of these endangered schools to cease operation.361

About two months after Immaculate Conception closed its doors, the Diocese of Youngstown announced a plan to “save” local Catholic education. In a news story that appeared in August 2006, Dr. Skube attributed the recent closings of Immaculate Conception and St. Matthias elementary schools to factors including the decline in urban population, growing economic hardship, and rising tuition levels. “The trend is down,” Skube said, acknowledging that the rate of attrition was highest among parish schools in Youngstown itself.362 Observing that each parochial school was free to set its own tuition, Skube stated that tuition costs for parishioners ranged from between $1,300 and $2,300 per year for elementary pupils in the Youngstown area, while non-parishioners paid between $800 and $1,800 more for elementary pupils. Skube indicated that the Youngstown Diocese might play some role in easing parents’ economic burden. In a bid to preserve the 20 diocesan schools that were still operating in the metropolitan area—which includes Mahoning, Trumbull, and Columbiana counties—the diocese would increase financial aid programs to assist parents who wanted to send their children to Catholic schools, he added.363

363 Ibid.
For Youngstown residents, the diocese’s promise to “save” local parochial schools may have had a hollow ring to it. The city’s “system” of parish schools, after all, officially came to an end two months earlier, with the closing of all but one of the schools within the municipal limits. As the *Vindicator* reported, six parish schools in Youngstown had closed since 1994. In Skube’s view, the shutting down of these schools could be attributed to one fundamental circumstance: “The bottom line is that there are just fewer pupils available as a parish population declines.”

If the situation Skube described served as a worst-case scenario, the decline of parish schools (especially those based in urban areas) was a nationwide phenomenon. Despite a slight national increase in the late 1990s, enrollment at Catholic parochial schools across the country dropped noticeably in the early 21st century. In 2005, the National Catholic Education Association reported that 1,992,183 children were attending Catholic elementary schools in the 1993-1994 school year, and in 1998-1999 that number rose to 2,013,102. In the 2003-2004 academic year, however, enrollment fell dramatically to 1,842,918. In 2004, 123 Catholic elementary schools across the country were forced to either close or consolidate.

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\[\text{364}\] Ibid.
Legacy of an Urban Parish School

In May 2007, almost a year after the Immaculate’s closure, I spoke once again to the school’s last principal, Sister Charlotte Italiano, who was then serving as director of the Ursuline Pre-School and Kindergarten in neighboring Canfield, Ohio. The walls of her brightly decorated office were covered with plaques and certificates that attested to her decades of community service, and it occurred to me that her brief tenure as principal of Immaculate Conception Elementary School was a footnote in a long, varied career. During our conversation, however, it became clear that Sister Charlotte’s connections to the Immaculate reached beyond her experiences as the school’s “closing” principal. She had spent a portion of her childhood in an Italian-American enclave located a few blocks from the parish. It was a neighborhood of “first-time landowners” who took “extreme pride in their property,” maintained well-cultivated gardens, and worked “together in canning the vegetables and fruits of the summer.” In the 1940s, Sister Charlotte attended Immaculate Conception for the first few years of her elementary education. Therefore, when she took on her duties at Immaculate Conception Elementary School in the late summer of 2005, the assignment struck her as something of a homecoming, although it turned out to be unexpectedly bittersweet.

Her mood became reflective as she recalled the moment that she first learned of the parish council’s decision to close the school. “Oh, I was very upset,” she recalled. “In fact, when I went to the parish council meeting…I didn’t think they were going to

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366 Italiano, interview.
end up closing the school.” The news left her feeling “overwhelmed,” but also angry. “...I think I was angry because the diocese did not do anything, in my opinion, to keep the school going.”

Although Sister Charlotte did not specifically mention the former bishop of the Youngstown Diocese, Thomas J. Tobin, she did say, “I think with the new bishop [George V. Murry]...being an educator himself, as a Jesuit, he sees the importance of Catholic education and urban education.” She also affirmed that diocesan leadership could—and often did—play a decisive role in determining the success, or failure, of an urban parochial school. She added that Bishop Tobin’s predecessor, Bishop James Malone, treated Catholic schools as a personal priority during his long tenure. “He was an educator,” she said. “He saw to it that good things happened in the schools.”

While Sister Charlotte suggested that diocesan intervention might have altered the fate of Immaculate Conception Elementary School, she was not inclined to minimize the challenges arrayed against the city’s parochial schools. Among the destabilizing trends she described was the rise of charter schools, which featured smaller class sizes, greater numbers of credentialed staff, specialized programs, and (not least of all) free admission. Sister Charlotte explained that charter schools could afford to keep two certified teachers in each classroom. “And then, all of the extra programs came in, the Title programs that [provided] extra help for the youngsters in the public schools, that originally were not part of the opportunities that Catholic schools had,” she added. “So, if you had a child

367 Ibid.
368 Ibid.
with special needs and local Catholic schools didn’t have anything, where do you go?”\textsuperscript{369}

In addition, many of the neighborhood parents who depended on Immaculate Conception Elementary School evidently failed to heed warnings about the school’s almost certain closure in the event of low enrollment. Sister Charlotte noted that late student registration was a perennial problem. Yet, in the spring of 2006, prompt registration was nothing less than essential for the school’s continued operation. Sister Charlotte recalled that the school had only 43 students enrolled for the upcoming school year. “No way could you keep a school open that way,” she said. Sister Charlotte added that parents had been warned repeatedly about the severity of the situation. “[Immaculate Conception Parish administrator] Monsignor Zuraw told people, all along, that these were critical times,” she said. “If they were going to sign their children up, they had to do it so that we would know what to do, because teachers had to be on board. And we had to look at how we would get the money to keep the place open.”\textsuperscript{370}

Sister Charlotte suggested that the factors contributing to the Immaculate’s closure were complicated, and deeply enmeshed with the challenges that faced Youngstown in general. She could not seem to decide whether the school’s closure was the inevitable outcome of larger trends or the result of diocesan administrators’ flagging commitment to urban Catholic education. On the issue of Immaculate Conception’s legacy, however, Sister Charlotte spoke with clarity and conviction. “[W]e have provided a very firm, solid, working class of people to go on to further the ideals—not

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid.
just Catholic or Christian, but human ideals,” she said. “We…have had the privilege of having an impact…on these youngsters. And I think that’s going to be one our legacies, that we have spent the time and energy to make difficult situations easier for many people…. And the influence isn’t going to be felt right away. It’s going to take time to move out into different circles.”

Our discussion on the school’s long-term impact eventually turned to the fate of the 12 students who participated in the Immaculate’s final graduation ceremony. Sister Charlotte noted that four of these students were “standout” athletes at Ursuline High School, one of Youngstown’s two Catholic high schools. She went to share her memories of the ceremony itself. The students’ graduation ceremony, she recalled, was held in the neo-Gothic interior of Immaculate Conception Church, which despite post-conciliar renovations, looked much as it had when the structure opened in the late 19th century. A banner designed by the children stretched across the church’s old main altar, reading, “Thank You For All the Good Times!” Sister Charlotte described the Mass as “inspiring,” but added that only one of the graduating students was actually a Roman Catholic. The religious service was followed by a graduation party that reflected “the influence of other people on the less fortunate.” Friends and acquaintances of the principal who were active members of Holy Family Church, a parish located in the affluent suburb of Poland, Ohio, donated time and material for the graduation party. “They came down and they provided the food, the table arrangements, the whole party

371 Ibid.
for the graduation,” she recalled. “They not only bought everything and set it up, but they also stayed to serve it. They brought their children with them. So, those children saw how our children were at that time. Now, you’re talking [about children who are] very affluent to the marginalized, and those who are struggling to make it.”  

For Sister Charlotte, such opportunities for interaction between rich and poor, Black and White, Catholic and non-Catholic, were among the enriching benefits of urban parish schools like the Immaculate. “So, that was a good thing,” she said, her mind apparently drifting back to the post-graduation festivities. “And that’s a good memory to keep.”

\[^{372}\] Ibid.  
\[^{373}\] Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

URBAN EXODUS: DEPOPULATION AND URBAN PARISH SCHOOLS

Father Edward P. Noga said he can still remember the morning he first became aware of profound changes in Youngstown’s center city. In the early 1960s, as a seventh-grader in the suburban parochial school of Immaculate Heart of Mary, the future priest (along with his classmates) was introduced to a couple of new students who had just relocated to Austintown Township from Youngstown’s south side. The newcomers, who had previously attended St. Patrick’s Elementary School, “lived in the path of the highway.”

They were among scores of urban residents who were forced to retreat from the city when their neighborhoods were leveled “in the name of progress.” Years later, circumstances led Father Noga to reflect on this incident. In the 1980s, he was appointed pastor of St. Patrick’s Church, the same parish his “uprooted” classmates at Immaculate Heart of Mary Elementary School had been compelled to leave almost two decades earlier. By this time, the urban parish’s Spanish Gothic-style church and adjacent brick school building appeared out of place on the city’s near south side, with its long stretches of dilapidated housing punctuated by vacant lots. Over the next decade, moreover, the pastor watched as the beleaguered neighborhoods surrounding St. Patrick’s Church

1 Father Edward P. Noga, interview by the author, June 18, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
2 Ibid.
became so thinly populated that bus service to the district was practically discontinued.\(^3\)

In 1996, St. Patrick’s Elementary School, which had served more than 1,000 students in the early 1960s, enrolled just 107 children.\(^4\) That same year, the diocese announced that the school would close, only to be reopened as New Hope Academy, an ecumenical school operated by the Diocese of Youngstown, the Lutheran Church, and the Ursuline Sisters of Youngstown.\(^5\)

Father Noga interpreted the retreat of residents from Youngstown’s center-city neighborhoods as a response to a host of destabilizing trends that rendered urban neighborhoods less viable. “I think what happened was, things were changing socially,” he said. “People were looking outside the city as a way of re-stabilizing.”\(^6\) The “social changes” to which Father Noga referred were the result of urban developments that included demographic change, deindustrialization, and suburbanization. The cumulative effect of these trends was exacerbated by massive urban construction projects that transformed the city. In Youngstown, as elsewhere in the country, entire neighborhoods were swept away to accommodate building projects that included interstate highway construction.\(^7\) Such projects often placed a disproportionate burden on Blacks and ethnic Whites, who tended to live in targeted neighborhoods—a situation that prompted some

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\(^3\) Ibid.


\(^6\) Noga, interview.

observers to argue that highway construction was a contributing factor to the urban race riots of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{8} Notably, few urban dwellers experienced the benefits of highway building projects, which facilitated the flow of suburban commuters to and from the center city, even as they “sliced through urban neighborhoods, thereby eliminating housing and disrupting neighborhoods.”\textsuperscript{9} “It destabilized the whole town,” recalled longtime Youngstown resident Paula McKinney. “This was a real nice town till the freeway came through. I mean, at least you had regular blocks, and you knew where you were…. But now, it’s a disaster.”\textsuperscript{10}

The construction of interstate highways also encouraged the flow of capital out of the city and into outlying areas. Robert A. Beauregard points out that interstate highways “gave impetus to the trucking industry and improved its competitiveness relative to railroads and international shipping.” As ports and railway yards declined in importance, the highway “enabled businesses…that relied on trucking to relocate outside the city, where they would have better access to the metropolitan market via the new regional highway network.”\textsuperscript{11} In addition, the construction of limited-access highways “created high-value intersections throughout the suburban periphery,” thereby fueling the creation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} Bill McNichol, \textit{The Roads That Built America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System} (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), 154-155.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Robert A. Beauregard, \textit{When America Became Suburban} (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 85.
\item \textsuperscript{10} Paula (Lehnerd) McKinney, interview by the author, June 14, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Beauregard, \textit{When America Became Suburban}, 85.
\end{itemize}
of shopping malls that “diverted retail expenditures from central business districts.”12 As Kenneth T. Jackson observes, in his classic study of suburbanization, the apotheosis of the automobile during the postwar era “so vastly changed the equation that cities began to ‘come apart’ economically and functionally even as they had earlier begun to come apart legally with the breakdown of annexation.”13 All of these trends were well-represented in northeastern Ohio. As Linkon and Russo point out, in their study of post-industrial Youngstown, the city’s I-680 beltway “effectively cut downtown Youngstown off from much day-to-day traffic, directing drivers and, more importantly, shoppers” to newly built suburban shopping plazas and malls.14 By the early 1980s, the long-term effects of these developments had transformed Youngstown’s once-bustling downtown district into a bleak vista of decaying buildings.

Yet, interstate highway construction was just one of many factors that fueled the decline of urban neighborhoods in places like Youngstown. Across the country, thousands of cities were undermined by a phenomenon later termed as “parasitic urbanization,” in which suburban communities grew at the expense of neighboring cities. As Beauregard notes, the growth of suburbs in the post-World War II era was “inseparable” from the contraction of industrial urban areas. Declining cities “provided residents for the burgeoning, peripheral housing developments” and “spun off the

12 Ibid.
14 Linkon and Russo, Steeltown U.S.A., 44.
businesses that anchored shopping malls and industrial parks.”\[^{15}\] As traditional urban centers lost residents, jobs, consumer expenditures, and tax revenues, “decline struck these cities with a vengeance.”\[^{16}\] The growth of suburbs was facilitated by a host of factors that included population growth, the federal government’s housing and economic policies, postwar industrial patterns, White responses to demographic change, urban renewal projects, the rise of the automobile as a chief mode of transportation, the wider availability of affordable housing, and (not least of all) the U.S. population’s “national distrust of urban life and communal living.”\[^{17}\]

Trends that affected Midwestern U.S. cities like Youngstown were evident in urban communities among most of the “developed” nations of the postwar era. The decline of U.S. cites was, in many ways, reflective of “the deindustrialization of the global North and the rise of manufacturing in the global South.”\[^{18}\] By the end of the 20\(^{th}\) century, major Western cities such as New York, London, and Paris “had been eclipsed by cities outside North America and Europe.”\[^{19}\] At the same time, developments within the continental United States intensified domestic patterns of urban depopulation. These developments included the migration of tens of thousands of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North during the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century. The sudden arrival of large numbers of onetime rural dwellers in largely unprepared cities would

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\[^{15}\] Beauregard, When America Became Suburban, 37.
\[^{16}\] Ibid.
\[^{17}\] Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 287-296.
\[^{18}\] Ibid, 67.
\[^{19}\] Ibid, 66.
have placed a burden on urban institutions under the best of conditions. Difficulties attending the “Great Migration,” however, were compounded by factors including institutionalized racism and tragically poor timing. In the 1950s, thousands of Blacks—who were eventually joined by Latinos—flooded into northern industrial cities “just as manufacturing jobs were leaving.”20 As early as the 1940s, the trends that contributed to urban deindustrialization were already beginning to unfold.21

Urban Parishes as Sacred Ground

The forces that devastated urban economies also undermined entrenched models of U.S. Catholic identity that had evolved in a largely urban context since the mid-19th century. Catholic historian John T. McGreevy notes that European Catholic immigrant groups “invested an inordinate amount of their savings in property” when compared to other urban dwellers.22 Some analysts have described the tendency of White Catholics to cluster in enclaves as part of “a conscious attempt to recreate old patterns of community in a new environment.” McGreevy, on the other hand, stresses the influence of group loyalties that centered on neighborhood parishes.23 For Catholics, he argues, “neighborhood, parish, and religion were constantly intertwined.”24 McGreevy further contends that the maintenance of a tight-knit, self-monitoring community was implicitly

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid, 21.
supported by Catholic doctrine, as articulated in Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *Rerem Novarum* (“Of New Things”), which advocated a corporate society bound together by a network of mutual obligations. This essentially organic view of society also informed Pius XII’s 1939 encyclical on the “Mystical Body of Christ,” which compared participants in a community to the organs of the divine corpus.\(^{25}\) McGreevy observes that, for many American Catholics, an individual who was alienated from the community “was a tragic figure since proper habits could be learned only in the context of a specific moral tradition.”\(^{26}\) In a formal sense, “church-sanctioned institutions—notably marriage and the family—were crucial to inculcating virtue, but so too were local groups ranging from church societies to trade unions and political parties.” McGreevy points out that “[s]uch structures were essential to creating a civil society, one capable of resisting either an overreaching state or an unchecked market economy.”\(^{27}\)

Given the role that urban enclaves played in the transmission of traditional religious values, it is difficult to ignore that many of the factors driving suburbanization in the postwar era also undermined the integrity of established Catholic neighborhoods. A tendency to leave behind traditional conceptions of American Catholic identity was accelerated in the early 1960s, when developments in the public sphere inspired a growing number of Catholics to question whether their religious community was as marginalized as they once believed it to be. In 1961, John Fitzgerald Kennedy became

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\(^{25}\) Ibid, 52.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 24.
\(^{27}\) Ibid.
the first Roman Catholic president of the United States, undercutting the widely held perception that a “papist” presidential candidate was “unelectable,” while signaling to American Catholics “that they were accepted by a wider culture once disposed toward suspicion of them.”\(^{28}\) The following year, the initiation of the Second Vatican Council opened an unprecedented era of ecumenism. So-called “Vatican II Catholics” moved “beyond the religious world of their parents and grandparents” and, in many cases, “drew an analogy to growing up.”\(^{29}\) This new official openness to non-Catholics, which flew in the face of the Catholic Church’s traditional insularity, further weakened U.S. Catholic solidarity.\(^{30}\) Patterns of suburbanization certainly facilitated this process. As McGreevy notes, most Catholics of the pre-conciliar era resided in “cultural ghettos” that were “constructed by the parish.”\(^{31}\) Unquestionably, the “parish boundaries” that defined many urban neighborhoods had helped American Catholics to establish cohesive communities, even as they limited opportunities for meaningful interaction with urban dwellers who subscribed to other religions.\(^{32}\)

In Youngstown, as elsewhere in the northeastern United States, traditional Catholic neighborhoods were drained of their vitality as younger people retreated from the central city. When large numbers of ethnic White families moved to the suburbs, they left behind churches and schools that had been cherished social, cultural, and

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\(^{29}\) Ibid., 201.

\(^{30}\) O’Toole, *The Faithful*, 252-258.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 20-25.
religious centers. Hundreds of Croatian Americans abandoned the lower north side neighborhoods that encircled Sts. Peter and Paul Church and Elementary School, prompting its closure in 1973. Likewise, Italian Americans gradually retreated from the traditional ethnic strongholds that had sprung up around the parishes of St. Anthony and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, both based on the city’s north side. While a significant number of Slovak Americans remained loyal to the modest, but manicured, neighborhoods that abutted the south side parish of St. Matthias, most of their children moved elsewhere. This exodus of White, middle-class Catholics from the city imperiled the institutions they left behind, and parochial schools were especially vulnerable, considering that they faced the double threat of declining enrollment and shrinking donations. Some Catholic observers, including diocesan officials, responded to these developments by emphasizing the church’s “responsibility” to maintain an urban presence by, among others, preserving urban parish schools. Catholics educators who were aware of the prevalence of racial and economic inequality in American society went so far as to re-imagine urban parish schools as training grounds for community leaders. Others, however, clung to more traditional concepts of religious education and raised questions about continued diocesan

support for parish schools that no longer served a majority of White, middle-class Catholic students.\textsuperscript{36}

Debates over the future of urban parish schools unfolded against a backdrop of deepening internal discord. The nation’s Catholics were evidently unable to agree on many of the fundamental ingredients of their collective religious identity. Liberal Catholics, inspired by the inclusive language of Vatican II, advocated engagement with the larger society. The council, they noted, had shown that the church was “\textit{in} the modern world—not above it, not below it, not for it, not against it.” Hence, the church was obliged to “assume its share of responsibility for the well being of the world, not simply denounce what it finds wrong.”\textsuperscript{37} Conservatives, on the other hand, remained focused mainly on the interests (spiritual and material) of a traditionally defined Catholic community. Such internal discord left some American Catholics disoriented, especially those who were at ease with the uniformity of the past. Crucially, this uniformity was not simply a matter of perception. McGreevy notes that, despite “\textit{intra-Catholic disputes},” pre-conciliar American Catholics held many values in common, and all of them “placed enormous financial, social, and cultural weight on the parish church as an organizer of local life.”\textsuperscript{38} Surprisingly, the diversity of the post-Vatican II era was more consistent with the church’s pre-modern past. “There are various ways of being Catholic, and

\textsuperscript{36} Marie Aikenhead, “Board Refuses School Funding: Votes Against Diocese Inner City Aid,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, November 17, 1976, 1.
people are choosing the style that best suits them,” Dolan observes, in his 1985 overview of U.S. Catholic history. “Though this is something new for modern Catholicism, it is not new in the history of the church. For centuries, there were always differing schools of theology, differing liturgical traditions, and differing ways of being Catholic.”39 Those Catholics who continued to view the church as a “perfect” and “unchanging” society, however, could not have been expected to share this perspective.

The weakening of a group solidarity that many U.S. Catholics had once taken for granted coincided with—and was, to some extent, exacerbated by—the arrival of more Catholics into suburban communities. As these transplanted urbanites encountered large numbers of Protestants and Jews (often for the first time), they began to lose touch with the traditional identities that had shaped their values and general outlook in an earlier era.40 The question of how urban depopulation influenced U.S. Catholic identity is complicated and difficult to track, however. Thus, it would be a daunting challenge to weave into this chapter a meaningful discussion of Catholic disunity, given the chapter’s primary focus on the trends that facilitated Youngstown’s deterioration—a development that, in turn, weakened the position of local urban parish schools. A detailed examination of U.S. Catholic disunity that highlights its relationship to the decline of urban parish schools will appear later in this study. For now, the reader is encouraged to take note of the many ways in which urban trends dampened the vitality of Catholic enclaves that

once fostered the maintenance of traditional institutions and values. The loss of these neighborhoods (along with major events like World War II and the implementation of the “G.I. Bill”) smoothed the path for the integration of Catholics into the American mainstream; and by the early 1960s, many Catholics, separated from their traditional urban settings, began to question the long-term efficacy of religious elementary schools. Within a decade, the Catholic exodus from the city inspired a new (equally contentious) debate concerning the viability and overall purpose of urban Catholic schools, a growing number of which served non-White, non-Catholic students.41

The Role of Deindustrialization

To understand how these trends played out in Youngstown, one must take into account the city’s dramatic economic decline, which precipitated a level of depopulation beyond that seen in most other northeastern cities. As a 2005 Youngstown city planning brochure observes, few communities have made the journey from “third largest steel producing city in the U.S.” to “poster child” for deindustrialization.42 In the late 1970s, Youngstown gained national attention for “losing 40,000 manufacturing jobs overnight” and secured a reputation for “crime and corruption.”43 Worse yet, the disappearance of traditional industrial elites left behind a yawning “power vacuum.” This vacuum was eventually filled by interest groups who set out to develop “their own plan of action in the wake of the city’s decline and competed with each other to achieve their own narrow

43 Ibid.
goals.” As Sean Safford points out, in his comparative study of Youngstown and Allentown, Pennsylvania (two communities deeply affected by deindustrialization), “The result has been nothing short of catastrophic decline and hollowing out.”

As Youngstown’s leaders struggled with challenges arising from suburbanization, the city’s position as a major manufacturing center was eroded by factors that included the unchecked deterioration of its industrial infrastructure. Therefore, it is proper to consider the role extreme patterns of deindustrialization may have played in the deterioration of the city’s parochial school system. These patterns clearly accelerated the “out-migration” of potential consumers of urban parochial education.

Youngstown’s reputation as an industrial center was dealt a mortal blow in September 1977, when the New Orleans-based Lykes Corporation announced that the firm’s Youngstown Sheet and Tube Division was “pulling out of town.” In 1978, one journalist described the steel shutdown in Youngstown as “simply the largest and most dramatic industrial debacle in recent memory.” The rapid decline of the local steel industry deprived the community of its most enduring icon, all but guaranteeing that it would become divorced from its past. Those Youngstown residents who experienced the dynamic “boom” years of the early 20th century could hardly have predicted that the city would become nationally known as a worst-case scenario for the phenomenon of

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deindustrialization. While urban trends in Youngstown were broadly consistent with developments in other northeastern industrial centers, the community has not “[recovered] as well as some other deindustrialized cities.”\textsuperscript{48} In stark contrast to cities like Allentown, a former steel-manufacturing center that experienced economic resurgence in the wake of industrial collapse, Youngstown has seen “the continuing exodus of ‘good’ factory jobs and the succession of scandal-ridden attempts at bringing prosperity back to a once-proud community.”\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, as Safford points out, Youngstown’s recent and widely publicized efforts to scale down its “footprint” to match a shrinking population could be seen as “an acknowledgment that its best days are past and that its future lies with making do with diminished circumstances.”\textsuperscript{50}

It would be difficult to exaggerate the role of deindustrialization in the decline of Youngstown, a community that once took pride in its position as a regional center of iron and steel production. Significantly, the industrial sector’s collapse in the late 1970s and early 1980s occurred against a backdrop of perceived economic stability—a circumstance that most likely amplified its impact. As local labor attorney and activist Staughton Lynd observes, residents of Youngstown, in the years leading up to the industrial shutdowns, viewed the community’s steel plants as “permanent fixtures.” Most found it hard to envision a collective economic future that did not revolve around steel production.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Safford, \textit{Why the Garden Club Couldn’t Save Youngstown}, 2.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
the early 1980s, Lynd, who witnessed the dislocations brought on by steel plant closures, described the far-ranging effects of deindustrialization. “A plant closing affects more than the workers at the plant,” Lynd writes. “City income from industrial taxes goes down, schools start to deteriorate and public services of all kinds are affected. Layoffs occur in businesses which processed the product; retail sales fall off. All the signs of family strain—alcoholism, divorce, child and spouse abuse, suicide—increase.”

Notably, the long-term impact of deindustrialization in Youngstown was more pronounced than in many other communities of the industrial northeast. Youngstown—unlike neighboring manufacturing centers like Cleveland, Akron, and Canton—was an economic monoculture, heavily dependent on steel production for its economic vitality as well as its identity. While some observers have blamed the community’s post-industrial difficulties on a (widely publicized) prevalence of political corruption and organized crime, others have emphasized the long-term impact of local industrial leaders’ constant efforts to limit economic competition. Linkon and Russo observe that, “throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the steel industry fought to exclude the growth of the aluminum industry in Youngstown by making land acquisition difficult and creating a hostile climate for business.” As a result, the city “stagnated economically” during the 1950s, even as “other regions with similar infestations of organized crime saw increases in production, construction, and economic diversification.” In the wake of subsequent

52 Ibid, 4.
53 Linkon and Russo, Steeltown U.S.A., 47.
54 Ibid.
steel-plant closures, the community was stripped not only of a viable future, but also of a meaningful past. Linkon and Russo note that the community’s loss of industry precipitated “the fragmentation of Youngstown’s constitutive narrative as locals began to argue about how to think of their shared history.” The question that seemed to be on everyone’s mind was articulated in a Vindicator article published five years after the initial plant closures: “How could an industry so much a part of the history of the community, and so vital to its economic life, simply cease to be or move away?”

The Rise of an Industrial “Boomtown”

Local observers in the early 20th century, of course, held a radically different view of the community and its problems. In the 1920s, Youngstown’s more established residents feared that their city had grown up too quickly, drawing too many people of diverse backgrounds—people who often disagreed on fundamental values. As Safford notes, the city’s “elite actors formulated responses that drew on their cohesiveness, time and again, to circle the wagons in the face of uncertainty.” Anglo-American elites “banded together” to protect the community from the external threat of industrial consolidation, while at the same time, taking steps to contain the influence of “eastern European immigrants and workers,” who were “perceived as threatening the established social order.” The city’s self-described “pioneers” looked back wistfully on an era when Youngstown’s residents were seemingly on familiar terms with most of their

55 Ibid, 3.
57 Safford, Why the Garden Club Couldn’t Save Youngstown, 140.
neighbors. It appeared those days were gone forever by the 1920s. The city’s population more than tripled between 1900 and 1920, soaring from 44,885 to 132,358.\(^{58}\) In 1925, a Vindicator survey showed that the population had risen to 161,477,\(^{59}\) and engineers with the Ohio Bell Telephone Company predicted that Youngstown’s population would reach 470,000 by 1950 if growth continued at the same pace.\(^{60}\) Despite the tensions that arose in the wake of ethnic and religious diversity, ethnic-White communities were quickly established. Furthermore, in a climate of exponential growth, urban institutions of all kinds thrived, including Youngstown’s parochial elementary schools, which numbered 15 by the close of the 1920s. Within a decade, the city hosted a total of 19 parochial elementary schools, staffed by seven orders of nuns and enrolling about 6,750 children.\(^{61}\)

Youngstown’s early 20\(^{\text{th}}\)-century population boom closely paralleled the growth of the local steel industry, which had evolved from the burgeoning iron industry of the previous century. The area’s first blast furnace had been established in 1803 in Poland Township, a community to the immediate southeast of Youngstown.\(^{62}\) By the mid-19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, Youngstown itself was the site of several iron industrial firms, notably David Tod’s Brier Hill Iron & Coal Company.\(^{63}\) The continued expansion of the community’s


\(^{59}\) “Survey Shows 161,477 Here,” The Youngstown Vindicator, December 7, 1925.

\(^{60}\) “Sees 470,000 Here in 25 Years: Ohio Bell Man Tells Club of City’s Prospects,” The Youngstown Telegram, October 23, 1925.

\(^{61}\) “Expect 7,200 Enrollment: Twenty Catholic Schools Prepare to Open with Bigger Rosters,” The Youngstown Vindicator, September 4, 1937.


\(^{63}\) Ibid., 37.
iron industry depended heavily on a vast network of railroad connections that ensured a consistent supply of coal and iron ore from other parts of the country.\textsuperscript{64} Despite this dependence on transported raw materials, however, “growth in the steel industry was generating a boom-town expansion” by the opening of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{65} In 1900, local industrialists George D. Wick and James Campbell, in response to the perceived threat of nation-wide industrial consolidation, organized the Youngstown Iron, Sheet and Tube Company (later known as Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company), which became one of the country’s most important regional steel producers.\textsuperscript{66} In 1923, the firm expanded its operations by acquiring steel plants in South Chicago and East Chicago, Indiana. Between the 1920s and 1970s, the Youngstown metropolitan area also hosted the furnaces and foundries of Republic Steel and U.S. Steel.\textsuperscript{67} Although Youngstown’s industrial sector remained relatively stable until the post-World War II era, the population projections of the 1920s proved wildly optimistic. The city’s population approached its peak in 1930, when it was recorded at 170,002, rendering it the third largest city in Ohio—and the 45\textsuperscript{th} largest city in the United States.\textsuperscript{68} Less dramatic growth was tracked over the next few years. In 1936, a census bureau estimate placed the population at

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 66-67.
\textsuperscript{66} Blue et al., \textit{Mahoning Memories}, 94.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 181-184.
\textsuperscript{68} “Youngstown is 45\textsuperscript{th} Among American Cities: City, However, Ranks Fifth in Home Ownership among Nation’s Communities,” \textit{The Youngstown Telegram}, June 29, 1931.
182,550,\textsuperscript{69} while a WPA property survey arrived at the more modest figure of 175,000.\textsuperscript{70} Significantly, by 1940, the urban population had dipped below 170,000, and for the next couple of decades, the municipality’s numbers rose only incrementally, even as the metropolitan area experienced dramatic gains in population.

The Growing Impact of Suburbanization

In 1950, Youngstown’s population was estimated at 168,000, a slight increase from the 1940 census record of 167,200.\textsuperscript{71} As the decade of the 1950s progressed, the city continued to experience only limited growth, despite the postwar population boom. In 1954, for instance, a \textit{Vindicator} estimate showed that Youngstown’s population rose modestly to 168,330, a gain of merely 610 residents.\textsuperscript{72} The paper reported that these meager gains were indicative of “one of the biggest population shifts in Youngstown’s history,” a massive movement of people to the suburbs.\textsuperscript{73} The paper also noted that, according to its survey, “nearly all the major cities in a five-county area around Youngstown have failed to record much population growth in the last 14 years but that astounding increases have been noted in areas bordering on the municipalities.”

\textsuperscript{70} “City’s Population 175,000 WPA Property Survey Shows: Check Reveals 41,000 Work in Mills—Data Gathered on Housing, Home Conditions,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, October 14, 1936.
\textsuperscript{72} “Shift to Suburbs Shown in Population Figures,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, August 1, 1954.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
addition, the survey revealed that the adjoining suburbs of Austintown and Boardman townships saw their respective populations practically double during the same period.74

Youngstown’s population trends were clearly reflected in the progress of its parochial elementary schools. The post-World War II “baby boom,” which brought about a temporary rise in the city’s population, bolstered enrollment in Youngstown parish schools. This development most likely encouraged false hopes among urban Catholic educators, as declining neighborhoods were temporarily infused with new life. Media accounts suggest that diocesan representatives were generally optimistic about the future of parochial schools. In the mid-1950s, for example, the Vindicator reported that, “[b]ased on the annual number of infant baptisms, the Youngstown Catholic Diocese must be ready to meet more than a 50 per cent increase in elementary school enrollment by 1960.”75 Such optimism about the future seemed well founded at the time. In 1959, parish school enrollment for Youngstown and surrounding Mahoning County reached an all-time high, with 16,914 enrolled.76

To meet the demands of soaring enrollment, two new parochial school facilities were established within the city limits. In 1955, St. Christine’s Church, located on the quasi-suburban west side, opened a new elementary school. That same year, St. Patrick’s Church, on the south side, established a junior high school annex called St. Patrick’s

74 Ibid.
76 Ann Jean Schuler, “Parochial Schools Found 1959 Big Year; Enrollment at Record,” The Youngstown Vindicator, January 10, 1960.
Glenmary. As the decade proceeded, other parish schools were forced to expand their facilities to meet the needs of an expanding student population. In 1957, administrators of the south-side parish of St. Dominic’s announced the construction of a 14-room annex. The building, which was designed to relieve overcrowding in the parish’s original 16-room structure, featured state-of-the-art teaching facilities and an audiovisual classroom. In 1958, St. Anthony’s Parish, forced to relocate because of highway construction, erected a $500,000 church and school complex on the fringes of the north side’s Brier Hill district. The school’s administrators were compelled to build additional classrooms when St. Anthony’s enrollment jumped from 201, in 1959, to 436, in 1963. This expansion was consistent with developments elsewhere in the city. A 1961 Youngstown school board estimate indicated that 13,318 students were enrolled in Catholic schools—elementary and secondary—while 27,324 attended public schools. In short, about one-third of the city’s school-age population was enrolled in Catholic schools. While the Vindicator article outlining the estimate failed to specify how many of these pupils were enrolled in parochial elementary schools (as opposed to high schools), these students certainly accounted for the largest share of this figure.

78 “Huge Elementary Building to Include 14 Classrooms,” The Youngstown Vindicator, January 22, 1957.
79 Ibid.
80 “Work to Begin Soon on New St. Anthony Church, School: Structure to Cost $500,000; Includes Rectory, Social Hall,” The Youngstown Vindicator, January 24, 1958.
81 “Bishop gives his OK to recommendation to close St. Anthony: In the past 11 years, the school’s enrollment has dropped by 40 percent while tuition has risen by 71 percent,” The Vindicator, March 4, 1996.
82 “Catholic Schools to Have Third of City’s Students,” The Youngstown Vindicator, July 14, 1961.
83 Ibid.
By the early 1960s, however, signs of dwindling enrollment were becoming evident, and some urban parishes were unable to maintain annexes that had been built little more than a decade earlier. In 1967, St. Patrick’s Church closed its elementary school annex in response to a dramatic decrease in enrollment. Between 1960 and 1967, the parish school’s student population fell from 1,057 to 615, reflecting a loss of about 40 percent of the student body.\(^84\) Scarcely an isolated incident, the contraction of St. Patrick Elementary School’s enrollment reflected a substantial shift in the community’s population during the early 1960s. The Ohio Department of Development reported that Youngstown’s population had fallen from 166,689, in 1960, to 164,242, in 1965—a decline of 2,447.\(^85\) The population estimate reflected, once again, a movement of urban residents to suburban areas. The ODD reported, in 1966, that the Youngstown metropolitan area, on the whole, enjoyed a population increase of almost eight percent, jumping from 509,006, in 1960, to 548,303, in 1965.\(^86\) The trend continued into the next decade, as Youngstown’s final census count for 1970 was set at 139,788, reflecting a 16.1%-percent drop since 1960, when the population was recorded at 166,689.\(^87\) At the same time, however, the Youngstown metropolitan area swelled to 536,003 (compared to


\(^{87}\) “Metropolitan Area is 536,003: City Census Drops to 139,788,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, January 13, 1971.
509,606 in 1960), a development that supported widespread perceptions that suburbanization was a major factor in the city’s depopulation.88

Ironically, some projects that were framed as efforts to “revitalize” the city accelerated the flow of people into the suburbs. During the 1960s, Youngstown, like many other U.S. cities, launched highway construction and urban renewal programs that targeted older residential areas. In a number of cases, the disappearance of aging neighborhoods adversely affected established institutions and businesses, including parochial schools. One of the earliest casualties of interstate highway construction was St. Ann’s Church and Elementary School, a landmark of the Brier Hill district on the city’s north side. For more than 90 years, the red brick church and school had overlooked the steel mills that snaked along the basin of the Mahoning River.89 In 1960, however, the large, Norman-style parish complex was closed and pulled down to make way for the extension of a nearby expressway.90 Significantly, St. Ann’s Parish was not alone in its fate. The first edifice of St. Anthony’s Church, an Italian-American parish located in the same district, was also razed.91 Several years later, the growth of Youngstown State University imperiled longstanding neighborhoods on the city’s lower and upper north side; and in 1967, the expansion of the university contributed to the closure of St. Joseph’s Elementary School, a north side institution since 1874. The former church

88 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 “Work to Begin on New St. Anthony Church, School,” The Youngstown Vindicator, January 24, 1958.
building was converted into a facility for the Newman Center, a campus organization for Catholic students, while the university leased the vacant school building until it was destroyed by fire in 1969. Around the same time, highway construction resulted in the removal of the traditional Irish- and Italian-American enclaves that surrounded Immaculate Conception Church and Elementary School on the city’s east side. The combined effect of highway construction and urban renewal projects continued to affect heavily Catholic center-city neighborhoods over the next decade.

The human cost of urban construction project was often overlooked by city planners. Paula McKinney, a graduate of St. Columba’s Elementary School, recalled that the clearing of aging homes to accommodate YSU’s northward expansion contributed to the closure of the city’s oldest parish school. The north-side boundaries of St. Columba Parish, which covered an area of approximately 20 blocks, extended from the downtown area to the lower reaches of the upper north side, she explained. “Now, all that’s gone,” Mrs. McKinney said. “And…those houses had kids in them that went to school. Well, of course the enrollment dropped.” Mrs. McKinney’s interpretation of events echoed statements that were issued by local Catholic leaders more than 30 years earlier. When St. Columba’s Elementary School closed in 1972, the diocesan superintendent of schools, Monsignor William A. Hughes, stated that the city’s urban renewal program, “which removed many homes from the area and provides the opportunity for the beautiful


94 McKinney, interview.
campus of Youngstown State University, meant the removal of many parishioners from
the near North Side.” Monsignor Hughes concluded that the university’s expansion
project had a critical impact on the parish school’s enrollment and helped to make closure
inevitable. Notably, the developments Monsignor Hughes described were hardly
limited to communities like Youngstown; they were broadly reflective of national
trends. 

Public Housing and the “Racialization” of the City

Urban renewal projects generally coincided with the building of public housing,
given that renewal efforts often involved the razing of older housing stock. Significantly,
decaying neighborhoods “targeted by the public housing program were often adjacent to
the main commercial district, and their condemnation and demolition were central to the
vision of a renewed downtown.” In the period stretching from the late 1940s to the
mid-1970s, about 500,000 housing units were razed in urban renewal efforts, and more
than 900,000 public housing units were constructed. As Beauregard writes, “Most
notably, and further racializing the image of the city, the percentage of minority tenants
in public housing rose from approximately 2.5 percent to over 60 percent.” The
concentration of low-income housing projects in urban areas often reflected the vested
interests of civic leaders. Jackson observes that legislation “tended to concentrate public

95 Mary Claire Sheehan, “St. Columba School Ends 112 Years of Education,” The Youngstown Vindicator,
June 4, 1972, B-1.
96 McNichol, The Roads that Built America, 154-155.
97 Beauregard, When America Became Suburban, 81.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
housing in the center rather than in the suburbs” because “housing authorities were typically made up of prominent citizens who were more anxious to clear slums and to protect real-estate values than they were to rehouse the poor.”

Beyond the impact of construction projects that isolated or destroyed center-city neighborhoods, urban depopulation was driven by the growing allure of the suburbs themselves. As early as 1954, the Vindicator reported that “country life” offered all of the “comforts and conveniences of the city…plus some room to move around in.”

Significantly, a growing number of White urban dwellers also looked to the suburbs as a “safe zone” that would insulate them from demographic changes that were occurring throughout much of the center city. Former Youngstown resident Mel Watkins, in his memoir, Dancing With Strangers, described racist residential restrictions that were prevalent on the city’s south side in the 1950s. One evening, upset by a violent argument between his parents, Watkins left the family home and strayed into the all-White enclaves that bordered suburban Boardman Township. Watkins recalled this nocturnal journey as a risky violation of the community’s informal—but vigorously maintained—policies of racial segregation. “I walked down Woodland to Hillman Street, then, in a daze, started up Hillman, past the Falls Avenue playground, where on many occasions I’d joined kids and adults from that Italian neighborhood in nightly softball games,” he writes. “Kept moving, aimlessly, past Princeton Junior High School, into the all-white, middle-class neighborhood above Indianola Avenue; then farther south to Midlothian Boulevard and

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100 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 225.
the restricted enclave of the well-to-do whites, where a Negro’s mere appearance was cause for alarm, and arrest was likely should one be caught loitering on foot after nightfall.”

Ultimately, the construction of low-income housing projects in the central city increased the isolation of African-American urban dwellers, given that such projects became closely associated with disadvantaged minority groups. Westlake Terrace, the first of these local projects, made its appearance in the late 1930s. Within two decades, other public housing projects were completed, including the Kimmel Brooks Homes and McGuffey Terrace, both located on the racially diverse east side. There is little doubt that the presence of low-income housing in cities like Youngstown drove suburbanization. As Jackson points out, public housing was “confined to existing slums,” and the prevalence of center-city projects “reinforced the image of suburbs as a place of refuge from the social pathologies of the disadvantaged.” Tellingly, efforts in the late 1970s to build low-income housing on Youngstown’s heavily White, working-class west side met fierce resistance that threatened to derail the project. The retreat of Whites into restricted suburban communities contributed significantly to Youngstown’s

102 Watkins, Dancing With Strangers, 115.
103 “Rents Fixed for Westlake: Will Range from $19 to $22.25 a Month, Including Utilities,” The Youngstown Vindicator, October 11, 1939.
105 Jerry Knight, “Dedication of 154-Unit Project Will Be Held by City Wednesday,” The Youngstown Vindicator, October 11, 1959.
106 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 227.
107 Ibid.
depopulation, but this trend was one factor among many. Whatever motives drove individual middle-class Whites to relocate to the suburbs, the result was much the same for urban neighborhoods, however. As the city’s wealth declined, vital urban institutions—including public and private schools—suffered the consequences.

Urban Depopulation and Declining Enrollment

In the 1960s, the media began to draw a connection between the city’s waning population and the decline of urban parochial schools. In 1967, the *Vindicator* reported that the planned closure of St. Patrick’s junior high school annex was the result of “declining enrollment due to the changing character of the parish.” Interestingly, this ambiguous statement not only calls attention to the impact of urban depopulation; it also implies that the surrounding neighborhood was experiencing demographic change. More than two years later, in December 1969, the *Vindicator*’s coverage of a parent-teacher meeting at St. Edward’s Elementary School, located on the city’s upper north side, refers more explicitly to the impact of demographic change. In an interview, Attorney Richard P. McLaughlin, a parishioner who had two children enrolled at the school, described the challenges of raising a family in a “changing inner-city.” Although the attorney did not specifically mention the movement of African Americans into north-side neighborhoods, the tenor of his comments suggest that growing racial diversity was among the “changes” discussed at the meeting. “It is vital that we, as parents, take a firm role in helping our children to understand the changes in our neighborhoods,” McLaughlin said, “and accept

them in the spirit of charity and brotherhood so perfectly exemplified by the Man whose birthday we will celebrate this month.”

Curiously, the media often underplayed the fact that declining enrollment among urban parish schools was driven, in large part, by the steady movement of people from the city into outlying areas. Local media placed more emphasis on developments such as rising tuition. This trend seems odd, given that reports of “horizontal growth” in the Mahoning Valley filled the columns of local newspapers a decade earlier. Furthermore, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, newspaper coverage of census reports and estimates highlighted the fact that the county’s once pastoral suburbs were showing consistent growth, even as the city contracted. Although the 1970 census count for Youngstown was recorded at 139,788, reflecting a 16.1-percent drop from the 1960 figure of 166,689, a newspaper article noted that suburban growth had “offset the loss,” ensuring that Mahoning County’s final census count would be “1 per cent higher than a decade earlier.” In other words, the suburbs continued to grow, albeit modestly, even as the city’s population steadily contracted.

Youngstown’s declining census figures were invariably reflected in falling enrollment levels at urban parochial schools, which fueled a situation that the media began to describe as a “Catholic School Crisis.” In 1971, the Vindicator reported that Youngstown’s parochial elementary schools would open in September with 951 fewer

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111 “Metropolitan Area is 536,003,” The Youngstown Vindicator, January 13, 1971.
students than the previous academic year—a 14 percent decline in enrollment.\textsuperscript{113} Initially, these dramatic losses were attributed almost exclusively to the introduction of tuition fees among local parochial schools.\textsuperscript{114} The advent of tuition was undoubtedly a major contributing factor to a drop in enrollment that occurred in the early 1970s. In August 1971, for instance, the \textit{Vindicator} reported that 2,000 students were expected to depart from Catholic elementary and high schools throughout Mahoning County “as the result of parochial tuition fees.”\textsuperscript{115} At the same time, this development fails to explain the continuation of this trend in subsequent years, when parents became increasingly dissatisfied with urban public schools. A more consistent factor in declining enrollment among urban parochial schools was the city’s shrinking pool of potential subscribers.

During the early 1970s, falling parish school enrollment was especially pronounced in the aging neighborhoods of Youngstown’s central city. In the north side’s Brier Hill district, St. Casimir’s Elementary School, an institution connected to a Polish-American parish established in 1927, closed its doors in the spring of 1971. A similar development occurred at Westlake’s Crossing, a working-class district located to the west of the city’s downtown, and about a half-mile from the southern edge of Brier Hill. In 1973, the diocese announced the immanent closure of Sts. Peter and Paul Elementary School, an institution sponsored by a Croatian-American parish that was founded in

\textsuperscript{113} “2,000 to Leave Catholic Schools,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, August 30, 1971.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
1911.  Given the district’s tumultuous recent history, this development undoubtedly struck many local observers as inevitable. The area’s metropolitan housing authority had repeatedly targeted the area’s neighborhoods for “redevelopment” between the 1930s and 1950s. In 1939, Westlake’s Crossing became the site of Youngstown’s first low-income housing development, which was christened Westlake Terrace. The district’s transformation was completed in 1958, when the majority of its White ethnic and Black neighborhoods were razed in the course of slum-clearance projects. Then, in the early 1960s, the “Monkey’s Nest,” a predominantly Black neighborhood that stood to the south of Westlake’s Crossing, was demolished to make way for the building of the city’s Mahoning Avenue-West Federal Street Expressway as well as an industrial park.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, older housing stock along the western edge of the district’s Croatian-American enclave was pulled down to accommodate public housing. Hence, by 1973, the elegant brick bell tower of Sts. Peter and Paul Church stood over a gritty neighborhood composed of dilapidated homes, crumbling 19th-century commercial buildings, low-income housing units, and industrial warehouses. Enrollment at the parochial elementary school, which was recorded at 204 in 1967, had fallen to 73 by 1972. These developments were probably ignored by the majority of the Youngstown area’s White Catholics. At this point in the community’s history, the most

117 “Housing Cost Near Average: $3,154 Figure is Set for Each Apartment on Westlake Site,” The Youngstown Vindicator, July 2, 1939.
glaring symptoms of urban decline were restricted to the decaying central city, which had been largely abandoned by White, middle-class urban dwellers. In time, however, negative trends within the city’s industrial sector affected the metropolitan area as a whole, including outlying suburban townships. The city’s position as an important center of steel manufacturing was about to come to an end.

The End of Youngstown Steel

Many observers regard the collapse of Youngstown’s steel-manufacturing plants as a product of corporate greed and mismanagement. Indeed, evidence suggests that the absentee owners of the area’s industrial facilities viewed these properties as dubious long-term investments. The community’s manufacturing plants, unlike those of many other northeastern industrial cities, were never transferred to outlying areas. While Youngstown Sheet and Tube relocated its headquarters to Boardman Township in the early 1960s, actual steel production was largely restricted to the aging industrial facilities of Youngstown and nearby Struthers and Campbell, Ohio. These facilities, for the most part, required drastic refurbishment to remain competitive. As Fuechtmann observes, in his study of religious responses to the community’s deindustrialization, the mechanisms in some of Youngstown’s plants “could probably qualify as industrial antiques.” He points out that a “1908 vintage steam engine with a 22-foot flywheel” continued to serve as the primary power source of one U.S. Steel facility until its closure in 1979.¹²⁰ Likewise, a 1983 study noted that, at the time of the plant closures, the community’s

“newest blast furnace, an essential component in most steel-making activities, was constructed in 1921.”

The deplorable condition of Youngstown’s industrial infrastructure may have owed something to the departure of the community’s traditional industrial class, whose members had practically abandoned the city by the early 1950s. As John Ingham writes, the exodus of Youngstown’s industrial leaders “was so complete that by 1968, only 16 percent of the original thirty-seven iron and steel families remained in the area.” In short, the city’s industry was no longer in the hands of individuals that were invested in the community. Worse yet, this development coincided with a period of unprecedented international competition. In 1959, during a protracted 116-day strike, “steel consumers relied on the newly built steel mills of Japan and Europe to maintain their inventories.” For the first time in the 20th century, the United States was importing more steel than it was producing, and steel imports increased over time “as a hedge against strikes.”

While the collapse of Youngstown’s steel industry had unusually severe consequences for the surrounding community, it was by no means an isolated incident. Developments in the city’s industrial sector were broadly consistent with trends seen elsewhere in the nation. In his analysis of Detroit’s postwar economic decline, Sugrue observes that America’s once formidable industries were overwhelmed by “[a]dvances in

123 Fuechtmann, Steeples and Stacks, 34.
124 Ibid.
communication and transportation, the transformation of industrial technology, the acceleration of regional and international competition, and the expansion of industry in low-wage regions, especially the South.”\textsuperscript{125} A regional shift in U.S. industry was discernible as early as the 1930s, when the government “channeled a disproportionate amount of resources to the South, culminating in the Sunbelt-dominated military-industrial complex of the Cold War era.”\textsuperscript{126} This trend was pushed forward by advances in transportation. Federally subsidized highway construction, for instance, “made central industrial location less necessary by facilitating the distribution of goods over larger distances.”\textsuperscript{127} Ultimately, this radical shift in the transportation sector rendered Youngstown’s massive urban steel-production plants (all “strategically” located along major rail lines) as artifacts of the past.

Local industrial leaders were warned repeatedly about the looming crisis. As Safford notes, a series of consultants’ reports requested by local industrialists during the 1940s and 1950s predicted that the local steel industry would face challenges related to rising costs and decreased competitiveness. Among others, the reports urged local steel manufacturers to consider “industrial diversification.”\textsuperscript{128} Fuechtmann notes that, by the 1950s, “the city of Youngstown and to a varying extent its manufacturing suburbs were moving into a period of no growth, and eventually of population decline.”\textsuperscript{129} Despite

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\textsuperscript{125} Sugrue, \textit{The Origins of the Urban Crisis}, 127.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Safford, \textit{Why the Garden Club Couldn’t Save Youngstown}, 70.
\textsuperscript{129} Fuechtmann, \textit{Steeples and Stacks}, 18.
\end{flushright}
mounting questions about the continued viability of Youngstown’s steel industry, however, local industrial and political leaders “sought federal funding to build a canal linking Lake Erie to the Ohio River Valley through Youngstown”—a last-ditch effort to salvage local steel concerns that ultimately met with failure.130

An ominous turning point in the community’s industrial history came in 1969, when Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company, the area’s primary steel producer, fell victim to a hostile takeover by New Orleans-based Lykes Corporation, a family-owned business that focused on shipbuilding and ocean transportation. With the escalation of the Vietnam War, the small firm dramatically grew its assets by transporting war materiel across the Pacific, and by the late 1960s, Lykes “was looking around for a way to [further] expand and diversify its assets through the corporate takeover route.”131 Youngstown Sheet and Tube, with assets of $806 million, lost no time in rejecting Lykes’ proposal for a merger. The company’s representatives pointed out that the New Orleans firm lacked experience in the steel sector, while its assets amounted to a mere $137 million—a fraction of Sheet and Tube’s assets.132 Lykes’s owners persisted, however, attracted by Sheet and Tube’s annual cash flow of $100 million and its low selling price, which offered a chance to complete “a billion-dollar merger for something like 30 cents on the dollar.”133

130 Safford, Why the Garden Club Couldn’t Save Youngstown, 71.
131 Fuechtmann, Steeples and Stacks, 42.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid, 43.
In January of 1969, to the shock of many local observers, Lykes Corporation completed the corporate takeover of Sheet and Tube, borrowing $150 million in bank loans and issuing about $191 million in debentures to finance the move. Consequently, the newly merged company “assumed a debt liability of nearly $350 million.” Given the disparity in assets between the two companies, few observers predicted that the merger would benefit Sheet and Tube. Indeed, a report prepared by the Anti-Trust Division of the Department of Justice went so far as to question the legality of the merger. The report also accurately predicted that Lykes Corporation would abandon the previous management’s long-term strategy to upgrade Sheet and Tube’s facilities and plunder the firm’s resources. In the absence of existing legislation to prevent the merger, however, U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell lacked firm legal grounds to oppose it. Before long, the steel company found itself on a treacherous downward spiral. Denied adequate investment, Sheet and Tube managed to lose money even during the short-lived domestic steel boom of 1973 and 1974, despite the fact that it was operating at 100-percent capacity. These losses were the result of continual breakdowns that arose from the company’s dependence on outmoded equipment. Sheet and Tube’s failure to modernize also ensured a more expensive product, because “labor costs for running the small blast furnaces, as well as for the slow open hearth furnaces, made Youngstown

134 Ibid.
136 Fuechtmann, Steeples and Stacks, 44-45.
137 Ibid, 48.
steel comparatively expensive in a highly competitive market period.\textsuperscript{138} Meanwhile, U.S. banks became more reluctant to extend loans to the beleaguered steel company, at a time when “they were significantly expanding their loans to Japanese steel companies.”\textsuperscript{139} Within eight years of the ill-fated merger with Lykes Corporation, Sheet and Tube began the painful process of closing down its Youngstown-area operations.\textsuperscript{140}

Not surprisingly, Youngstown’s most dramatic population losses occurred in the 1980s, following the collapse of its core steel industry. This grim chapter in the community’s history opened in September 1977, when representatives of Lykes Corporation announced the closure of the company’s huge facility in nearby Campbell as well as smaller plants in neighboring Struthers. The Campbell shutdown itself resulted in the loss of 4,000 jobs in the Youngstown area, and it proved to be the first in a series of crippling economic developments.\textsuperscript{141} The layoffs in Campbell sent ripples of uncertainty across the community. Father Edward Noga, then an assistant pastor at St. Christine’s Church, recalled that his parish lost 50 families in the months immediately following Lykes’ announcement. “Today, we see people moving for jobs all the time,” the priest recalled. “But that was…unprecedented [at the time], especially as we look back…and [recognize] all the federal legislation that has come out of our experience of companies just pulling up stakes and not telling anybody and not giving governments notice.”\textsuperscript{142}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{138} Ibid.
\bibitem{139} Ibid, 51.
\bibitem{140} Bruno, \textit{Steelworker Alley}, 21-23.
\bibitem{141} Fuechtmann, \textit{Steeples and Stacks}, 1.
\bibitem{142} Noga, interview.
\end{thebibliography}
The shutdown of Youngstown Sheet and Tube’s operations in Campbell and Struthers was followed by the staged withdrawal of U.S. Steel in 1979 and 1980, which resulted in the closure of massive steel plants in Youngstown and neighboring McDonald, Ohio. Another string of closings came with the bankruptcy of Republic Steel in the 1980s. Thus, in the course of several years, “the Steel Valley”—a onetime industrial zone comprising Mahoning and Trumbull counties as well as portions of western Pennsylvania—lost an estimated 400,000 manufacturing jobs, 400 satellite businesses, $414 million in personal income, and from 33 to 75 percent of the school tax revenues.

This situation was compounded by the fact that local responses to the crisis were “characterized by extreme fragmentation, infighting, and ultimately inaction.” Those efforts taken were frequently informed by a desire to revitalize the Youngstown area’s crippled steel sector. The community’s ongoing attachment to steel was reflected in the high-profile activities of the Ecumenical Coalition of the Mahoning Valley, a local activist group comprising church leaders and steelworkers. Between 1977 and 1979, the coalition raised funds in a doomed attempt to reopen the Campbell Works of the defunct Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. Many observers questioned the wisdom of this grass-roots effort, and some, like former labor leader Jack O’Connell, contended that “it was one of those things that hurt this valley more than anything else.” For O’Connell, 

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144 Bruno, Steelworker Alley, 149.
145 Safford, Why the Garden Club Couldn’t Save Youngstown, 72.
146 Fuechtmann, Steeples and Stacks, 4-5.
The coalition’s “Save Our Valley” campaign prevented local residents from coming to terms with the fact that the steel industry was gone forever. “We had the old-timers in this valley still sitting in their kitchen, waiting for a call back to the mill, when we reopened the mill,” he said. “The mills stayed there, and they became a monument to extinction.”147

The impact of these events on the city’s population proved devastating. Although population estimates for the late 1970s were unavailable for this study, preliminary census figures released in 1980 revealed that Youngstown’s population fell from 140,509 to 112,146 between 1970 and 1980—a decline of 20.4 percent.148 Meanwhile, the population of Mahoning County, which includes several large suburban townships, fell by a less dramatic 7.1 percent, slipping from 304,545 in 1970 to 282,813 in 1980.149

Within a couple of years, local researchers suggested that urban depopulation had outstripped—by a wide margin—figures recorded in the 1980 census. In 1982, Dr. Terry Buss, director of Youngstown State University’s urban studies program, speculated that the city’s population was already 10,000 lower than the 1980 census indicated.150 Buss pointed out that it “usually takes up to three years for the effects of a mill shutdown to develop fully.” His statements were supported by Dr. John Russo, director of YSU’s

147 Martin John “Jack” O’Connell, interview by author, April 13, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
149 Ibid.
labor studies department, who agreed that the community had experienced a “substantial drop” in population since 1980.\footnote{Ibid.}

These predictions of a continuous and steep decline in the city’s population were prescient. Within several years, the cumulative effects of years of population decline—coupled with the disastrous plant closures of the 1970s and early 1980s—were reflected in Youngstown’s diminished ranking among American cities. In 1984, the \textit{Vindicator} reported that Youngstown, which had been the country’s 45\textsuperscript{th}-largest city in 1931, ranked 145\textsuperscript{th} nationally. Similarly, the former “boomtown,” once the third-largest city in Ohio, dropped to the position of seventh-largest.\footnote{“Youngstown is 145\textsuperscript{th} Most Populous U.S. City,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, May 1, 1984, 4.} At the same time, the city gained unwanted exposure for its postindustrial difficulties. A 1984 study conducted by the New York-based research firm, Dun & Bradstreet Corporation, ranked Youngstown as 23\textsuperscript{rd} among the country’s 25\textsuperscript{th} fastest-shrinking metropolitan areas in the period stretching from 1980 to 1983.\footnote{“Youngstown and Steubenville Among Top 25 in Population Drop,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, May 28, 1984.} The study estimated that the Youngstown area experienced a 1.8-percent drop in population between 1980 and 1983.\footnote{Ibid.} Then, in 1985, Youngstown’s surrounding Mahoning County was ranked 14\textsuperscript{th} in population loss in the country.\footnote{“Mahoning Co. ranks 14\textsuperscript{th} in population loss in U.S.,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, May 6, 1985.} To the alarm of civic leaders, researchers anticipated that the situation would worsen over time. A preliminary report issued by the Ohio Data User’s Center, a research institute connected to Ohio’s Department of Development, forecasted that depopulation would continue into
the next century. The report projected that Mahoning County, which recorded 289,487 people in 1980, would have just 248,530 people in 1995, and only 229,687 by the year 2010. These population projections, based on available census data from the period between 1970 and 1980, were supported by studies released near the end of the decade. In 1987, a Dun & Bradstreet survey of 414 counties with populations exceeding 100,000 ranked Youngstown 17th nationally in percentage of population decrease. The survey suggested that in 1986, Mahoning County’s population stood at 276,230, compared with 289,487 in 1980.

As municipal leaders scrambled to respond to chronic depopulation, they were hampered by decades of city planning based on the assumption of continued growth. A citywide plan proposed by the municipal government in 2005 observed that two previous city plans—issued in 1951 and 1974, respectively—“were for a different era that anticipated a population between 200,000 and 250,000.” Youngstown’s oversized infrastructure, of course, contributed to mass vacancies in residential, institutional, commercial, and industrial zones. Over the years, deterioration of structures in these zones powerfully underscored Youngstown’s image as a city in decline, thereby encouraging the out-migration of residents. Excess housing units, in particular, had a “devastating” effect on urban neighborhoods, as structures without economic value were

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158 *Youngstown 2010*, 7.
“abandoned and looted of anything that [had] scrap value.” Meanwhile, the shells of vacant homes became “convenient places for criminal activity.”\(^{159}\) In the absence of appropriate planning, the decline of the city’s population quickly outstripped the scaling down of its oversized infrastructure. As a 2005 city planning proposal indicates, Youngstown’s population fell from 115,423 to 82,026 between 1980 and 2000, while the number of the city’s housing units declined more modestly during the same period, falling from 45,105 to 37,158.\(^{160}\)

In the wake of rampant deindustrialization, Youngstown’s shrinking population found its parallel—predictably enough—in the flagging rolls of the city’s parish schools. Diocesan records show that, between 1979 and 1980, total enrollment for Youngstown’s parochial elementary schools fell from 4,034 to 3,922—a loss of 112 students.\(^{161}\) Records also show that, by 1984, parochial school enrollment had slipped to 3,102, reflecting a staggering loss of 820 students since 1980. Then, in 1985, the city’s parochial school rolls showed 2,838 students, a reduction of 264 students from the previous year.\(^{162}\) The initial effects of urban depopulation, once again, were most pronounced in those schools based in aging center-city neighborhoods. Between 1979 and 1980, for instance, schools that showed the most severe enrollment losses included St. Dominic (-31), on the south side; St. Edward (-32), on the north side; and Sacred

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\(^{159}\) Ibid, 31.
\(^{160}\) Ibid.
\(^{161}\) Statistics on School Enrollment from Youngstown Diocese (1979-1997), reproduction, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
\(^{162}\) Ibid.
Heart (-40), on the east side. A handful of center-city parish schools saw a modest boost in enrollment— notably St. Patrick’s Elementary School, which gained 24 students— while a few others maintained status quo enrollment. On the whole, however, schools located in neighborhoods that experienced depopulation before the collapse of Youngstown’s steel sector were among those seriously affected by the accelerated depopulation characteristic of the 1980s.

Naturally, center-city ethnic parish schools were among the most vulnerable of Youngstown’s urban institutions. Heavily dependent on the sponsorship of White ethnic groups who had mostly retreated to suburban areas, these schools were struggling even before the advent of the 1980s. Therefore, few local observers could have been surprised in 1983, when the diocese announced that Sts. Cyril and Methodius Elementary School, a fixture on the north side since 1907, would close at the end of the school year. The parish and school, which were established primarily for Slovak Americans, also served hundreds of Lithuanian, Polish, Hungarian, and Greek Uniate Catholics. At its peak, Sts. Cyril and Methodius enrolled 250 students, the vast majority of whom belonged to the parish. Yet, by the end of the 1977-1978 academic year, the school enrolled only 95 students. While enrollment fell only modestly over the next few years, the composition of the student body changed significantly. The Vindicator reported that, at the time of Sts. Cyril and Methodius’ closure, only 48 of the school’s 90 students were

163 Ibid.
“from the parish,” a circumstance that could be interpreted to suggest that many of the remaining students were non-Catholic and non-White.\textsuperscript{165} The decision to close the school came on the heels of a diocesan projection that only 78 students would be enrolled for the upcoming academic year.\textsuperscript{166}

As the effects of deindustrialization and unemployment bore down on the community, urban parochial schools continued to grapple with plummeting enrollment. In 1986, the diocesan school board announced the closure of St. Stanislaus Elementary School, a south-side institution affiliated with a Polish-American parish.\textsuperscript{167} While the school had served 333 students in 1965, it enrolled just 71 in 1985. Tellingly, just 28 of these students were members of the parish—further evidence of demographic changes that resulted in a smaller percentage of Catholics in urban neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{168} In time, even those ethnic parish schools that operated in majority-White, working- to middle-class neighborhoods were showing the effects of depopulation. This became evident in 1990, when Holy Name Elementary School, which operated on the west side since 1920, announced it would close its doors permanently. While it was located in a relatively stable neighborhood, the school’s fate had hung in the balance for nearly a decade. Holy Name faced the prospect of closure in 1982 and, once again, in 1987, when the diocese demanded that the school enroll at least 70 students in order to remain open. On the

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
second of these occasions, Dr. Nicholas Wolsonovich, the diocesan school superintendent, granted Holy Name a reprieve when a recruitment drive boosted enrollment to almost 60 students.\textsuperscript{169} It was clear to most people involved, however, that the parish school’s days were numbered. Between 1975 and 1989, Holy Name’s enrollment plummeted from 212 to 43, while the school’s cost-per-pupil average rose from $500 to $2,500.\textsuperscript{170}

In the face of such discouraging data, parishioners continued to support the school. For many, the institution held a significance that outweighed its utilitarian value. Holy Name Elementary School was the centerpiece of a Slovak-American neighborhood that, despite highway construction, retained much of its Central European charm. Over the years, the school’s alumni had included Brooklyn Dodgers legend George “Shotgun” Shuba, whose career was immortalized in Roger Kahn’s 1972 sports classic, \textit{The Boys of Summer}. As Kahn observes, Shuba developed his early baseball skills on the streets and vacant lots of this west-side ethnic enclave.\textsuperscript{171} Parishioners of Holy Name, conscious of the school’s rich history, successfully fought its closure on two occasions. By 1990, however, Holy Name’s enrollment had been reduced to a paltry 43 students, and the school was forced to cease operation.\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} “Catholic diocese plans closing of west side elementary school,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, March 8, 1990, 1.
Meanwhile, in the face of popular predictions that the community had “hit rock bottom” and was likely to rebound, Youngstown’s population continued its inexorable slide, falling to 95,732 residents in 1990. Indeed, the opening of the new decade marked an unsettling milestone in the community’s demographic history. With its population recorded at just below 100,000, Youngstown lost its official status as a major American city. More troubling developments were on the horizon. The following year, in 1991, statistics showed that surrounding Mahoning County was losing younger workers at a rate many observers considered alarming. The *Vindicator* reported that, between 1980 and 1990, the number of county residents aged 18 to 24 fell from 35,509 to 23,569. Although occasional media reports suggested that the urban population was stabilizing, less optimistic forecasts consistently proved more accurate. Nevertheless, some municipal leaders persisted in characterizing realistic demographic projections as byproducts of “negativity.” In 1996, when the *Vindicator* predicted that Youngstown’s population would fall to 90,109 in 2000, the director of the Mahoning County Planning Commission dismissed the projection as “pessimistic.” The *Vindicator*’s forecast, as it turned out, was unduly optimistic. In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded the city’s

population at 82,026, a figure that fell considerably below the *Vindicator’s* 1996 forecast.\(^{176}\)

In sync with the city’s declining population, parochial school enrollment continued its precipitous slide. Urban parish school administrators, faced with flagging rolls and shrinking resources, were compelled to be resourceful to keep their schools operating. As early as the 1970s, Immaculate Conception Elementary School, located on the city’s east side, developed a “mission concept” that enabled it to engage in diocesan-wide fundraising efforts.\(^{177}\) This surprisingly effective strategy proved crucial to the survival of several center-city parish schools; and by 1991, both Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s elementary schools depended heavily on donation drives that targeted diocesan parishioners and parochial school students. In April, the two schools narrowly averted closure when they met their joint goal of $115,000.\(^{178}\) Both of these institutions survived to enroll students the following academic year; and to the surprise of many, Immaculate Conception remained in operation for another decade. Schools with less visibility, however, were poorly equipped to weather urban trends that chipped away at their economic viability.

The 1990s shaped up as a decade of serial parochial school closings. In 1996, diocesan superintendent Dr. Wolsonovich announced that another urban icon, St.

\(^{176}\) Roger Smith, David Skolnick, and Peter H. Milliken, “Despite city’s loss, Valley sees growth: Several communities—including Canfield, Cortland, Columbiana and Calcutta—grew significantly in the ’90s,” *The Vindicator*, March 17, 2001, 1.


Anthony’s Elementary School, would cease operation. The relatively modern school was the pride of a working-class, Italian-American neighborhood on the city’s lower north side. Until the 1990s, St. Anthony’s Parish had weathered many of the urban trends that conspired against its existence. In the late 1950s, as noted, the parish’s original church building was pulled down to make way for interstate highway construction, a project that also claimed the large complex of St. Ann’s Parish, which had served the neighborhood’s Irish-American Catholics. By the time the buildings were demolished, few of St. Ann’s parishioners remained in Brier Hill, and the old parish was relegated to history. The story of St. Anthony’s Church was different, however. Not only did the parishioners pool their resources to rebuild the church (along more elaborate lines than the original), but they also established a parish school. St. Anthony’s Elementary School opened in 1959 with 201 students and saw its enrollment expand dramatically over the next several years. The school’s enrollment peaked at 436 students in 1963. Yet, by the fall of 1996, St. Anthony’s rolls had slipped to 122, making closure all but unavoidable.

St. Anthony’s fate was shared by one of the city’s most widely admired urban parish schools. That same year, in 1996, St. Patrick’s Elementary School abandoned its long struggle to remain in operation. The parish school had been a landmark on the city’s south side since 1914, when it opened with 500 students, and enrollment grew dramatically over the next several decades. By the 1950s, St. Patrick’s served more than 1,000 pupils and was required to build a new junior high school building. Within a

179 “Bishop gives his OK to recommendation to close St. Anthony,” The Vindicator, March 4, 1996, B-1.
decade, however, the school’s rolls began to fall; and by the spring of 1996, the parish school served just 107 students, a figure that represented a decline of 126 pupils from the previous academic year.\footnote{Ibid.} Significantly, however, the institution’s story did not end with its closure as a parish school. In May 1996, Thomas J. Tobin, bishop of the Diocese of Youngstown, announced that the school would be “transformed” into a joint Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical school known as New Hope Academy.\footnote{Peter H. Milliken, “Parish the thought: Can St. Pat’s be 85?” \textit{The Vindicator}, May 19, 1996, B-2.} The new school was to be co-sponsored by the Diocese of Youngstown and the Northern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Within a decade, the building—like several other former parish school facilities in Youngstown—was leased to a charter school franchise.

In certain respects, the challenges facing St. Patrick’s Church were emblematic of those confronting many other urban parishes that sponsored elementary schools. Burdened with aging and oversized physical plants, these parishes were barely able to pay the utility bills that kept their facilities heated and properly lit. Under such circumstances, the difficulties involved in maintaining a parish school often seemed overwhelming. The challenges facing Father Edward Noga, pastor of St. Patrick’s Church, were especially daunting. Upon assuming the pastorate in 1985, Father Noga struggled to maintain a sprawling physical plant that included a neo-Gothic church that towered more than 100 feet above street level. The church building featured a 92-foot ceiling, 140-foot nave, and 72 stained-glass windows, all of which were in need of restoration work by the 1990s. Father Noga noted that, in recent years, the parish had

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spent $200,000 to repair the church’s leaking roof, while devoting hundreds of thousands of additional funds to the remodeling of the parish social hall and the restoration of its stained glass windows.

These projects have generated a degree of controversy. The pastor recalled that, during parish council meetings, some members objected to the planned restoration of the church’s stained-glass windows, contending that the $300,000 needed for the project could be used to develop outreach programs. “And they’re right,” Father Noga acknowledged. “But, at the same time, [the church building is] like our home.” Gesturing to the neo-Gothic church that stands just north of the parish rectory, he added, “Over 21 years, the amount of money put into the maintenance and upkeep of that building that’s 40 feet from us is no less than staggering.” St. Patrick’s parishioners are uncomfortably aware of the amount of money the parish has devoted to the preservation of its physical plant. One member of St. Patrick’s Parish Council agreed with Father Noga that the costs involved in maintaining parish facilities contributed substantially to the school’s closure. At the same time, he described the closing of the parish school as unavoidable. “I think it’s terribly sad,” said parishioner T. Gordon Welsh. “I also think, however, that it’s…realistic to recognize that our little parish of St. Pat’s could no more afford to keep that school than fly in the air.”

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183 Noga, interview.
184 Ibid.
185 T. Gordon Welsh, interview by the author, May 1, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
Growing Competition for a Shrinking Pool of Students

The decade of the 1990s brought with it new challenges, including the rise of competitive charter schools that drew from a shrinking pool of urban pupils. These state-funded schools were not the first institutions to compete directly with Youngstown’s parish schools, but their impact was unprecedented. The local media reported on the growth of private religious schools in center-city neighborhoods during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1981, the Vindicator observed that the city’s Protestant schools had doubled their enrollment, even as public school rolls fell by 23.1 percent (from 133,145 students to 102,123), and Catholic schools enrollment slipped by 9.5 percent (from 15,093 students to 13,560). One of the first Christian private schools to appear in Youngstown was Watkins Christian Academy, which opened on the city’s east side. Given its location, the academy undoubtedly competed for students with Immaculate Conception and Sacred Heart elementary schools. In short order, Watkins Christian Academy was joined by Youngstown Christian School and Calvary Christian Academy. Both schools opened on the south side, where they most likely appealed to non-Catholic clients of St. Patrick’s Elementary School. Despite the steady growth of these schools, however, they posed a relatively modest threat to urban parish schools. The reason was simple and straightforward: Many private Christian schools charged exorbitant tuition

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187 Ibid.
fees. Youngstown Christian School, for example, charged $750 a pupil, compared to the $250 tuition fee charged at most local Catholic elementary schools.\textsuperscript{188}

A more serious threat to urban parish schools emerged in the next decade, with the rise of non-denominational, state-funded charter schools that offered amenities that were traditionally associated with parish schools. Furthermore, these schools did not charge tuition. Eagle Heights Academy, Youngstown’s premier charter school, opened on the city’s south side in 1998. Located in a massive Beaux-Arts building that once housed a large public school, Eagle Heights emerged in the wake of state legislation authorizing the establishment of charter schools within Ohio’s eight major urban school districts.\textsuperscript{189} The academy was one of 15 charter schools that opened across the state in 1998 alone. While nonsectarian schools like Eagle Heights Academy received state funding, they operated independently of any school district. Furthermore, despite their nondenominational status, some of these schools were supported and managed by local religious leaders, who deplored the record of urban public schools. Eagle Heights Academy, for instance, was established and managed by a group of local Protestant ministers that included the late Reverend Jay Alford, a conservative activist who was then pastor of Highway Tabernacle Church, an evangelical Christian community in Austintown.\textsuperscript{190} Within less than a decade, Reverend Alford emerged as co-chairman of an organization calling itself Citizens for Public Service, whose stated goal was to elect

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Ron Cole, “Charter school gets set to open: Private donors have given $400,000 to renovate the old high school, the board president said,” \textit{The Vindicator}, June 30, 1998, A-1.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
local political leaders “who will recognize their responsibility to God and to the citizens who elect them.” Reverend Alford participated in the school’s five-member board of trustees, which was led by the Reverend Gary L. Frost, an African-American civic leader who served as pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church in Youngstown.

Reverend Frost, who developed the concept behind Eagle Heights, was the chief organizer of Warriors, Inc., a group of Protestant ministers that purchased the former South High School building when the public school ceased operation in 1993. By the summer of 1998, Warriors, Inc., raised $400,000 to renovate the 87-year-old school building, which had been vacant for five years. Faced with the task of securing the $1 million needed to restore the structure, Reverend Frost expressed confidence that the group would achieve its goals. He predicted that 450 students would participate in the school’s kindergarten-through-sixth-grade program in the coming fall, and he was not disappointed. Reverend Frost appeared equally optimistic about the group’s fundraising campaign to refurbish the school building. “God has really come through,” he said, “in allowing people and business people to come forward” to assist in the building’s renovation.

Reverend Frost’s confidence was evidently well placed. In October of 1998, Eagle Heights Academy received a powerful economic boost when the banking firm of

191 Linda M. Linonis, “Politically active pastor dies at 75: The pastor’s ‘love and mentorship will be missed,’” The Vindicator, May 28, 2008, B-1.
192 Ron Cole, “Charter school gets set to open: Private donors have given $400,000 to renovate the old high school, the board president said,” The Vindicator, June 30, 1998, A-1.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
National City Corporation contributed more than $1 million to the charter school. A
ceremony marking the contribution featured an appearance by Ohio’s then governor,
George Voinovich. Reverend Jay Alford, who spoke at the ceremony, praised the
Republican governor for his support of charter schools and described him as “the greatest
governor in the history of Ohio and the greatest governor in the United States.”
Reverend Alford had reason to be pleased with the state’s Republican leadership. At this
point, developments at the state level were working to the advantage of those supporting
the charter school movement. In July 1998, for instance, the Ohio State Board of
Education approved legislation that authorized the opening of more charter schools
around the state, including a second one in Youngstown. This legislation eventually
paved the way for Youngstown Community School, which was scheduled to enroll 36 at-
risk kindergarten students on the city’s impoverished south side.

Significantly, the state government continued to enact policies that facilitated the
expansion of charter schools. In the spring of 1999, the Ohio legislature allowed for the
creation of 37 new charter schools statewide, and in April, two more prepared to open in
Youngstown. Hope Academy (Youngstown Campus), the largest of the two schools,
was authorized to enroll up to 390 students in classes ranging from kindergarten to eighth

195 Dennis LaRue, “National City Commits $1 Million to Charter School: Bank CEO on hand to greet
Voinovich as governor defends his education initiatives,” The Youngstown-Warren Business Journal,
196 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
199 Dan Trevas, “2 charter schools OK’d for the city: The new schools, along with Eagle Heights Academy
and Youngstown Community School, have a total enrollment of about 1,200 pupils,” The Vindicator, April
grade. The new school operated as a franchise of the Akron-based firm, Hope Academy Limited Liability Corporation, an educational enterprise that served as a consultant for Eagle Heights Academy. Hope Academy’s local campus was joined by the Life Skills Center of Youngstown, which was prepared to serve up to 120 at-risk students in grades nine through 12. The Vindicator reported that the city’s four charter schools were expected to enroll a combined 1,200 students “who otherwise would be in the city’s public or parochial schools.” A disproportionate percentage of these students would attend Eagle Heights Academy, which experienced considerable growth since its establishment in 1998. Within a year, the charter school enrolled 624 students and had a waiting list of 1,000.

The impact of the city’s charter schools upon parish schools was almost instantaneous. In 1999, administrators at St. Dominic’s Elementary School—described in the local media as “a stronghold of the city’s South Side for 75 years”—announced that the institution would close at the end of the school year. St. Dominic’s enrollment, which peaked in 1964 at 1,297 students, fell to 150 in 1999. Father Joseph Allen, pastor of St. Dominic’s Church, attributed the closure to factors such as “the school’s increasing dependence on parish subsidies, uncollected tuition, and chronic enrollment

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declines.” Tellingly, the pastor added that the most recent drop in St. Dominic’s enrollment coincided with the opening of Eagle Heights Academy on the city’s south side. In what emerged as a “perfect storm” scenario, Youngstown’s urban parochial schools—long deprived of adequate enrollment, tuition dollars, and parishioner donations—were now in competition with free, publicly funded schools that offered many of the benefits of private schools.

With the rise of competitive charter schools, the trend toward declining enrollment among urban parish schools escalated in the early 21st century. In June 2003, Wallace Dunne, a diocesan school board member and former parochial school principal, addressed a crowd gathered for the final baccalaureate Mass of St. Edward’s Elementary School. The speaker’s connection to the school was strong—he had served as principal of St. Edward’s between 1971 and 1989—and his words were poignant. “I’m very sad about the closing, but this school has made a tremendous contribution to the community over the years,” Dunne said to the crowd. “If you go to city hall or the hospitals or the legal profession...you’ll find St. Edward’s graduates have done well.” Indeed, the parish school had been one of the most successful institutions of its kind in Youngstown. St. Edward’s Elementary School had opened on the city’s affluent upper north side in 1917, and it quickly emerged as one of the city’s major parochial schools. In the

206 Ibid.
207 Ibid.
209 Marie Shellock, “Parishioners at St. Edward’s have good reason to celebrate: Refurbishment is part of a $750,000 project,” The Vindicator, January 8, 1994, B-4.
1960s, the parish’s boundaries were extended into adjoining Liberty Township, a move that mitigated the effects of suburbanization; and as recently as the mid-1990s, the parish seemed relatively stable. Moreover, St. Edward’s leadership appeared committed to the development of both parish and school. In 1994, the parish raised $750,000 to refurbish the church interior, a project that involved the construction of a new marble altar, the installation of new pews, and the placement of several arched windows where a side entrance had been located.\footnote{210} By the turn of the 21st century, however, St. Edward’s Church was forced to confront the realities connected to an aging parish population, as more and more young families moved elsewhere. To make matters worse, neighboring Liberty Township, the home of a large percentage of St. Edward’s parishioners, was struggling with challenges once associated with Youngstown’s north side, as more low-income families moved into the suburban community.

The end came swiftly. In February of 2003, Father Frank Lehnerd, pastor of St. Edward’s Church, announced that the parish’s elementary school would not re-open for the upcoming academic year. In a prepared statement, Father Lehnerd attributed the school’s terminal difficulties to an exodus of Catholics from the city. “St. Edward School has had a long history of serving the Catholic families on the North Side of Youngstown and Liberty Township,” the pastor stated. “As the Catholic population has moved further from the parish, the need for a Catholic school has declined.”\footnote{211} Absent from the pastor’s

\footnote{210} Ibid.

\footnote{211} “St. Edward to close at school year’s end: The declining enrollment is due in part to the movement of Catholics to the suburbs, the diocese said,” \textit{The Vindicator}, February 25, 2003, 1.
comments was any reference to the parish school’s increased reliance on the patronage of
the mainly non-White, non-Catholic families residing in surrounding neighborhoods.
Many of these families had apparently chosen alternatives to Catholic education.
Interestingly, the school’s dependence on the patronage of non-Catholic students could
hardly have been predicted 30 years earlier. In 1977, only 5.4 percent of St. Edward’s
614 pupils were African American, and just 5.2 percent of the student body was non-
Catholic.212 By 2002, however, the Vindicator reported that St. Edward’s was among the
city’s endangered parish schools. Like Immaculate Conception Elementary School, St.
Edward’s served students who were mainly from low-income, non-Catholic, and minority
backgrounds.213

Those local residents who were surprised to learn about the closing of St.
Edward’s Elementary School, an institution sponsored by a traditionally affluent parish,
were undoubtedly shocked two years later, when the media reported the imminent closure
of St. Brendan’s Pre-School and Elementary School. Since 1925, the parish school had
been a landmark on the city’s working- and middle-class west side. Moreover, the parish
appeared to be vibrant. Although the effects of deindustrialization were painfully evident
throughout much of Youngstown, the city’s west side had weathered the economic storm
surprisingly well. Neighborhoods surrounding St. Brendan’s Church tended to be well
maintained, even as homes elsewhere in the city fell into disrepair. In addition, with 119

212 Marie Aikenhead, “Diocesan Schools Reveal Ethnic Makeup: 8.2% of 10,408 Students are from
213 Ron Cole, “Immaculate Conception: Does bell for students also toll for school? The school has opened
early; the new principal’s attitude is that it won’t be closed,” The Vindicator, August 14, 2002, B-1.
students enrolled in its kindergarten through eighth-grade classes, St. Brendan’s appeared healthier than some of its center-city counterparts. However, when compared to St. Christine’s Elementary School, another west side institution, St. Brendan’s enrollment seemed extraordinarily low. In 2005, St. Christine’s Elementary School enrolled 444 students, more than three times the number of students recorded at St. Brendan’s. Therefore, in February of 2005, St. Brendan’s pastor, Father James Daprile, visited classrooms and confirmed widespread rumors that the school would close in June of that year—a move that angered parents who believed that they should have been the first to be informed.

Naturally, the local media placed the school’s closure in the context of the city’s declining population. Bishop Thomas J. Tobin underscored this theme, noting that Youngstown had lost 41 percent of its population since 1970, “bringing with it a 56 percent decrease in Catholic population.” Bishop Tobin indicated that the decision to close the school, although “difficult,” was virtually unavoidable. Nevertheless, for many west-side residents, the 2005 closure of St. Brendan’s Pre-School and Elementary School was a portent of unsettling changes to come. News of the school’s impending closure inspired angry protests from the small number of families who depended on the school.

214 “St. Brendan’s Elementary: Declining numbers led to school closing,” The Vindicator, March 1, 2005, 1.
215 Ibid.
216 “St. Brendan’s in final year: The diocese says an official announcement will be released Monday,” The Vindicator, February 26, 2005, 1.
217 “St. Brendan’s Elementary: Declining numbers led to school closing,” The Vindicator, March 1, 2005, 1.
Some observers went so far as to predict that the pastor’s decision to close the school would accelerate the deterioration of the west side, which had been relatively gradual up to that point. Paula McKinney, whose grandson attended the parish school at the time of its closure, recalled warning the pastor that the move would have devastating implications for the surrounding neighborhood. Among others, she predicted that “for sale” signs would appear on lots throughout the district. “[The pastor] closed the doors, and you see what’s happening,” she said, referring to the accelerated departure of White, middle-class families from the west side. “And I told him it was going to happen, too.”

Despite detailed news coverage of these developments, the serial closure of the city’s parochial schools went unnoticed by a surprising number of local residents. Many of the community’s Catholics took the schools for granted, assuming they would always be part of the urban landscape. This stubborn illusion was dispelled on June 6, 2006, when Youngstown’s pattern of parochial schools came to an official end. On that date, administrators of two of the city’s three remaining parish schools—Immaculate Conception, on the east side, and St. Matthias, on the south side—announced that these institutions would cease operation. Sister Charlotte Italiano, principal of Immaculate Conception, observed in a newspaper interview that the school’s final graduating class of 12 students was the smallest in its entire history. Meanwhile, Cheryl Jablonski, the principal of St. Matthias Elementary School, told reporters that the school’s 61 students...

218 McKinney, interview.
(from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade) would make a bittersweet journey to a regional amusement park “to mark the end of the school year and the permanent closure.” As local media pointed out, the simultaneous closings of St. Matthias and Immaculate Conception elementary schools left only one parish school operating within the city limits. Few observers missed the fact that St. Christine’s Elementary School, located in a quasi-suburban neighborhood that straddled Austintown and Boardman townships, was “urban” only in the most technical sense.

Developments seen in Youngstown during the 1990s and early 21st century were consistent with trends seen elsewhere in the United States. In cities across the country, private religious schools—especially Catholic parochial schools—were fighting what appeared to be a losing battle for survival. In neighboring Cleveland, for instance, Catholic parochial schools have continued to face strong pressure to consolidate. In January 2008, then President George W. Bush acknowledged in his State of the Union address that faith-based schools were “disappearing at an alarming rate in many of America’s inner cities.” Advocates of Catholic education were acutely aware of this trend, and many attributed this development to the adverse effects of urban charter schools. Father Ronald J. Nuzzi, director of the Alliance for Catholic Education leadership program at the University of Notre Dame, referred to charter schools as “one

219 Harold Gwin, “Final bell tolls for two schools: There were some long faces as children left St. Matthias on Tuesday,” The Vindicator, June 7, 2006, B-1.
220 Edith Starzyk, “Catholic schools facing pressure to consolidate: Parish classrooms’ conversion, however, not strictly paired with church closings,” The Plain Dealer, March 30, 2009, 1.
of the biggest threats to Catholic schools in the inner city, hands down.”

Ironically, the most influential advocates of charter schools have turned out to be the same conservative political leaders who now express concern about the decline of center-city private religious schools. Supporters of charter schools respond to the concerns of Catholic educators by pointing out that Catholic schools remain a vital force in America’s educational landscape, with “more than 2.3 million K-12 students in about 7,500 U.S. Catholic schools.” This is about twice the number of students enrolled in the nation’s charter schools. In response, critics of charter schools have called such figures misleading. They note that, since the passage of the first state charter school law in 1991, charter schools have grown consistently, while urban Catholic schools have continued to decline. Education Week reported that since 2000, “urban Catholic schools in the United States have lost 20 percent of their enrollment, or 187,283 students.” Meanwhile, a 2006 study of enrollment patterns in private and charter schools in Michigan showed that between 1994 and 1999, charter schools drew nearly the same rate of students from public and private schools. However, given that only eight percent of

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222 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
Michigan’s students attended private schools, these schools were disproportionately affected.  

Understandably, Catholic educators in Youngstown cited the growth of charter schools as a major contributing factor to the disappearance of urban parish schools. These schools, after all, were already struggling with the dwindling enrollment that had been brought on by urban depopulation. Sister Charlotte Italiano, who served as principal of both St. Patrick’s and Immaculate Conception elementary schools, indicated that the impact of the charter schools was decisive. The charter schools “pulled people away from the [parochial] schools” because of the huge financial incentive, she said. “If parents could save money at the elementary school level to advance their kids into high school or college, that’s what they would choose to do,” she added. “And they could not be faulted for that.”

Sister Charlotte pointed out that charter schools often provided amenities that were not offered at Catholic elementary schools. Parochial school class sizes were, on average, larger than those at charter schools, making the student-teacher ratio considerably higher. Meanwhile, charter schools “could afford to have two certified teachers in every classroom.” Urban parish schools, on the other hand, “struggled to keep one full-time teacher in the classroom.”

Parish schools were also far less equipped to serve “special needs” children, given that government funds dispensed for

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229 Ibid.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
this purpose could not “compare with what the public schools get.”\footnote{Ibid.} Father Noga, pastor of St. Patrick’s Church, concurred with Sister Charlotte’s assessment. “The charter schools were perceived as private schools that were free,” he said. Given the choice, many urban parents chose to save money that could be directed toward a child’s high school or college education.\footnote{Noga, interview.} For parishes that were already struggling to maintain elementary schools, such competition turned out to be the last straw.

**Signs of Resurgence in a Beleaguered City?**

The closure of most of the city’s parish schools had its parallel in the consolidation of Youngstown’s public schools. Scores of the city’s elementary schools have merged or closed down, while Youngstown’s six original public high schools reconfigured and consolidated; only four operate within the city limits today. Meanwhile, the community’s population continues to fall, and linear population predictions developed by the Ohio Department of Development suggest that it will slip from over 82,000 to 54,000 by 2030.\footnote{Youngstown 2010, 7.} Under such circumstances, perennial forecasts of Youngstown’s imminent revitalization often fall on deaf ears. Residents have been bombarded with proposed economic panaceas since the collapse of the community’s industrial sector in the late 1970s. Moreover, as Safford notes, responses to the city’s

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Noga, interview.}
\footnote{Youngstown 2010, 7.}
\end{footnotesize}
ongoing crisis have “balkanized along the narrow interests of powerful elites” rather than reflecting “a relatively unified set of community-oriented actions.”

Since 2001, however, urban redevelopment has moved in sync with a comprehensive plan called “Youngstown 2010.” By 2008, the *Vindicator* reported that economic development incentives put in place three years earlier had “helped secure $9.5 million in new investments in the city.” Tangible results of the renewal effort are most evident in the downtown area, where aging buildings have been razed or restored. The downtown has seen modest construction, and in recent years, it has attracted small businesses, including restaurants, nightclubs, and art galleries. In 2005, a high-tech convocation center known as the Chevrolet Centre opened on the site of a closed steel mill. Yet, progress has moved at an excruciatingly slow pace, especially in a community that has experienced nearly three decades of decline.

One thing is clear: Those who hope to lay the groundwork for Youngstown’s revitalization can scarcely afford to ignore the ravaged state of the city’s neighborhoods. The once prosperous north side, for example, remains trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and violent crime, in spite of efforts to turn the area into a thriving historical district. Crack houses operate within blocks of the Tudor- and Spanish Colonial Revival-style homes that were built by Youngstown’s industrial barons in the early 20th century.

236 Safford, *Why the Garden Club Couldn’t Save Youngstown*, 92.
237 Angie Schmitt, “Hope and gloom: Some 24,000 jobs have been lost in the Mahoning Valley since 2000. What does the contracting economy mean for the Youngstown revitalization plan?” *The Vindicator*, February 13, 2008, 1.
238 David Skolnick, “Sealing the deal on the Chevrolet Centre,” *The Vindicator*, November 18, 2005.
The situation is even worse on the south side, a once solidly middle-class residential district whose vacant homes serve as way stations for drug addicts, dealers, and the indigent. In 2004, a study conducted by Youngstown State University revealed that almost 20 percent of respondents “rated their neighborhood quality of life as ‘poor.’” Fifty percent of respondents in the same study indicated that they felt “unsafe in their neighborhood.” Crime remains one of the city’s most intractable problems, and in 2008, one east side resident complained to a newspaper reporter that “We’re tired of being held hostage in our backyards.” Only the most stubborn optimist, it seems, could manage to locate a silver lining within this dark, spreading cloud of urban blight.

Nevertheless, a number of civic leaders insist that the community can be turned around. Father Noga, the pastor of St. Patrick’s Church, is among those who have expressed hope for the future. Pointing to the depopulated neighborhoods that surround his parish, the pastor argued that they could serve as the ground for future revitalization. The disappearance of older residential areas might pave the way for new development, given that such vacant tracts of land “have become the new neighborhoods” in other cities. When Father Noga came to St. Patrick’s in 1985, the main artery of Hillman Street, which runs a block west of the parish, was “peppered with substandard and abandoned homes.” Today, most of those dilapidated structures are gone—a

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239 Angie Schmitt, “Taking back our neighborhoods: Fifty percent of Youngstown residents feel unsafe in their neighborhoods at night, a 2004 study said,” The Vindicator, February 11, 2008, 1.
240 Ibid.
241 Interview, Noga.
242 Ibid.
circumstance that could appeal to developers, who tend to prefer vacant land.\textsuperscript{243} Father Noga pointed out that most developers prefer to avoid the responsibility of removing older structures from property slated for re-development, especially in view of EPA regulations that frequently add to the cost of demolition. “We’ve had to change the bus route on the south side, because there’s nobody [who] lives on Hillman Street,” the pastor said. “So, that [area] could become some of the new neighborhoods, because there’s land.”\textsuperscript{244} While Father Noga’s vision for the rebirth of the south side may seem fanciful, such re-development is not unprecedented in Youngstown. The pastor’s observations must be understood in the context of an ongoing revitalization project focused on Smoky Hollow, a former ethnic enclave on the city’s north side that was destroyed developments that included the expansion of Youngstown State University.

Developed in a serpentine, half-mile ravine that stretches along the main artery of Wick Avenue, the neighborhood once produced luminaries such as Hollywood mogul Jack Warner, who grew up in “the Hollow,” and shopping mall developer Edward J. DeBartolo, Sr., who was born there. By the 1920s, Smoky Hollow was the home of a thriving Italian-American neighborhood that produced one of Youngstown’s signature institutions, the Mahoning Valley Restaurant, better known to locals as “the MVR Club.” Six decades later, however, all that remained of the Hollow was the resilient MVR Club, a tiny but well-tended World War II monument, and a handful of wooden frame homes

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.
that survived the university’s persistent efforts to create additional parking space for students. Like many other ethnic neighborhoods, Smoky Hollow had fallen victim to slum-clearance and urban renewal projects that exacerbated ongoing depopulation. In 2001, however, the district was redeveloped as a site of upscale apartments and townhouses, in the hope that a revitalized Smoky Hollow would attract university students, faculty members, and younger professionals. If Youngstown 2010 succeeds in its revitalization efforts, however, this development is unlikely to bring back the city’s parochial schools. The disappearance of a once-vibrant pattern of urban parish schools may be a permanent legacy of the city’s dramatic decline.
CHAPTER V

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND URBAN PARISH SCHOOLS

On January 30, 2007, Bishop George Vance Murry, the first African American to lead the Diocese of Youngstown, held a press conference to discuss issues affecting local Catholics. The newly appointed religious leader, whose physical resemblance to actor James Earl Jones was widely noted, had emerged as something of a local celebrity. The bishop’s image appeared regularly on the front page of news publications, and representatives of the local media seemed impressed with his eloquence, warmth, and facile wit. During the press conference, a reporter opened a question-and-answer period with a lighthearted query on the speaker’s impressions of northeastern Ohio’s climate, a teasing reference to the fact that Bishop Murry’s previous post was in the balmy Diocese of St. Thomas, in the Virgin Islands. It didn’t take long for the reporters’ questions to take a more serious turn, however. Weeks earlier, four young people had perished in an execution-style slaying on the city’s crime-ridden south side. All four of the victims had been Black, and police suggested the incident was related to gang activity. The bishop was pressed for a response to the tragedy.

Bishop Murry, a native of Camden, New Jersey, was no stranger to the kinds of social problems that confronted a city like Youngstown. In addition, he was alert to the

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2 Ibid.
realities of institutional discrimination. Within months of his installment, he spoke out publicly against local policies and practices that reflected the persistence of racial inequality. In response to a reporter’s question on the church’s role in quelling urban crime, the bishop said, “There is definitely a place for the Church, not only in calming violence, but [also] in interacting with the city.” He went on to point out that urban ministries could play a significant role in curbing gang activity, given that young people attracted to such organizations “are without a sense of belonging.” Bishop Murry’s overview of the Catholic community’s outreach to local urban youth featured references to several social welfare agencies and highlighted the efforts of individual pastors. He made no mention, however, of parochial schools, which had disappeared from impoverished urban neighborhoods during the decade-long tenure of his predecessor, Bishop Thomas J. Tobin, and the subsequent year-long period when the diocese lacked episcopal leadership.

Indeed, Bishop Murry mentioned none of the rich and relevant history of the African American history in his new diocese. Much of this history was informed by conflict with ethnic Whites, a large number of whom were Catholic. While “free-born” Blacks who arrived in the 19th century tended to live throughout the community, those who came during the period of the Great Migration tended to move into aging urban neighborhoods with large White Catholic population. A deeper understanding of

\[3\] Linda M. Lionis, “Bishop takes up fight against racism: The bishop said people of faith must strive to end racism, and offered suggestions of how,” The Vindicator, November 21, 2007, 1.

the role that demographic change played in the decline of Youngstown’s urban parish schools requires an examination of the complex relationship that developed between African Americans and White Catholics during the period stretching from the late 19th century to the opening of the 21st century.

Origins of a Black Community

African Americans formed a small but well-organized community in Youngstown by the mid-19th century, decades before the arrival of the thousands of southern and eastern European immigrants who eventually comprised a large percentage of the community’s Catholic population. The first African American known to reside within the city limits was Mrs. Malinda Knight, who arrived in the community in 1831.5 One source suggests that Mrs. Knight was “born in freedom in Columbus.”6 She was later joined by members of a family that played a prominent role in the local African-American community and, for some, symbolized the prospect of Black mobility in a White-dominated society. In the mid-1800s, Pennsylvania-based bricklayer Lemuel Stewart arrived with two of his brothers and established a niche in the local building industry.7 The Stewarts eventually participated in the construction of several of the city’s landmarks, including the second edifice of St. Columba’s Church, a massive granite structure that was consecrated as a cathedral in 1943. Like many Black families who

6 Irene Stewart, “Colored People Among City’s Best Citizens: Mrs. Malinda Knight, First Colored Resident Hundred Years Ago,” The Youngstown Telegram, June 29, 1931.
settled in Youngstown during this period, the Stewarts benefited from some degree of formal education. As local African-American journalist Leon Stennis observes, Youngstown (unlike neighboring Warren and Salem, Ohio) was never a stop in the Underground Railroad, and therefore most Blacks who arrived in the community during the 19th century were freeborn and skilled.\(^8\) This sophisticated population wasted little time in establishing the foundations of a vibrant community.

In 1871, the city’s relative handful of Black residents organized an African Methodist Episcopal church, whose descendant, St. Andrew’s A.M.E., stands on the north side’s West Rayen Avenue, just blocks from an industrial zone that once encompassed the retail area of Westlakes Crossing and a traditional Black enclave known (perhaps pejoratively) as the “Monkey’s Nest.” Several years later, in 1876, the community’s oldest African-American Baptist congregation, Third Baptist Church, was organized on the sparsely developed south side; and by 1910, there were four churches serving a population that had grown to almost 2,000 people.\(^9\) Although a large percentage of Blacks continued to attend Protestant churches where White congregants predominated, a trend toward segregation became more pronounced in later years, as the African-American population expanded. At this point, however, the city’s residential districts witnessed relatively few instances of racial segregation. As George D. Beelen observes, “there seemed to be no more pressure on [African Americans] as to where they

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\(^9\) Ibid.
could live than on the recent white immigrants from southern and central Europe.”

Moreover, by the 1920s, the Black community boasted a small class of professionals, and a half-a-dozen churches served as vital centers of social, cultural, and political activity.

Perhaps the African-American community’s most visible representative was one-time lawmaker William R. Stewart, the most accomplished of Lemuel Stewart’s children. William Stewart eventually settled in the North Heights district, an upscale residential area that stretched along the city’s northeastern border. This leafy neighborhood was the preserve of local industrialists, bankers, professionals, and business leaders. An anomalous figure, in terms of both prestige and material wealth, Stewart paid for his studies at the Cincinnati Law School with earnings derived from a part-time practice helping Civil War veterans secure their pensions. In 1888, he had been elected as a Republican to the first of two terms in the state legislature, where he sponsored anti-lynching legislation and bills that provided pensions to civil servants. Then, between 1907 and 1914, Stewart served as local attorney for the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, representing the Washington, D.C., embassy through the consulate in neighboring Cleveland. His remarkable career inspired ambitious young African Americans who

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12 Mary Ellen Pellegrini, “A pride in historic district: Three groups work together to ensure that the striking neighborhoods will be preserved,” The Vindicator, December 25, 2006, B-1.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
believed they, too, could achieve success in a White-dominated world. In the late 1950s, when Stewart passed away at the age of 93, local Blacks were proud—and perhaps astonished—to learn that the attorney had left behind an estate of $425,833.¹⁶

Youngstown’s Black population began to grow steadily in the late 19th century. Between 1880 and 1890, the total number of African Americans residing in the city rose from 320 to 648.¹⁷ A more dramatic expansion occurred over the following two decades. Between 1900 and 1910, the city’s African-American population rose from 1,015 people to 1,936, while the percentage of Blacks in the community moved up slightly, from 2.0 to 2.4 percent.¹⁸ An accelerated period of growth occurred between 1910 and 1920, when the Black population tripled, jumping from 1,936 people to 6,662. As Stennis notes, the expansion of the Black population between the outbreak of World War I and the early 1920s was encouraged, even facilitated, by local steel interests. Agents of steel plants, he writes, “went through the South and induced large numbers of blacks to come north, assuring them higher wages.”¹⁹ Among others, potential recruits were shown pictures “of large homes in which prominent blacks lived,” an approach that evidently proved effective. In any event, steel agents had little difficulty persuading Blacks to leave behind the poverty and brutally enforced discrimination they faced in the South. As Stennis observes: “Carloads of blacks were shuttled into plants. Often the majority of a

¹⁸ Ibid.
black congregation—pastor and all—would come.”

Northern industrial recruitment peaked in 1919, when African-American workers became unwitting tools of industrialists seeking to “break” widespread labor strikes—a strategy that exacerbated the antipathy of ethnic Whites toward Blacks.

Although Black migration to northeastern Ohio leveled off temporarily in the mid-1920s, largely due to a slump in industry and chronic discrimination in employment, the African-American population in Youngstown remained large in comparison to other northern communities. A 1925 *Vindicator* editorial notes that Youngstown and Cleveland were among the “big 10” Black centers in the northern United States. The same editorial acknowledges that Black migrants from the South faced discrimination in employment, housing, and education. The editorial advises, “If [African-American migrants] are to come here and stay, they must have better means of livelihood than they have in the South, better housing, better schooling for their children, and equal protection of the law.” Indeed, discrimination in the workplace was endemic, and those Blacks who secured steady employment in the area’s steel mills found themselves limited to the “grimy jobs in the coke plants and blast furnaces.”

Despite such hardships, Black workers often remained aloof from the labor movement in the first half of the 20th century. As labor historian David Brody notes,

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20 Ibid.
22 *The Youngstown Vindicator*, March 15, 1925, editorial.
Blacks were wary of labor unionists during this period; and union leaders, for their part, failed to encourage the participation of African-American workers. Brody notes that Black steelworkers who entered the industry in the early 1900s “had been rebuffed or badly used by unions.” Many unions excluded Blacks from membership, and African-American workers frequently discovered (to their dismay) that unionization was followed by the replacement of Black workers with White ones. Meanwhile, Black critics of labor unions questioned what they viewed as discriminatory practices, including apprenticeship examinations “that did not test knowledge or expertise relative to the particular skill but extraneous academic material.”

Not until the 1930s did local unions draw substantial support from African-American steelworkers. By this time, the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (SWOC)—forerunner of the United Steelworkers of America (USW)—had benefited from the guidance and financial assistance of another union, the United Mine Workers (UMW). In what turned out to be a successful campaign to establish an independent union in the local steel industry, the UMW “threw their money, organizing skills and non-discriminatory clause into the union effort to attract the black worker.” As local Black historian E. Wayne Robinson observes, however, most skilled African-American steelworkers felt a need to work as “jack-legged craftsmen” (skilled laborers who worked

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24 Brody, Steelworkers in America, 224.
without union approval) well into the 1940s. Hence, in a community that was rife with ethnic and religious tension, Blacks were forced to conclude that Whites, whatever their abiding differences, operated in ways that tended to limit the social and economic mobility of African Americans. Restrictions on Black mobility became even more apparent between 1920 and 1930, when the city’s Black population more than doubled, jumping from 6,662 people to 14,352.

Racial Tension on Youngstown’s West End

Tension between Blacks and Whites occasionally spilled over into violence on Youngstown’s “West End,” a residential and retail district to the northwest of the downtown area that was a major destination for Black migrants. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, instances of violence on the city’s West End not only called attention to the distrust and resentment that existed between Blacks and Whites; they exposed the extent to which the legal establishment discriminated against African Americans. One incident, in particular, stands out. The 1921 shooting of a White police officer by an unknown Black assailant inspired an official response so extreme that it forced the community’s normally reticent Black leadership to speak out against racial intolerance. On the evening of May 3, 1921, Patrolman Alexander R. Warren was speaking with an acquaintance near the corner of Belmont and West Rayen avenues, several blocks from Westlakes Crossing, when he noticed “two suspicious characters, shabbily dressed,”

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moving along the opposite side of the street. Those on the scene later described the unidentified men as “colored.” Officer Warren reportedly told his acquaintance that he was going to “look them over.” At this point, the policeman crossed the street and confronted the two men. Witnesses later stated that one of the two men pulled out a gun, aimed it at Warren’s chest, and fired. The men then fled the scene “and were lost in the darkness.”

Police detectives, speculating that the pair had “jumped” a freight train at Westakes Crossing, telegraphed a depot at Leavittsburg and requested that the train be stopped and searched for men matching the descriptions of the two suspects. Within hours, two Black men were detained at a train depot in neighboring Braceville, Ohio, although they were later released.

The search for suspects didn’t end there, however. The city’s police captain ordered that “all police…arrest any and all suspects upon their respective beats.”

Eventually, local police arrested 200 “colored persons on the open charge of suspicion.”

The following day, an account of the incident appeared on the front page of the Vindicator, under a banner headline reading, “Officer Is Slain; 200 Are Jailed.” Not surprisingly, this indiscriminate roundup of Black males on the city’s West End—in spite of its breathtaking scale—yielded few practical results. On May 6, 1921, the Vindicator reported that 198 of the 200 Black suspects picked up by police had been cleared of

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29 “Thugs Kills Officer Without Warning: Patrolman Alexander Warren Shot Down in Cold Blood as He Crosses Street to Question Two Men Thought to Have Been Negroes or Whites with Faces Blackened,” The Youngstown Vindicator, May 4, 1921, 1.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
charges and released. Furthermore, it was unclear whether the two remaining suspects, who were held on charges of carrying concealed weapons, were involved in the shooting death of Officer Warren.\textsuperscript{33}

Criticism of the police dragnet came from a variety of sources. An article that appeared in the \textit{Vindicator} on May 5, 1921, outlined the concerns of local Black leaders, in particular, who complained that the police had gone “too far” in their investigation of Warren’s death. One Black leader stated that, if the same rules had been applied to the slaying of Youngstown racketeer James “Big Jim” Falcone, which had occurred a few days earlier, police would have rounded up scores of local Italian Americans.\textsuperscript{34} The following day, a \textit{Vindicator} editorial sharply criticized the police investigation, noting that the roundup “serves again as a reminder that on occasions of this kind the position of a large class of our people is anything but enviable.”\textsuperscript{35} The same edition of the paper carried a written protest from the executive committee of the local chapter of the NAACP. “We find that 200 or more colored citizens who have been in the city for a number of years, were arrested and embarrassed,” the letter states. “We know that 250 men did not commit the murder and we resent the insults which have been heaped upon innocent colored citizens of this city during the last two days.”\textsuperscript{36} Ironically, a close

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\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} “Colored People Indignant Over Wholesale Round-Ups—Want Policeman’s Murderer Punished, But Say Police Go Too Far,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, May 5, 1921, letter to the editor.
\textsuperscript{35} “The Negro and the Community,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, May 6, 1921, editorial.
\textsuperscript{36} The Executive Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, “Colored People Send Protest: Regret Warren Murder, But Feel Needlessly Embarrassed,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, May 6, 1921, letter to the editor.
\end{flushright}
examination of the same paper that carried the editorial and letter of protest reveals the 
extent to which news coverage in Youngstown was racially biased. On May 6, 1921, the 
*Vindicator* published a front-page story that featured the following headline: “Negro Bandits Hold up Store on South Side.”37 The newspaper’s treatment of this incident was 
consistent with its practice of highlighting the race of suspects when they were believed to be Black.

Other responses to the police dragnet called attention to the cultural gap 
separating established Blacks from those who arrived during the period of the Great 
Settlement in Youngstown, complained in a letter to the *Vindicator* that the dragnet had 
damaged “the self respect of our better colored element, which is the salvation of the 
masses.”38 In the letter, Chase noted that the Black males arrested on suspicion charges 
had included a nephew of prominent local contractor Charles R. Berry, a onetime 
business associate of Lemuel Stewart. He closed the letter with a dire warning about the 
long-term consequences of racial discrimination, stating that “the whole race if treated 
with too much scorn or brutality may rise like a madman.”39 Such an outcome could be 
avoided, Chase added, if middle-class, Christian values were encouraged within the 
Black community. Chase concluded: “The way to save the colored race from themselves

37 “Negro Bandits Hold Up Store on South Side: Clerk Intimidated With Pistol and Cash Register is 
Looted,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, May 6, 1921, 1.
39 Ibid.
and to save white people from their worst element is to give them a good Y.M.C.A. and similar features, let them know the best and not the worst white people, lead them into balance, economic opportunity, and justice—and away from fear and dread.”

Taken as a whole, Chase’s letter sheds light on the complicated position of middle-class African Americans. On the one hand, established Blacks felt a need to condemn blatant acts of racial discrimination. On the other, they were careful to distinguish themselves from newer arrivals, who, in their view, were “burdened” with the “cultural baggage” of the South.

The shooting death of Officer Warren occurred less than two months after another, less spectacular murder on the West End. This earlier incident inspired a more measured police response, but once again, it drew unwanted attention to Youngstown’s Black community. As in the case of Officer Warren’s murder, media reports underscored the race of the suspected perpetrators. This time, however, responses to the crime called attention to fissures that existed within Youngstown’s White community on the issue of race. According to news reports, on the early morning of March 28, 1921, two young Black men entered Philip Lowenthal’s small confectionary shop in the district of Westlakes Crossing. One of the men drew a pistol, while the other rifled the cash register and searched Lowenthal’s pockets. A newspaper account that appeared two days later stated that the armed robbers were “disappointed in the amount of money obtained and

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40 Ibid.
41 Beelen, paper.
deliberately shot the confectioner through the lung.” The mortally wounded Lowenthal, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who had recently opened the business, was rushed to St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, where he died the following afternoon. The senseless nature of the killing, along with the “respectable” character of the victim (a married man with children), ensured that the story would find a place on the newspaper’s front page.

One day after the confectioner’s death, the Vindicator ran a front-page story with a banner headline reading, “Murder Stirs West End.” The story reports that the municipal police department, in response to the incident, had doubled the number of officers “detailed” to the district. Police had evidently detained at least two neighborhood residents found to be in possession of firearms. Neither of the men was described as a suspect in Lowenthal’s murder; but significantly, both of them had Anglo-Saxon names. Given that the arrests had occurred in the ethnically and racially mixed neighborhoods surrounding Westlakes Crossing, it seems quite possible that the detained men were Black. The newspaper article did not make clear whether local authorities were cracking down on a wave of violent crime in the district or taking steps to avert a race riot. An outbreak of racially motivated violence was, in fact, a realistic possibility, given that racial tension in Youngstown was concentrated in neighborhoods located on

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42 “Two Colored Bandits Shoot Man Fatally: Wantonly Shoot Victim When They Secure No Loot,” The Youngstown Vindicator, March 29, 1921, 1.
43 Ibid.
44 “Murder Stirs West End: Trouble Feared As Murder Result,” The Youngstown Vindicator, March 30, 1921, 1.
45 The Vindicator reported on April 1, 1921, that police arrested two additional suspects, one of whom was identified as “colored.”
the West End—former ethnic enclaves that absorbed most of the city’s Black migrants.

While the subject of race was not highlighted in the paper’s coverage of “trouble” attending Lowenthal’s murder, an anonymous letter that appeared days after the shooting suggests that racial friction was indeed a factor in the reported unrest at Westlakes Crossing. This letter, which decries the influence of “the lowest and dirtiest types of southerners who infest this district,” was the second of two anonymous contributions published in the aftermath of Lowenthal’s murder.\(^46\) Taken together, these letters not only highlight racial tensions that existed within the community; they also underscore differences that divided many of the city’s White residents. As the letter helps to illustrate, disagreement among Whites over fundamental values was reflected in divergent attitudes about law and order, public morality, and race relations.

The first of the two letters appeared on the same day that Philip Lowenthal was interred at Youngstown’s Children of Israel Cemetery. This letter, signed “A Republican,” excoriates the city’s safety director, David J. Scott, for his failure to curb the rising crime rate. The letter goes on to condemn unrestricted illicit activity, claiming that “[w]hiskey and beer are being sold at a dozen places in the heart of the business district, and no arrests.”\(^47\) “Gambling in which thousands of dollars figure, is in full bloom every night, and no raids,” the letter states. “Holdups and robberies, and what

\(^{46}\) “‘Monkey’s Nest’ is Evidence City Needs Police Protection: Citizen of the West End Complains That ‘Totin’ Liquor is Worse Crime Here Than ‘Totin’ A Gun—if Scott Were to Get a Hold-Up Call and a Bootleg Call at the Same Time He Would Answer the Bootleg Call First,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, April 1, 1921.

\(^{47}\) “Letters From the People,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, March 30, 1921, letter to the editor.
percentage are apprehended? Within the radius of Commerce and Federal and Wick and Chestnut streets ninety per cent of the automobile thefts occur. What steps have been taken to break up this practice?“

“A Republican” then attacks an unnamed local mobster whose bootlegging and gambling operations were the subject of an earlier newspaper editorial. Finally, the letter criticizes Youngstown’s chief of police, contending that neither he “nor a number of the men of his department are giving the city that honest, efficient, and impartial service for which they are being paid.”

A biting response to the first letter appeared two days later. The second letter, which was signed “A Resident of the West End,” also takes aim at the safety director’s performance. This time, however, the writer adopts a more personal line of attack, calling into question the safety director’s intelligence as well as his masculinity. Although “A Resident” appears as concerned as “A Republican” about the city’s rising crime rate, he defines “crime” differently and apparently resents the previous writer’s emphasis on local bootlegging activities. “A Resident” complains that, if anything, “Our Lady ‘Safe-tea’ Director” has devoted too much time to the enforcement of Prohibition legislation, a preoccupation that has caused him to neglect more serious crimes. The writer appears to target reform-oriented Protestants, the most visible supporters of Prohibition, when he writes that the safety director “was…placed in that office for no

48 Ibid.
49 The writer undoubtedly refers to Youngstown’s reputed crime boss, James “Big Jim” Falcone, who was shot to death outside of his downtown “near beer” establishment on April 28, 1921.
50 “Letter From the People,” The Youngstown Vindicator, March 30, 1921.
other purpose than to chase up raisin-jack makers.” The letter goes on in a similar vein: “As other citizens have already written through the columns of your valued paper, if [the safety director] would apply just one-fourth of his time to give the good people of Youngstown some semblance of police protection instead of running around all hours of the night and wee hours of the morning breaking into other people’s business in search of liquor, and then deliver [sic] addresses from pulpits in order to draw attention to his prowess, he would be doing something like his duty.” “A Resident” insists that the safety director was “prejudiced on certain subjects to the point of persecution,” and adds tartly, “A dollar to a nickel that if [he] gets a robbery or holdup call and a bootleg call at the same time, he’ll make the bootleg call first.”

Although both letters are anonymous, they contain powerful clues to the writers’ respective backgrounds. The first letter, which is signed “A Republican,” leaves little doubt about the author’s political orientation. The writer’s ethnic and religious background is somewhat uncertain, but the views the writer expresses are broadly consistent with those held by many of the city’s native-born White Protestants in the early 20th century. Although temperance advocates were found among the local Roman Catholic clergy, the most influential supporters of Prohibition legislation were

51 “‘Monkey’s Nest’ is Evidence City Needs Police Protection,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 1, 1921.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Protestants. Catholics, on the whole, resented all efforts to legislate what they perceived as “Protestant” morality, and this reaction was seen throughout the northeastern United States. Irish writer Breandon Delap, a biographer of the 1920s New York gangster, Vincent “Mad Dog” Coll, mirrors this interpretation when he describes Prohibition as “the rearguard action of New England WASPs, who were concerned about the massive influx of immigrants from poor European countries, where drink was part of the culture.”

This view of Prohibition is echoed by Ohio historian Andrew R. L. Cayton, who writes that the subsequent rise of Ku Klux Klan activity throughout the state “reflected a desire among native-born Protestants to save their world from an onslaught of diverse immigrants.” It therefore seems possible, perhaps even likely, that the author of the first letter was a native-born White Protestant.

The first writer’s fixation on certain types of criminal activity (bootlegging and car theft) may also provide clues to his economic background. In 1920s Youngstown, violent crime flourished in declining neighborhoods such as those surrounding Westlakes Crossing. This notorious stretch of real estate, bisected by railroad tracks and studded with older housing stock, had a reputation for vice and gang activity that traced back to the turn-of-the-century. In the early 1960s, Hollywood movie mogul Jack L. Warner, who grew up on Youngstown’s north side, claimed in his autobiography that he belonged

56 Andrew R. L. Cayton, Ohio: The History of a People (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 310.
to the “Westlakes Crossing Gang,” a cohort of teenaged delinquents led by one “Toughy” McElvey.\(^{57}\) To the immediate south of rough-and-tumble Westlakes Crossing stood an old neighborhood known as the “Monkey’s Nest.”\(^{58}\) In the 1920s, this district was home to scores of relatively recent European immigrants, including Irish, Italian, Croatian, Polish, Slovak, and Ukrainian Americans. It was also one of the few neighborhoods in the city that was readily accessible to newly arrived Black migrants from the South, some of whom had been recruited by industrialists at the height of the Steel Strike of 1919.\(^{59}\)

For reasons that included extreme poverty, the northwestern urban district comprising Westlakes Crossing and the Monkey’s Nest gained a reputation as a locus of violent criminal activity.\(^{60}\) At the same time, quasi-suburban areas—including the city’s upper north side, west side, and south side—were relatively insulated from violent crime. In his letter, “A Republican” unwittingly offers clues to his own economic status when he suggests that the most serious threats to the community are a widespread flouting of Prohibition laws, the prevalence of illegal gambling, and a wave of automobile thefts. (Only in passing does the writer refer to “holdups and robberies.”) When examining these claims, one must keep in mind that a large percentage of working-class ethnic Whites did not regard the first two activities as serious crimes. Indeed, many immigrants treated Prohibition as an unjust law that Anglo-Americans had foisted upon the rest of the


\(^{58}\) While the name appears to predate the area’s transformation into an African-American “ghetto,” it later took on racist connotations among some local Whites.

\(^{59}\) Brody, *Steelworkers of America*, 254-255.

community, and a sizable minority showed few qualms about exploiting its unpopularity to their economic advantage. Gambling, too, was considered an acceptable male pastime in many European cultures, and some immigrants interpreted laws prohibiting such activity as biased and intrusive. Equally revealing is the first writer’s reference to car thievery. Although a significant number of low-income Americans owned cars by the early 1920s, this tended to be less true in dense urban areas like Youngstown, where automobile ownership was often closely associated with the suburban middle classes. As David J. Goldberg notes, “the car had less of an impact on large cities, where people still lived in congested areas and relied on public transportation.” Hence, the writer of the first letter, given his salient concerns, appears to have belonged to the middle classes. Furthermore, his almost exclusive emphasis on violations of anti-gambling and Prohibition laws suggests that “A Republican” lived in a neighborhood that was largely insulated from violent crime.

Meanwhile, the author of the second letter evidently lacked the luxury of treating violent crime as an abstraction, for he paints a picture of the West End that is almost apocalyptic. “A Resident” complains that, while official “deadheads” squandered energy “to coddle along their hobbies,” residents of the West End were “at the mercy of murdering, raping fiends such as shot down Lowenthal Monday night.” According to the letter, such “fiends” were invariably Black males; and the writer’s avoidance of

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62 “'Monkey’s Nest’ is Evidence City Needs Police Protection,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 1, 1921.
standard racial pejoratives does not prevent him from expressing his profound hostility toward the African Americans who shared his neighborhood. “A Resident” describes a series of crimes allegedly committed by African Americans “within a stone’s throw of Lowenthal’s place.” He claims that, on the day of the murder, three “negroes” threatened another proprietor with a razor, while an unknown Black assailant struck a railroad detective on the head. The writer adds that Black prostitutes have solicited their trade with impunity on the district’s streets, while “colored” cardsharps have hustled naïve customers in broad daylight. Worst of all, “A Resident” writes, the “innocence” of the district’s “white children” was threatened daily by “that dirty southern element which the steel manufacturers are credited with having brought in here ‘to keep their mills going.’”63

The writer’s contemporaries would have recognized this last statement as an indirect reference to Black steelworkers. Racist sentiment among local working-class Whites had soared two years earlier, when area industrialists imported thousands of Black workers from the South as “strikebreakers.” During the national Steel Strike of 1919, the National Committee of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) reported that more than 30,000 African Americans entered the industry.64 Although this number represented “roughly a tenth of the total body of strikers,” industrialists accurately

63 Ibid.
predicted that the tactic would demoralize the striking workers.\textsuperscript{65} The first to respond to pressures brought on by the recruitment of strikebreakers were skilled steelworkers, most of whom had opposed the strike from the beginning. Faced with the prospect (however remote) of losing their jobs, they “led the return to work.”\textsuperscript{66} In communities like Youngstown, where 5,000 Black laborers entered the steel industry between 1919 and 1920,\textsuperscript{67} many working-class Whites attributed the strike’s failure to the presence of Black “strikebreakers.” Hence, the second writer’s oblique reference to the Steel Strike of 1919 reflects the manner in which developments in the industrial sector had deepened working-class Whites’ collective antagonism toward African Americans.

A New Social and Political Hierarchy

The two letters, taken together, throw into sharp relief the social and political hierarchy that had emerged in early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century Youngstown. Many native-born White Protestants attributed the community’s moral decline to the recent influx of European immigrants, who were criticized by many self-righteous congregations for their allegedly higher consumption of alcohol, their tolerance of gambling, and their disorganized lifestyles.\textsuperscript{68} Reservations about immigrants were also evident among industrial leaders, who feared that European newcomers were more “susceptible to unsound social and political propaganda.”\textsuperscript{69} Anglo-American concerns about the political “leanings” of

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid, 163.
\item Ibid.
\item Brody, \textit{Steelworkers of America}, 254-255.
\item Jenkins, \textit{Steel Valley Klan}, 22-23.
\item Ibid, 22.
\end{enumerate}
southern and eastern European immigrants skyrocketed after 1916, when workers striking against Youngstown Sheet and Tube burned down the retail district of East Youngstown, a village that bordered Youngstown’s Haselton district. The establishment’s anger proved so enduring that the village was subsequently renamed as “Campbell,” in an apparent effort to erase unpleasant memories of the incident. Jenkins notes that immigrants played a prominent role in the rioting. “Of the eighty-one young men arrested—their average age was twenty-seven—only seven were listed as Americans; most came from southern and eastern Europe,” Jenkins writes. “The association of the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) with the strikers generated nativists’ fear of the revolutionary tendencies of the foreign-born.”

Recent immigrants, on the other hand, were more inclined to attribute the rioting and vandalism in East Youngstown to a handful of “troublemakers” who had infiltrated the labor movement. Some of them resented the extent to which the industrial establishment blamed “new” immigrants (especially those from southeastern Europe) for the city’s crime, corruption, and labor unrest. Indeed, recent immigrants—and Catholics, in particular—became highly defensive amid the rise of White Protestant vigilante organizations that presented themselves as guardians of public morality. In a passage on Ku Klux Klan activity in 1920s Ohio, Cayton describes the complex network of social and political fault lines that divided heterogeneous industrial communities like

72 Jenkins, Steel Valley Klan, 20-21.
Youngstown. “The Klan thrived in cities such as Youngstown,” he writes, “where the steel industry attracted immigrants from all over the world and whose population in 1920 was 59.8 percent foreign-born and 5 percent African American.”73 The historian observes that the city’s population increased by eight times between 1880 and 1920, while its Black population doubled during the same period. “Tensions between native-born Protestants and Catholic and Jewish immigrants ran high, especially over the issue of alcohol,” Cayton adds. “In the 1920s, Klan and Klan-backed candidates won several elections in the Mahoning Valley, appealing not just to prejudice but to citizens concerned with a perceived decline in public morality. The Klan promised to restore law and order and Protestant values over an unwieldy and assertive population of immigrants and blacks.”74

Given that many native-born Protestants were engaged in what they considered as a last-ditch effort to preserve their way of life, it is not surprising that many of them supported a sharp reduction in European immigration. In Youngstown, as noted, many White Protestants perceived a strong causal relationship between the rise of ethnic and religious diversity and the city’s soaring crime rate. This wave of criminal activity was by no means exaggerated. As Jenkins observes, the city’s crime rate rose dramatically during the first two decades of the 20th century. “Felonies, which averaged 136 per year between 1900 and 1910, increased over 73 percent by 1913,” he writes. “From 1914 through 1920 the yearly average was 537 felonies, almost a 400 percent increase over the

73 Cayton, The History of a People, 311.
74 Ibid.
first decade.”\textsuperscript{75} This increase owed much, of course, to the growth of the city’s population during the same period. The most dramatic expansion occurred between 1910 and 1920, when Youngstown’s population rose from 79,066 to 132,358.\textsuperscript{76} Nevertheless, many White Protestants viewed rising crime as an exclusive byproduct of the city’s growing ethnic (and religious) diversity.\textsuperscript{77}

Meanwhile, African Americans readily understood that they had few, if any, allies within Youngstown’s polarized White community. The hostility of recent immigrants was almost palpable; and in time, responses from native-born White Protestants were equally demoralizing. Although representatives of the local Ku Klux Klan sought to assure Black leaders that their organization differed from the violently racist southern Klan, African Americans recognized that White supremacist values permeated the group’s agenda.\textsuperscript{78} It was no accident that the city’s expanding south side, a center of local Klan activity, was overwhelmingly White, Protestant, and middle class, with only “pockets of the poor and immigrants.”\textsuperscript{79} Blacks were prevented from moving into such neighborhoods through a vast array of formal and informal practices. As Kevin Boyle observes, in his study of 1920s Detroit, the maintenance of racial segregation in developing neighborhoods involved the cooperation of banks, real estate firms, and lending agencies. Boyle acknowledges that “[n]o one outside the South suggested that

\textsuperscript{75} Jenkins, \textit{Steel Valley Klan}, 26.
\textsuperscript{77} Jenkins, \textit{Steel Valley Klan}, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 159-160.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, 52.
the flow of blacks into the city be prohibited.\textsuperscript{80} Yet, urban Whites gradually “carved a color line through the city,” while a growing number of White business owners “banned black customers from their stores and restaurants.”\textsuperscript{81} Ultimately, northern Whites “decided that blacks couldn’t live wherever they wanted,” and business leaders “infused the real estate market with racist rules and regulations.”\textsuperscript{82} In addition, White realtors “wouldn’t show black tenants apartments outside the ghetto,” and bankers refused to offer them mortgages.\textsuperscript{83} Similarly, insurance agents declined to provide Blacks with coverage, and real-estate developers “wrote legal restrictions into their deeds, banning blacks from new housing tracts.”\textsuperscript{84} If these manifestations of institutionalized racism were not enough, native-born White homeowners placed further restrictions on the choices of Black residents by organizing “protective associations” to “keep their areas lily-white.” In this way, “the glittering cities of the Jazz Age were inexorably being divided in two.”\textsuperscript{85} Notably, the pattern prevalent throughout much of the industrialized North was reproduced to a large extent in Youngstown, where most urban Black neighborhoods formed an arc to the immediate northwest of the downtown area. The eroding ethnic enclaves of the city’s so-called West End were among the community’s least desirable residential areas. Indeed, the \textit{Vindicator} reported in 1935 that the

\textsuperscript{80} Kevin Boyle, \textit{Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age} (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 9.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 9-10.
“dilapidated” district “was picked by federal authorities out of seven submitted by the Metropolitan Housing Authority for slum clearance. 86

Racism within the White Protestant Establishment

For native-born White Protestants in Youngstown, the issue of race became a complicated, perhaps even painful, affair. Few of the community’s established Anglo-American residents wished to be seen as racially intolerant. As Ohioans, they took pride in their state’s role in the Underground Railroad, an intricate network of “safe houses” and secret tunnels that enabled thousands of fugitive slaves to make their way north to Canada. 87 In 1860, with the outbreak of the Civil War, Ohioans were among the Union’s staunchest supporters. The wartime leadership of Governor David Tod, a Youngstown industrialist, drew praise from President Abraham Lincoln, who offered the former governor a position in his cabinet, an offer Tod was compelled to refuse because of his declining health. 88 The White establishment’s reverence for the community’s mythologized past was reflected in public monuments and commemorations. A stone obelisk memorializing “the Union dead” dominated the central square, and public schools were named in honor of fallen leaders like William McKinley, the assassinated president who had fought for the Union’s preservation as a young man. In 1888, only 23 years after the end of the Civil War, Youngstown’s native-born White majority helped send

87 Cayton, Ohio, 108.
William R. Stewart to the state legislature, making him the second African American to serve as an Ohio lawmaker.\textsuperscript{89}

The White Protestant community’s supposed commitment to racial tolerance was tested, however, as the city’s population became more diverse; and the limitations of this tradition became increasingly apparent over time. Although native-born Whites praised the legacy of the Thirteenth Amendment and occasionally supported leaders from the Black community, they nevertheless harbored deep reservations about the impoverished southern Blacks who had arrived in Youngstown during the early 1900s. As indicated, such concerns were shared by many members of the city’s Black middle classes, a community of skilled and educated people. These freeborn Blacks had experienced neither the dehumanizing hardships of slavery nor the relentless exploitation of the post-bellum sharecropping system. Too often, they showed little sympathy for the less privileged segments of the local Black community. “The Negro leadership throughout [the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century] appears to have been more concerned with advancing self than race,” observes George D. Beelen, in a 1967 academic paper. “Indeed, many of the long-time Negro residents of Youngstown were most contemptuous of the southern Negroes of the Great Migration.”\textsuperscript{90}

Overall, the cultural gap separating established African-American residents and migrants from the South could not have been wider. Nicholas Lemann, in his well-regarded treatment of the Great Migration, observes that the social patterns of Black

\textsuperscript{89} “Birthday,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, October 29, 1939.
\textsuperscript{90} Beelen, seminar paper.
sharecropper society were “the equivalent of big-city ghetto society today in many ways.”91 Lemann describes this society as “the national center of illegitimate childbearing and of the female-headed family.”92 Rural southern Black society was burdened with “the worst public education system in the country, the one whose students were most likely to leave school before finishing and most likely to be illiterate even if they did finish,” Lemann writes. “It had an extremely high rate of violent crime,” he adds.93 Furthermore, chemical dependency and sexually transmitted disease “were nationally known as special problems of the black rural South; home-brew whiskey was much more physically perilous than crack cocaine is today, if less addictive.”94

In a multitude of ways, the arrival of Black migrants from the South magnified the hypocrisies and inconsistencies that had long informed the White establishment’s attitude toward the African-American community. Lemann indicates that, of the six-and-a-half million African Americans who moved from the South to the North between 1910 and 1970, “five million of them moved after 1940, during the time of the mechanization of cotton farming.”95 The approximately one-and-a-half million who arrived before this period often faced a cool reception from White elites. After all, the opposition of native-born Whites to the nation’s more extreme racist conventions did not necessarily reflect a genuine adherence to the principle of human equality. Therefore, it did not take long for

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Lemann, The Promised Land, 6.
the integrated neighborhoods of the early 19th century to give way to the racial and ethnic enclaves of the early 20th century.

For many White Protestants, “equality” involved strict separation; and therefore, much of the philanthropy directed at the Black community was informed by the White establishment’s commitment to separate—and inherently unequal—social arrangements. In the early 1900s, the Reverend Abner L. Fraser, the White rector of St. John’s Episcopal Parish, helped local African Americans establish the “colored” parish of St. Augustine’s.96 (This congregation should not be confused with a short-lived Black Catholic parish of the same name, which was established about four decades later.) Similarly, local patrician Henry Audubon Butler, son of the well-known industrial leader, Joseph G. Butler, Jr., helped organize the Butler Memorial Presbyterian Church, an institution reserved for Black congregants who were denied admission to the city’s fashionable First Presbyterian Church.97 These apparently well-intentioned gestures reflect how White benevolence often served to uphold the principle of racial segregation. As William Watkins observes, the “race philanthropy” supported by late 19th century Anglo-American industrialists—and lauded by most northern middle-class Whites—was designed, in part, to maintain social inequality along racial lines: “The possibilities of using philanthropy for social engineering were inviting. The ‘Negro Problem’ was

97 “One-on-One: Lorinda Butler—‘The most important thing is to do right and think right,’” The Vindicator, December 27, 1999, B-1.
among the most vexing and urgent of the time. Politics would be at the heart of using philanthropies to guarantee…a compliant Black population.”

Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Fault Lines Divide a Community

The social, political, and economic tensions that rippled through the community in the early 20th century were aggravated by demographic changes that radically altered the ethnic and racial composition of Youngstown. By the 1920s, the African-American population was growing at a faster rate than the European immigrant population—a development that reflected a massive shift of rural populations to urban centers as well as the impact of sharp restrictions on immigration that were imposed in 1921 and 1924, respectively. A 1931 report issued by the International Institute, a service organization managed by the local chapter of the YWCA, showed that the city’s Black population had more than doubled between 1920 and 1930, jumping from 6,662 to 14,352. According to the same report, the population of “foreign-born whites” declined slightly within the same decade, falling from 33,634 to 32,938. These figures were echoed by the local media. In June of 1931, the Vindicator reported that U.S. immigration figures for the previous month “showed that the total number of aliens entering the United States was less than the number leaving.” This high rate of departure among immigrants


100 “City’s Negro Group Doubles; Colored Population Rises from 6,662 to 14,552; Foreign Group Dwindles; Alien-Born Percentage Decreases from 25.6 to 19.4, Census Reveals,” The Youngstown Vindicator, June 8, 1931.
undoubtedly owed something to the adversity brought on by the Great Depression, whose impact was not fully reflected in the International Institute’s records on Black migration.

This decline in European immigration owed much to the lobbying efforts of native-born White Protestants, who contended that many of the nation’s social problems could be traced to the waves of European immigrants who had arrived during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In places like Youngstown, White elites were inclined to believe that recent immigrants had altered the social and political climate in ways that were deeply unsettling, fueling both corruption and public immorality. Thus, in the early 1920s, the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan avoided bringing “southern racial mores to Youngstown” and focused on the perceived threat posed by recent immigrants, who were disproportionately Catholic.101 The anti-immigrant sentiment then prevalent throughout the northern United States fueled the Harding Administration’s successful bid to limit European immigration in 1921, a move that came in response to controversies involving “new” European immigrants. As a Vindicator correspondent observes, “the compelling motive behind…the immigration restriction bill…is hesitancy about the recent immigration which comes largely from eastern and south-eastern Europe.”102 Further restrictions on immigration were imposed as the decade progressed. As Matthew Frye Jacobson observes, “the most significant revision of the immigration policy” was the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which was justified through “a racial logic borrowed from

101 Jenkins, Steel Valley Klan, 159-160.
102 Mark Sullivan, “Harding For Strict Bar To Immigration” He Long Since Declared in Favor of Limiting Tide from Europe,” The Youngstown Vindicator, May 6, 1921.
biology and eugenics.”\textsuperscript{103} In the wake of this legislation, prominent eugenicist Harry Laughlin stated that, after 1924, immigrants would be viewed primarily as parents “of future-born American citizens,” which “[m]eant that the hereditary stuff out of which future immigrants were made would have to be compatible racially with American ideals.”\textsuperscript{104}

Meanwhile, a large percentage of recent immigrants—as the letter composed by “A Resident” illustrates—viewed newly arrived Blacks from the South as a major source of the community’s social ills. On occasion, native-born Whites were moved to criticize recent immigrants for their overt intolerance toward Blacks. Recent immigrants, in response, often bristled over what they regarded as the hypocrisy of White Protestants. Did local White Protestant leaders truly believe that they were in a position to condemn the racist attitudes of “new” immigrants when their own neighborhoods were racially segregated? Critics of the White middle classes noted that Protestant-dominated suburban townships such as neighboring Canfield, Ohio, were segregated along racial and religious lines. Indeed, the extent to which recent immigrants were excluded from suburban communities during the 1920s shocked some newcomers to the area. In 2002, the late Joseph Hill, a 101-year-old Lithuanian-Jewish immigrant, recalled an incident that involved a newly appointed supervisor at his insurance firm. The supervisor, a Catholic named John Warland, encountered blatant religious bigotry when he attempted

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 82-83.
to purchase a house in a nearby suburb during the 1920s. Hill described the incident as follows: “So, [Warland] walks into the real estate office in Boardman [Ohio], and they assigned an agent to go with him to buy a house. The agent says, ‘Let’s go to Canfield.’ And Warland asks, ‘Why Canfield?’ And the agent says, ‘Because Canfield has very few Roman Catholics.’ Warland looks at him and says: ‘Well, let’s keep it that way. Take me back to my hotel.’ So, you see, he lost the sale.”

As Hill’s story suggests, anti-Catholic sentiment was prevalent in Youngstown during the early 20th century. In the 1920s, The Citizen, a pro-Klan weekly newspaper that was distributed throughout the Youngstown area, criticized what it termed as the Catholic Church’s “unfriendly, hostile and unclean attitude towards American Protestants.” During the same period, Catholics who moved into quasi-suburban areas, especially the city’s west and south sides, often arose from their beds to discover that wooden crosses had been burned in their front yards during the evening hours. In a 2007 interview, former south-side resident T. Gordon Welsh indicated that his own parents were targeted by the vigilante organization a few days after their marriage. “Dad had built a new house for Mother to go into when they came back from their honeymoon.” Welsh said. “And the first night they were there…the Klan came along…and they set a cross in the [yard and] set fire to it.”

It is difficult to determine whether these tactics of

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105 Joseph Hill, interview by author, October 9, 2002, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
106 Jenkins, Steel Valley Klan, 38.
107 T. Gordon Welsh, interview by the author, May 1, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
intimidation were widespread, but much documentation exists concerning the local Klan’s ceremonial cross burnings.\textsuperscript{108} As disturbing as such incidents undoubtedly were, however, the harassment of Catholic neighbors was not necessarily in line with the Klan’s overriding goal, which was to restore the dominance of native-born Protestant conceptions of morality. As Jenkins notes, there is no conclusive statistical data suggesting that the penetration of ethnic Whites into “old-stock” White urban neighborhoods “served as a prime motivation for the majority of Klan members.”\textsuperscript{109}

Exclusionary policies used by White elites against Blacks, on the other hand, were insistent, systematic, and enforced through quasi-legal means, including housing regulations and homeowners’ agreements.\textsuperscript{110} The subsequent participation of recent immigrants in such discriminatory policies and practices ensured that these devices would be extraordinarily effective, and their influence is felt to this day. As David R. Roediger notes, recent immigrants in large metropolitan areas like New York rushed “to draw the color line” by supporting racist property restriction organizations. In 1919, a light-skinned African-American minister who had infiltrated a White “pro-restrictionist” meeting in the Hyde Park-Kenwood area commented bitterly that “Jews attended, taking time out from charitable efforts to aid pogrom victims; Irishmen came straight from Free Ireland events; Italians came from the ‘murder zone’ in which they lived to victimize blacks; Poles, seen as having the blood of anti-Semitic massacres on their hands, showed

\begin{footnotes}
\item[109] Ibid, 85.
\item[110] Boyle, \textit{Arc of Justice}, 9-10.
\end{footnotes}
up; Czechs and Slovak, Russians and even ‘an honorable Japanese gentleman’ united against the ‘coon.’”

The Rising Tide of Southern Migration

In the decades leading up to World War II, Black migration to the Youngstown area continued to grow, albeit modestly. According to a 1944 newspaper article, the city’s population in 1940 was 167,720, a figure that included 10,382 residents who had migrated to the community in the previous five years. The article reported that only 334 of these new arrivals hailed from outside the continental United States, a figure that suggests many of these migrants traveled to northeastern Ohio from the nation’s economically depressed regions, including the South. Records that reflect the sweeping demographic changes that occurred within Youngstown’s city limits during the final years of the Depression support this interpretation. A report released by the U.S. Commerce Department in 1941, for instance, categorized more than 19,000 of Youngstown’s almost 170,000 residents as “nonwhite.” In 1942, the first year of America’s involvement in World War II, the Vindicator provided a more modest figure when it reported that the community had a total population of 167,720 residents, “with

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112 “10,382 Migrate Here in 5 Years,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 13, 1944.
113 Ibid.
126,385 native-born whites, 26,671 foreign-born whites, 14,615 Negroes, 18 Indians, and seven representatives of other races.”

As migration from the South escalated in the postwar era, media references to the community’s expanding minority population became more frequent, and some news reports volunteered brief explanations of this unfolding demographic shift. A 1951 newspaper article, for example, quoted a U.S. Census Bureau report which suggested that the migration of defense workers was mainly responsible for the growing percentage of “nonwhites” living in the community. The same article observed that “the nonwhite population increased from 14,664 to 21,547 between 1940 and 1950, while the white population dropped [by] almost an equivalent number, from 153,056 to 146,781, leaving the city with a net population increase of 610.”

Naturally, the sharp rise in Black migration during the postwar era contributed to chronic overcrowding in the city’s traditional Black neighborhoods. More established Black residents, seeking relief from congested living conditions, began to migrate to the Italian-American enclave of Brier Hill, a working-class district to the northwest of the city’s traditional Black “ghettoes.” During this period, more African-American residents also migrated to east-side neighborhoods such as Haselton, and to sections of the south side that abutted the downtown area—districts that already had small Black populations.

The movement of Blacks into neighborhoods that were dominated by working- and middle-class ethnic Whites brought African Americans into contact with large numbers of Roman Catholics, often for the first time.\footnote{116} White Catholics, for their part, responded warily to the presence of Blacks in neighborhoods that had grown up around parishes and parochial schools. By this time, White Catholics had already begun their migration to the suburbs, although they tended to leave the city at a slower pace than their non-Catholic counterparts. Indeed, pragmatic considerations were often behind patterns that some observers interpreted as evidence of a stronger Catholic commitment to urban neighborhoods. As McGreevy observes, an unusually large percentage of working-class White Catholics were homeowners, a circumstance that limited their mobility in the wake of urban decline.\footnote{117} Apart from such practical considerations, however, White Catholics also harbored emotional attachments to urban parishes, which made some of them reluctant to relocate to the suburbs, in spite of sweeping demographic changes.\footnote{118}

For those Whites who remained in the city, urban demographic change became a matter of concern. While a variety of factors contributed to the European-American exodus from the city, the growth of the urban Black population weighed heavily on the minds of retreating White Catholics. “What became clear during the 1950s was that while the migration to the suburbs possessed an independent momentum, its connections to racial issues were profound,” McGreevy writes. “In fact, the most obvious distinction

between suburban Catholicism and parish life within the city was the relative importance of racial concerns.” The author notes that, in the wake of “legal and economic barriers” that prevented Blacks from purchasing homes in outlying areas, “racial transition was an abstraction to most suburban Catholics.” The growing apprehension that many urban Whites felt about demographic change was reflected in their reluctance to socialize with African-American neighbors. Sister Charlotte Italiano, O.S.U., who spent a portion of her childhood in an Italian-American enclave on Youngstown’s east side, recalled that in the 1940s, there was virtually no interaction between Blacks and Whites in what was becoming a racially diverse neighborhood. “I don’t remember any fighting or friction,” she said. “I do think it was just a [matter] of ‘you stay on your side, and we’ll stay on our side.’ So, then, there wasn’t confrontation.”

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that open racial conflict was unknown in Youngstown during this period. Tension between members of the African-American community and the city’s heavily White police force, for instance, surfaced in the immediate aftermath of World War II. In October 1945, the local NAACP called an emergency protest meeting on the subject of “police brutality,” and the chapter’s leaders went so far as to demand the resignation of Youngstown’s police chief, John B. Thomas. In the course of the meeting, Fred D. Dillard, a local Black union leader,

119 Ibid, 84.
120 Sister Charlotte Italiano, O.S.U, interview by the author, May 31, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
claimed that Thomas had “beaten” several Black youths at a local settlement house. Dillard went on to question whether “our boys had fought for a concept of democracy which permitted a police chief to beat up someone just because he didn’t like the way they parted their hair, tied their shoes or wore their caps.”122 Given the political climate of the times, which encouraged the public to regard protest meetings with a degree of suspicion, the reporter covering the event evidently felt compelled to offer the following assurances: “There were some known Communists hanging around the fringes of the protest meeting, but they were not in control. The meeting was conducted with dignity; the protest taken up in the traditional American way.”123

Other confrontations had already occurred. In September 1945, for instance, the Vindicator published an editorial on a series of disturbances that involved White and Black youths.124 Describing the incidents as “an unpleasant reminder that Youngstown is constantly sitting on a racial powder keg,” the editorial praises the municipal government’s decision to enforce a curfew designed to prevent racially inspired gang violence in the city’s downtown area.125 Although the editorial acknowledges that the Black community “still has real grievances,” it also cautions that “leaders who inflame Negroes to demand extremes in social acceptance are only hurting their own people.”126 Such “extremes in social acceptance” evidently included Black demands for the

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
integration of local public swimming pools. In 1949, a *Vindicator* editorial described a campaign to “force the acceptance of Negroes in all of the city’s swimming pools” as the handiwork of left-wing agitators.\(^{127}\) The editorial claimed that the campaign’s supporters included “[p]olitical factions, the C.I.O. and now the ‘Young Progressives,’ a Communist front organization.” It continues with this allegation: “Undesirables have been imported into Youngstown to stir up hatred and dissension among Negroes in an attempt to line them up with traitors seeking to destroy the country.”\(^{128}\) The editorial concluded that local Blacks “are not helped by disloyal radicals posing as young progressives, and by Communists hurrying into Youngstown from Cleveland and other places to stir up all the dissension they can.”\(^{129}\)

Despite such overheated rhetoric, instances of conflict between Blacks and Whites were still relatively uncommon during the postwar era. Amid high levels of racial segregation, local Blacks and Whites had few opportunities to interact at all. Catholic religious leaders, for the most part, failed to take meaningful steps to bridge this gap, an omission that appeared consistent with the U.S. Church’s traditionally reserved attitude toward African Americans. As noted, Robert Casey, a resident of the Haselton district during the 1950s, could not recall any efforts on the part of clergy or religious to reach out to the growing Black population in the vicinity of Immaculate Conception Church.\(^{130}\)

\(^{128}\) Ibid.
\(^{129}\) Ibid.
\(^{130}\) Robert E. Casey, interview by the author, February 13, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
Moreover, the neighborhood’s racial diversity was not reflected in the classrooms of the parish school, whose students were mainly of Irish, Italian, and Lebanese backgrounds.\footnote{Robert E. Casey, \textit{An Irish Catholic Remembers and Reflects} (New Wilmington, PA: New Horizons Publishing, 2006), 56.} Casey said he did not believe that a single African-American student was enrolled at the institution at the time he attended Immaculate Conception Elementary School, or during the years that immediately followed his graduation.\footnote{Casey, interview.} The Haselton district’s small number of Black Catholics apparently belonged to St. Augustine’s Church, an African-American parish that was established on the city’s east side in the 1940s.\footnote{“Negro Catholics’ Church Named St. Augustine,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, September 30, 1944, 3.}

\textbf{The U.S. Church’s Reluctant Engagement with African Americans}

The postwar Catholic engagement with African Americans in northern urban centers was complicated by the fact that few Blacks were members of the Catholic Church. It would be misleading, of course, to suggest that the racial fears of White Catholics hinged exclusively upon the fact that most African Americans were Protestant. Generations of White Catholics, taking their cues from a racially conservative hierarchy, often expressed hostility toward African Americans, including those who shared their religion. As early as the 1850s, a Black Catholic in New York City wrote an urgent letter to Pope Pius IX, in which she complained of the racism of American clerics. In her letter, Harriet Thompson notes that a proposal to establish a Black school at a local parish had been rejected by Archbishop John Hughes, the charismatic leader of the Archdiocese of New York. She adds that it was “well known by both white and black that the Most
Reverend Archbishop Hughes…[hates] the black race so much that he cannot bear for them to come near him.”\footnote{Cyprian Davis, \textit{The History of Black Catholics in the United States} (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 96.} If Hughes’ racism was exceptional in its virulence, his failure to address the needs of Black Catholics was sadly representative of U.S. clerical leaders during the ante-bellum period.\footnote{Ibid, 97.} Despite Pope Gregory XVI’s condemnation of the slave trade in 1839, few American clerics showed much interest in the plight of African Americans in the decades leading up to the Civil War.\footnote{Ibid, 116-117.}

Tragically, the bulk of the U.S. hierarchy remained indifferent to Blacks in the post-bellum era. In 1866, at the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, U.S. bishops (despite the pleas of visionary leaders like Martin J. Spalding) failed to develop a plan to address the needs of recently freed slaves.\footnote{Ibid, 121.} Worse yet, a pastoral letter issued in the wake of the council expressed regret over the “expedient” nature of emancipation. The letter reads in part: “We would have wished, that in accordance with the action of the Catholic Church in past ages, in regards to the serfs of Europe, a more gradual system of emancipation could have been adopted, so that they might have been, in some measure prepared to make better use of their freedom than they are likely to do now.”\footnote{Ibid, 121.} Apart from the efforts of a handful of committed Catholic leaders—notably Katherine Drexel, the banking heiress who became a benefactor of both African-Americans and Native Americans, and John Ireland, the radical archbishop of St. Paul, Minnesota—the U.S.
church’s overall efforts to reach out to Blacks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were half-hearted. 139 140

Before the late 1950s and early 1960s, the small number of U.S. Catholic leaders who took an active interest in the concerns of African Americans operated largely on the fringes of the Catholic community. Some of these leaders, in line with the conventions of their day, expressed paternalistic attitudes toward Blacks. Even such towering figures as John LaFarge, S.J., and John Markoe, S.J., clerical pioneers in the realm of interracial cooperation, were guilty of such paternalism. In the 1930s, LaFarge established the Catholic Interracial Council of New York, an organization whose stated commitment to “social justice” outraged influential churchmen like Chancellor James McIntyre, who believed that “the social and economic conditions of blacks…were beyond the ken of the church.” 141 Markoe was a lifelong advocate of “the cause of interracial justice” 142 who “moved comfortably in black culture” and declared “it was superior to white culture.” 143 Yet, both men deeply offended the sensibilities of Black Catholic leaders in 1932, when they moved against Thomas Wyatt Turner, the African-American head of a national lay

139 Ibid, 135-136.
142 Davis, The History of Black Catholics in the United States, 228.
143 Southern, John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 110.
organization called the Federated Colored Catholics.\textsuperscript{144} LaFarge and Markoe’s efforts to promote interracial cooperation within the Catholic community came at the expense of existing Black leadership and forced a split in the organization. As a result, the group’s Midwestern branch, renamed as the National Interracial Federation, fell into decline and became inactive.\textsuperscript{145}

Whatever their shortcomings, however, LaFarge and Markoe were leagues ahead of their co-religionists on the issue of interracial relations, and they helped lay the groundwork for the church’s belated response to the civil rights movement. David W. Southern, in his critical examination of LaFarge’s ministry, observes that such pioneers “patiently bored far within the American church for almost half a century, trying to change what was essentially a racist organization.”\textsuperscript{146} As Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., notes, in his study of African-American Catholics, only a handful of U.S. bishops addressed the issue of racial discrimination in Catholic schools, notably Joseph Cardinal Ritter, in St. Louis, and Patrick A. O’Boyle, in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{147} Throughout much of the 1950s, the racial attitudes of the majority of the country’s White clerical leaders ranged from indifference to outright hostility, and these kinds of attitudes were reflected within the laity.\textsuperscript{148} “The beliefs of the pastor and people fed on each other,” writes Eileen McMahon, in her study of Catholic neighborhoods in postwar Chicago. “Pastors justified

\textsuperscript{144} Davis, \textit{The History of Black Catholics in the United States}, 227.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} Southern, \textit{John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism}, xiv.
\textsuperscript{147} Davis, \textit{The History of Black Catholics in the United States}, 39.
their positions by saying, ‘My people hate the niggers,’ while parishioners were given the message that it was all right to do so.”

Given the virulent racism that permeated American society, and the complacence (even complicity) of the U.S. Catholic hierarchy, immigrants came to view Blacks as natural antagonists. Roediger observes that anti-Black sentiment among newer immigrants was exacerbated, albeit indirectly, by ethnic conflict within the Catholic community itself. As an Irish-dominated hierarchy took increasingly stern measures against national parishes, such institutions were relegated to the declining neighborhoods of the central city. Therefore, those recent immigrants who relocated to new developments invariably found themselves in territorial parishes that reflected an Irish-American religious and cultural ethos. A significant number of newer immigrants responded by strengthening their commitment to national parishes, while seeking to “defend” traditional ethnic enclaves from the “encroachment” of outsiders, especially Black migrants from the South. Ultimately, decisions to abandon aging ethnic and religious enclaves were “tense,” because “moving out of a changing neighborhood meant abandoning spectacular church buildings” and leaving behind distinct ethnic religious traditions.

The expansion of territorial parishes did little to facilitate the integration of Black Catholics. “Even as hesitant Catholic initiatives for interracial harmony took shape, the

149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Roediger, Working Toward Whiteness, 169.
152 Ibid, 168.
Church taught by example that African Americans were different,” Roediger notes. “Thus the turn to mixed territorial parishes conspicuously left out African Americans, consigning them to separate congregations.” This is not to suggest that all northern Roman Catholic dioceses maintained a strict policy of racial segregation. In the early 20th century, for example, George Cardinal Mundelein reserved the parish of St. Monica’s for Chicago’s African Americans, while at the same time, emphasizing that Blacks should not be “excluded from attending other parishes.” As McMahon notes, however, “white territorial parishes often exercised their prerogative to exclude blacks or treat them as second-class parishioners.” Meanwhile, Black Catholics who feared discrimination in White-dominated parishes engaged in “voluntary” segregation. McGreevy cites the example of a Black family who relocated from St. Louis to the south side of Chicago in the late 1920s. One family member recalled his parents’ fears “that without a ‘Negro’ parish African-American children would not obtain positions as altar boys and that teenagers would date members of another race.”

While there is no evidence that Youngstown’s African-American Catholics were officially excluded from local territorial parishes, a significant number of them requested permission to set up a separate parish on the city’s east side in the 1940s. On the occasion of St. Augustine Church’s dedication in 1944, Youngstown Bishop James A. McFadden observed, rather paternalistically, that “many of the colored people of

153 Ibid, 169.
154 McMahon, What Parish Are You From?, 126.
155 Ibid, 127.
156 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 31.
Youngstown have asked that something special be done for them by the church.” He added that the new parish “should provide an opportunity for the religious and [social] activity they desire.”

Patronizing attitudes toward Black Catholics were no less evident among clerical leaders in the neighboring Diocese of Cleveland. Dorothy Ann Blatnica, V.S.C., in her study of Black Catholics in Cleveland, notes that Bishop Edward F. Hoban’s attitude toward “African American Catholics, was…colored by a missionary perspective that did not permit him to see them as leaders in the diocesan church.”

Notably, the emphasis some urban pastors placed on proselytizing created a substantial Black Catholic community where virtually none had existed. These evangelizing efforts, however, were marred by the tendency of White missionaries to devalue the traditions of the Black Church; and the debate continues over “[w]hether or not a separate rite for African American…is the only useful and effective resolution of the Church’s racist past.”

The U.S. church’s policies concerning the Black community began to show signs of change in the 1950s, when “a growing number of Catholic bishops and clergy, and a vocal minority of laypeople, began to speak out on civil rights issues.”

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159 McGreevy, “Racial Justice and the People of God.”
all institutions under his jurisdiction.”\textsuperscript{162} During the same period, Joseph Ritter, in his consecutive posts as bishop of Indianapolis and archbishop of St. Louis, took forceful steps to eliminate segregation.\textsuperscript{163} Sugrue notes that, in Detroit, the hierarchy’s “growing racial tolerance” occasionally “brought it into conflict with parishioners who lived in racially changing neighborhoods and with pastors who often shared racial prejudices and looked with chagrin on white flight from parishes.”\textsuperscript{164} By this time, northern White Catholics were increasingly (and disproportionately) affected by the unfolding trend of urban demographic change.\textsuperscript{165}

The White Catholic Response to Urban Change

Well before the 1960s, White Catholics throughout the northeastern United States had begun their gradual migration to the suburbs. Dolan notes that the breakup of old national parishes and ethnic enclaves was partly the result of racial tension that had accompanied demographic change. As thousands of African-American migrants from the South found their way into northern urban centers, many “chose to settle in neighborhoods located on the fringes of the old immigrant enclaves,” and a “slow but steady trickle” of White Catholics to the suburbs that began during the postwar era “reached flood-like levels by the 1960s.”\textsuperscript{166} Interestingly, the movement of Latinos into

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} Sugrue, \textit{The Origins of the Urban Crisis}, 192.
\textsuperscript{165} McGreevy, \textit{Parish Boundaries}, 131.
heavily White Catholic areas inspired relatively little anxiousness among established residents. McGreevy points out that “neighborhood contacts between Euro-American and Spanish-speaking Catholics at parish activities or in the parochial school were comparatively frequent when compared to contact between Euro-Americans and African-Americans.”167 He adds that the involvement of Latinos in parish activities may have “[signified] to Euro-American Catholics that the new group was not ‘black,’ regardless of physical features.”168 Perhaps the historical connection between Latinos and the Catholic Church played a decisive role in shaping White Catholic perceptions in this regard. In any event, (mostly Catholic) Latinos, unlike (overwhelmingly Protestant) African Americans, could be integrated into the parish structure that dominated most urban Catholic neighborhoods.169

Notably, anti-Black sentiment among White Catholics was often heightened by growing concern that the movement of Blacks into Catholic neighborhoods would imperil urban parishes and parochial schools.170 Not surprisingly, the fears of the urban Catholic laity were shared by a large number of clerical leaders, who watched with dismay as Catholic institutions in urban neighborhoods lost their traditional patrons. Throughout the 1940s, urban pastors around the country had helped to mobilize opposition to the location of housing projects in heavily Catholic neighborhoods, a move that (quite naturally) deepened some Black leaders’ hostility toward the Catholic

168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
170 Ibid, 84.
The fears behind such drastic measures were summed up by Saul Alinsky, a community organizer who worked with residents of working-class, White Catholic neighborhoods in Chicago who were struggling to adjust to demographic change in the 1950s. “When a community changes from white to Negro, the Catholic Church is in a different position than Protestant or Jewish churches,” Alinsky said. “It has a bigger real investment.”

Given that White Catholics were less likely than other European Americans to relocate to the suburbs, “Catholics (and their church) emerged from the decade as the single largest group (and institution) in the northern cities.” While tens of thousands of White Catholics ultimately found their way into suburban communities, “the Catholic percentage of the [urban] ‘white’ population continued to climb.” This trend was especially pronounced in traditional immigrant strongholds like Boston, where some census tracts suggest “the percentage of Catholics [had] climbed to over 96 percent.”

Contributing to growing racial tension in northern cities was the fact that the African-American percentage of the urban population was also rising. During the 1960s, for instance, the Black population of Chicago rose from 22.9 percent of the population to 32.7 percent; and the trend was similar in Cleveland, where the African-American

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171 Ibid, 72.
172 Ibid, 118.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
population rose from 28.6 percent to 38.3 percent. These parallel trends did not bring about integration, however. The Black population became increasingly isolated as Whites retreated from changing neighborhoods. As McGreevy notes, those “pockets of integration that did exist in the northern cities were usually ephemeral—areas midway through a complete turnover in population.”

Until the late 1960s, the flight of working-class Whites from some urban districts was facilitated by the policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which withheld loan guarantees from residents of urban neighborhoods that were racially and economically diverse.

Understated Racism in Postwar Youngstown

Youngstown, of course, witnessed its share of racial tension, but the community was largely untouched by the sort of violence that attended demographic change in other cities with tight-knit Catholic neighborhoods. McGreevy observes that Philadelphia’s Catholic leaders were widely criticized during the same period for their failure to condemn the harassment of a Black family that moved into suburban Levittown. This was followed up three years later by an incident in which mainly Irish-Catholic residents took to the streets of Kensington, a working-class district of Philadelphia, after hearing a rumor that a Black family had moved into their neighborhood. “Rocks quickly crashed through the windows of the alleged residence of the African-American family and neither the assurances of city government officials nor police could persuade the crowd that a

176 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 181.
177 Ibid.
move-in would not take place,” McGreevy writes. “Finally, a squad car arrived on the scene with Father Charles Mallon, pastor of Ascension parish. Since ‘many of the local people were members of the parish’ the crowd quieted and then cheered as Mallon informed them that no move-in would occur. Only at this point, did the crowd disperse.”¹⁷⁹

Given the relative calm that accompanied demographic change in Youngstown during the 1950s, some contemporary observers might have concluded that the city’s White residents were exceptionally tolerant on the issue of race. The truth, of course, was different. Most of Youngstown’s public swimming pools were segregated until the late 1950s, and the local YMCA maintained a separate facility for Blacks, a Tudor-style building that stood just north of the “Monkey’s Nest.”¹⁸⁰ In 1940, the establishment of the nation’s first low-income housing project on the city’s West End inflamed racial tension in neighborhoods to the immediate northeast of Westlakes Crossing.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, there is evidence that the movement of Black families into majority-White neighborhoods elsewhere in the city was followed by the abrupt departure of scores of European-American residents. Robert Casey, who spent part of his adolescence on Youngstown’s south side, described events that followed the arrival of the neighborhood’s first Black family during the 1950s. “They built a beautiful brick

¹⁷⁹ McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 92.
home…well kept up,” Casey said. “And yet, after they purchased this home, immediately White families started to leave, because they had the view that ‘Ah! There goes the neighborhood.’ And I thought to myself it was almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Indeed, hostile responses to demographic change among local White urban dwellers were prevalent enough to attract the attention of a committee on urban affairs, which comprised organizations such as the Baptist Ministers Conference, B’nai B’rith, Catholic Charities, the Junior Civic League, the NAACP, and the Youngstown Civil Liberties Union. In 1958, the committee published a pamphlet on the city’s “housing problem” that featured case studies of discriminatory housing practices that were evidently common in the community. “A Negro steelworker, a veteran of World War II, entered into an agreement with another real estate agency to purchase a house in another block on West Dewey Avenue, a block in which at that time there were no Negro residents,” one case study began. “The people who owned the house wanted to sell to him, the real estate agency wanted to sell it to him, the bank made the loan.” The sale was delayed, however, when “certain families in the block, fearful that this house was about to be sold to Negroes, protested to the bank.” As a result, the bank “held up the loan, and the man never did get the house.” The pamphlet also described an instance of “block busting,” in which urban property owners sought to “exploit the plight of the

182 Casey, interview.
Negro and make tremendous profits by owning slum property.” The strategy was outlined as follows: “They buy a house in a deteriorating section of town, and then sell the house for two, three, or sometimes even four times what it cost on a land contract to Negroes.” The pamphlet noted that such “block busters” encouraged “the rumor that Negroes degenerate a neighborhood and, buying from panic-stricken neighbors at very cheap prices, he reaps tremendous profits.”

Despite such instances of discrimination and intolerance, however, the overt hostility unleashed by demographic change in other northern urban areas during this period was practically unknown in Youngstown. Moreover, there is no evidence that local Catholic clergy rallied congregations to “save” the neighborhood when confronted with the “threat” of a “move-in,” which happened frequently in major metropolitan areas like Chicago. At the same time, the community’s racist conventions were scrupulously maintained throughout the 1950s. Mel Watkins observes that coming of age in Youngstown exposed him to “a subtle, seemingly inexplicable sense of outwardly imposed restraint and negation of self-worth.” He writes that this atmosphere left him with the sensation of “being trapped in one of Franz Kafka’s nightmarish fictional allegories,” where “defiance seemed imprudent unless one were himself willing to be labeled a troublemaker, deviant, or psychotic.” Watkins points out that racial discrimination within the larger community was often softened by a prevailing aura of

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184 Ibid.
185 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 105-106.
social harmony. As long as Blacks operated within certain perimeters, they could expect to be treated with a level of courtesy that existed nowhere south of the Mason-Dixon Line. In an especially revealing passage, Watkins describes the cheerful manner in which Youngstown’s policies of racial segregation were enforced. At the age of 12, he arrived late for a film at a downtown movie theater and, without thinking, took a seat in the orchestra section. Watkins recalls that a White usher “calmly walked over, smiled, and said, ‘I’m sorry, sir. I’m going to have to ask you to sit upstairs. It’s theater policy, you know.’” The author adds: “It was all done so courteously that, as I stood to leave, I felt a sudden obligation to thank him. Nearly asked if there was anything I could do for him. After all, it was my place—where I had intended to sit all along.”

When Black families moved into traditional ethnic enclaves, retreating Whites often observed that the neighborhood was “changing,” a term that subtly conflated economic and demographic transformation. Such coded language enabled Whites to express their anxieties about demographic change in a manner that, on the one hand, communicated their feelings of concern, while on the other, shielding them from the stigma of overt racism. Given that racially diverse urban neighborhoods were “red-lined” by banking agencies, many White residents undoubtedly felt justified in treating economic and demographic changes as interchangeable developments. The discriminatory policies of local financial institutions, after all, were closely aligned with those of the federal government. As Jackson observes, the FHA “helped to turn the

187 Ibid., 146.
building industry against the minority and inner-city housing market, and its policies supported the income and racial segregation of suburbia.”

By declaring urban neighborhoods “ineligible” for loan guarantees, the FHA “exhorted segregation and enshrined it as public policy.”

Meanwhile, many Black families who found themselves in majority-White neighborhoods were intimidated—at least initially—by their new, alien, surroundings. Ida Carter, a Black public schoolteacher who continues to reside on Youngstown’s south side, was a member of the first Black family to move into a home located on the main artery of Glenwood Avenue. She recalled in an interview that “it was strange for me, because being on the south side in 1959 was strange for Black people.” She added, almost ominously, “I was living [in a home] surrounded by White people.” Despite these verbal images of encirclement, however, Mrs. Carter went on to describe mainly harmonious relationships with White neighbors. “We moved up there, and the people embraced us,” she said. “As a matter of fact the family on one side of us took my brothers and taught them how to fix washing machines.” Mrs. Carter indicated that these neighbors “really put in my brothers a sense of working,” so that “they didn’t hang out on the streets.” The neighborhood impressed her as peaceful and pleasant. “No shootings,” she said. “No loud music. It was just nice.”

After recounting her upbringing and

188 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 213.
189 Ibid.
190 Ida Carter, interview by the author, May 4, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
191 Ibid.
schooling in positive terms, Mrs. Carter added, with a tone of finality, “I don’t have any horror stories.”\textsuperscript{192} The surrounding neighborhood, she recalled, was “gorgeous,” leafy and well maintained. “I mean it was just beautiful to walk up the street and see all the beautiful grass and the trees and the flowers,” she said. “And I know during the ‘60s, there was a lot of trouble. But we didn’t see it as kids.”\textsuperscript{193}

Without exception, Mrs. Carter compared the south side’s past favorably to its almost unrelievably bleak present. She described the current condition of her childhood neighborhood in the following terms: “The houses are torn down…. [I]t is like a completely different place. It feels like I’m out of town, because this is not the neighborhood we grew up in.”\textsuperscript{194} While she now lives in a south-side residential district that borders the affluent suburb of Boardman, Mrs. Carter admitted that she no longer benefits from the feelings of safety and security that she took for granted while growing up. She wistfully recalled sleeping on the front porch of her parents’ home “because we didn’t have air conditioning.” Then, in the same breath, she described the radically altered atmosphere of today’s south side. “We could sleep out on the porch all night long—I mean on Glenwood Avenue,” she said. “Windows open all night. You wouldn’t dare do that now.” Mrs. Carter revealed that, in her current neighborhood, she often fears for her safety. “[W]hen we bought our house up there, it was in the wintertime,” she recalled. “So, it was quiet. And we thought, ‘Oh, boy, this is really nice.’ But that

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
spring, all these...little boys [were] driving up the street, playing loud music.” Today, she hears “shootings every night,” and her grandchildren often “have to hit the floor” during the evening. “And we live in a decent neighborhood, we thought,” she added. “So, yes, it’s changed.”

In the grim aftermath of the 1960s, it has become easier for older Black urban dwellers to downplay memories of discriminatory practices that were ubiquitous. The past may have held its own trials, but for many, these have been eclipsed by the poverty and senseless violence that plague today’s center city. In the late 1970s, a *Vindicator* article on the “Monkey’s Nest,” a multiracial neighborhood that was destroyed amid local highway construction, featured comments by African Americans who described high levels of interracial cooperation. “Everybody, black and white, got along real well and we felt like we were taking care of our own little kingdom,” said Mrs. Deborah Williams, a former resident of the district. Such observations are undoubtedly sincere, but they often fail to take into account the manner in which institutional discrimination shaped and delimited interracial relations. Indeed, a fair number of African Americans seemed unfazed by the racist conventions of the postwar era even as they experienced them. In his memoir, Watkins recalls that as a preteen, he was largely oblivious to the many instances of segregation he encountered on a daily basis. “I, for one, had no idea that in the South, and presumably among many in Youngstown, the balcony [in movie theaters] was known as the ‘buzzard’s nest’ or ‘nigger heaven,’” he writes. “At the same time, it

195 Ibid.
didn’t matter.” Watkins also relates that he was unconcerned about the fact that “most downtown restaurants did not serve Negroes or that blacks were not welcome at the city’s hotels.”197 He recalls that the Youngstown’s Idora Park Ballroom was “roped off into two sections” so that “no blacks wandered into the white section near the bandstand.”198 He adds, however, that White patrons “regularly strayed into or hovered near the fringes of the black section to watch, loosen up, and learn how to shake their booties.”199

Then, in the 1950s, when he was in his early teens, the humiliation of a close friend forced Watkins to acknowledge the dehumanizing effects of racial discrimination. One afternoon, classmate Al Bright was invited to a Little League picnic held at a municipal park, and lifeguards stopped him from entering the swimming pool area because of his race. Finally, in response to the complaints and objections of Bright’s coach and teammates, the park superintendent reluctantly permitted the teenager to enter the pool, although under carefully outlined conditions. Watkins described what happened next: “When the [pool] area was cleared, Al was led to the pool and placed in a small rubber raft. One lifeguard waded in and, swimming alongside the raft, took Al for one turn around the pool. ‘Just don’t touch the water,’ he warned. ‘Whatever you do, don’t touch the water.’”200 While it seems likely that many African Americans tried to avoid situations that underscored their subordinate status in a White-dominated society, Al Bright’s experience suggests this was a challenging task. In a community where racism

197 Watkins, Dancing With Strangers, 133.
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid, 128.
was endemic, it was difficult—if not impossible—to remain insulated from policies and practices that were destined to leave behind emotional scars.

The “Whitening” of Youngstown’s Ethnic Europeans

The unequal social arrangements that Watkins described were reinforced in the community’s industrial workplaces, particularly in its steel-manufacturing plants. There, the appearance of interracial cooperation camouflaged the presence of a well-articulated racial hierarchy. As sociologist Robert Bruno notes, steelworkers of the same racial or ethnic background invariably held positions of similar status, and African-American and Latino workers “were concentrated in the coke works, cinder plant, and blast furnace,” those “parts of the mill [that] were traditionally thought of as outposts for unwanted jobs.”

Prior to the 1960s, Whites were also segregated according to ethnicity, given that “work assignments tended to tribalize the working class in different departments.” Bruno explains that, in the industrial workplace, “Italians were masons, Irishmen tended to be railroaders, Hungarians and Slovaks congregated around the open hearth, and foremen were usually ‘Johnny Bull’ English.” The realities of industrial production, however, made a thoroughly segregated work force impractical, and managers recognized the benefits of fostering smooth relations among workers of different backgrounds. Job occupancy continued to be “associated with ethnicity,” but the work environment was subtly restructured in ways that facilitated greater integration among various groups.

202 Ibid, 73.
203 Ibid.
“Most craft workers were not restricted to one part of the plant,” Bruno writes. “White masons, millwrights, and electricians would go anywhere a breakdown was reported.” Hence, the “plant was opened up because of the need for skilled workers to work everywhere and the need for laborers to always be on site.”

In this altered climate, the ethnic tensions that once prevailed among White industrial workers gradually subsided. Workers became more attentive to racial differences, a development consistent with the breakdown of old ethnic identities within the larger society. Moreover, in a process that began with the tightening of immigration quotas in the 1920s, the United States was being re-conceptualized as a nation of “Blacks” and “Whites.” Decades earlier, America had been viewed as a land of multiple races, some of whom were granted “whiteness,” even as they were carefully differentiated from the dominant “Anglo-Saxon” population. “As the ‘Negro Question’ steadily eclipsed every other race question on the national agenda between the 1930s and the 1950s,” Matthew Frye Jacobsen writes, “the interracial coalitions that formed—on the left and in labor unions, within churches, and within the Democratic Party—increasingly assumed a racially unvariegated group of whites to be precisely such a pre-existing, static, and self-evident entity.”

Significantly, the “whitening” of ethnic European Americans often occurred in the context of struggles with African Americans. Stefano Luconi, in his descriptive analysis of growing solidarity among once hostile ethnic

204 Ibid.
groups in Philadelphia, argues that the city’s “Italian Americans and Irish Americans [had] developed a common identity out of their tendency to hold African Americans responsible for the deterioration of their own standards of living.” Speaking in more general terms, he points out that “the consolidation around whiteness among European Americans resulted primarily from their demonization of blacks for most social and economic problems of postwar United States.”

In the White imagination, the myriad trends that had helped to undermine cities like Youngstown were ignored in favor of a single perceived causal factor: demographic change. The influx of Blacks into urban working-class neighborhoods left many Whites frustrated and angry. Few were prepared to objectively examine the range of developments that had transformed the city. Such trends included the relocation of industry and retail businesses to expanding suburbs, which left urban areas with shrinking tax bases and fewer jobs, and the implementation of urban renewal and highway construction projects, which destroyed once vibrant residential and commercial districts. Many Whites who saw cherished neighborhoods fall into disrepair blamed this outcome on the perceived values of African-American newcomers, who, in their view, showed no desire to improve their situation. One former south-side resident described his feelings of dismay as he watched his old neighborhood decline in the late 1960s. “I almost had a

207 Ibid.
feeling of abandonment, that we had abandoned it, not the people that came in,” he
recalled. “I still drive down Myrtle Avenue…just to look at…my [former] house,” he
added. “And I want so badly to go to the house where I was born and ask the people if I
could come in. And I’m a little afraid to. It’s a badass neighborhood. But I did sense
that we left…you know. And then, my mother said to me…she said, ‘Yes, sonny, but
why can’t they pick up the milk cartons?’”

Attitudes of resentment toward Blacks were especially strong among ethnic
Whites, who were disproportionately affected by urban demographic change. As Sister
Margaret Ellen Traxler observes, in a 1969 article, most of the four million southern
Blacks who migrated to northern cities between 1930 and 1968 “settled close to industrial
areas where jobs and housing were available.”

“This is where nationality groups also
were located, with the subsequent ‘threat to white property owners,” she continues.
“Social patterns of neighborhoods and parish ‘life styles’ changed as Negroes moved
in.” In the wake of demographic change, “the great migration of Catholics to suburbia
left behind emptying schools and churches.”
The perception among many Whites that
Black migration had “wrecked” the cities deepened as urban neighborhoods became more
impoverished, more dangerous, and less populated. In “Rust Belt” communities like
Youngstown, these urban trends were compounded by the collapse of staple industries,

208 T. Gordon Welsh, interview by the author, May 1, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection,
#314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
which further destabilized working-class neighborhoods that had survived into the late 1970s.

Demographic Change Dovetails with Urban Decline

Racial tension, if somewhat understated during the 1950s, was forced to the surface by the trends of the following decade. The fragile (and deceptive) stability of the immediate postwar era eroded as time moved on, and by the early 1960s, most urban dwellers were aware of unsettling developments. Yet, more subtle indicators of urban change were evident to close observers by the late 1940s. As Sugrue notes in his study of Detroit, the decline of cities in the country’s manufacturing belt began in the post-World War II era. Across the nation’s traditional industrial belt, “major companies reduced work forces, speeded up production, and required more overtime work.” Sugrue observes that the heavy industries “that formed the bedrock of the American economy, including textiles, electrical appliances, motor vehicles, and military hardware, automated production and relocated plants in suburban and rural areas, and increasingly in the low-wage labor markets of underdeveloped regions like the American South and the Caribbean.” Significantly, sweeping structural changes in the economy “proceeded with the full support and encouragement of the American government.”

In Youngstown, these larger economic trends coincided with the disappearance of the old industrial aristocracy. As Fuechtmann writes, postwar-era Youngstown “saw virtually a total

exodus of the old iron and steel elite from the city.”

In the end, the departure of the city’s latter-day patricians signaled a steep reduction in local ownership of area industry, a development that would have dire consequences for the Mahoning Valley.

Crucially, these trends dovetailed with a significant shift of population from the city to the expanding suburbs. In 1954, the local media reported that the adjacent suburban community of Boardman Township had nearly doubled in population, jumping from 7,881 in 1940, to an estimated 18,000 14 years later. Youngstown, on the other hand, experienced negligible growth. A newspaper article reported that the county’s population went from 240,251 in 1940 to 257,629 in 1950—an increase of 17,378.” The article added, however that the increase “was almost wholly in unincorporated areas, where about 17,000 people took up residence.” Youngstown proper had gained only 610 people, while nearby Campbell (formerly East Youngstown) lost 921. Less than a year later, Clyde E. McGranahan, executive secretary of the Home Builders Association of the Mahoning Valley, predicted that Greater Youngstown would “continue to grow as a ‘horizontal’ city, spilling further into the suburbs instead of growing up ‘vertically’ like New York and some other major cities.” The media attributed this population shift to the obvious advantages of suburban living. “In the past people either lived in cities or out in the country,” one newspaper article observed. “Now they live their country life with

213 Fuechtmann, Steeples and Stacks, 22.
214 Ibid., 23.
216 Ibid.
all—or nearly all—the comforts and conveniences of the city.” Close proximity to the cities ensured that suburban dwellers could “get the sewage and other benefits of city life plus some room to move around in.”\textsuperscript{218}

The apparent advantages of suburban living, however, were not the only draw for the tens of thousands of Whites who retreated from the cities. As Linkon and Russo point out, “suburbanization was fueled in part by racism, which had long been reinforced by hiring practices in the mills.”\textsuperscript{219} As more Catholics fled the city for the suburbs, old ethnic enclaves such as those in Haselton, Brier Hill, and Smoky Hollow began to deteriorate. Linkon and Russo go on to describe the scenario that unfolded in Youngstown’s increasingly beleaguered center city. “While ethnic working-class enclaves broke down, once racially integrated neighborhoods became more segregated,” they write. “The process was supported by lending and real estate practices, which kept black home buyers from even looking at homes in the new suburbs, much less being approved for home loans.”\textsuperscript{220} At the same time, deepening economic disparity between Black and White workers inhibited the mobility of Youngstown’s African-American residents. Not only were Blacks traditionally relegated to the lowest-paying jobs in steel mills; they also failed to benefit proportionately from postwar-era practices like collective bargaining, which included seniority provisions that tended to favor White workers.\textsuperscript{221}

All of these factors restricted the residential options of Blacks and contributed to the

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\textsuperscript{218} “Shift to Suburbs Shown in Population Figures,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, August 1, 1954.
\textsuperscript{219} Linkon and Russo, \textit{Steeltown U.S.A.}, 42.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
transformation of traditional ethnic neighborhoods, whose churches and parish schools remained in place even as their patrons moved elsewhere.

Meanwhile, tensions that were suppressed in earlier decades became shockingly apparent in the 1960s. Physical confrontations between Blacks and Whites became more common, and local African-American leaders were increasingly assertive in their criticism of racist policies and practices. Although Youngstown was spared the devastating violence witnessed in many other cities after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., some rioting occurred in pockets of the south side. Notably, a confrontation between mostly White police officers and Black youths erupted on the afternoon of April 8, 1968, just four days after Dr. King’s murder. The incident served as the jarring conclusion of a day that had opened with an act of hopeful idealism. A few hours earlier, 200 Black youths had participated in a peaceful march from a south side playground to the Mahoning County Courthouse, in the city’s downtown. The group, under police escort, crossed over the Market Street to the downtown area, where they listened to a series of speeches by local Black leaders who spoke on the theme of Black unity. When the event ended at 12:15 p.m., the youths, most of whom were members of a local Baptist congregation, returned to the south side.222

Within hours of the march, police took steps to break up a larger crowd of Black youths gathered at a south side intersection. According to witnesses on the scene, the police used greater force than required to disperse the crowd, and a riot ensued. The

222 Patricia Meade, “Remembering the rage: Angry blacks were ‘emulating what their peer groups were doing in bigger cities,’ one official said,” The Vindicator, April 6, 2008, 1.
municipal government promptly requested the assistance of the National Guard, which set up headquarters at the Christy Armory, located just north of Youngstown’s downtown area. Over the next few days, dozens of local businesses were looted, scores of schools and homes were vandalized, and three men were seriously injured, including two White police officers and a young Black man who had been accused of firing on police. Images of armed troops and a military tank moving through the streets of the south side did little to improve the area’s image and may have accelerated pre-existing patterns of “White flight.”

Reaching Across the Racial Divide

Given the widespread violence of the 1960s, it is sometimes easy to forget that the era witnessed courageous efforts to reconcile divided Black and White communities. On April 7, 1968, one day before rioting broke out on the city’s south side, local residents came together to mourn Dr. King’s assassination. More than 3,000 people of various backgrounds gathered for an interfaith religious service at Stambaugh Auditorium, an imposing neo-Classical building on Youngstown’s north side, where they paid tribute to the fallen civil rights leader’s life and work. The service, while led by the Reverend Lonnie Simon, the Black pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, featured the participation of a half-dozen area religious leaders. These leaders included Monsignor Breen P. Malone, the White pastor of St. Patrick’s Church, a parish situated in the heart of the

223 “City Curfew Stands, Guard Curbs Disorder: 2 Officers Are Shot in Hillman St.,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 9, 1968, 1.
224 “3,000 Attend Service for Dr. King Here,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 8, 1968, 1.
city’s racially divided south side. Monsignor Breen—an intense, balding man who physically resembled the Catholic mystic, Thomas Merton—was no stranger to the cause of civil rights. The priest was one of hundreds of White clergy and religious who had marched with Dr. King in Selma, Alabama, in 1965. As a pastor whose commitment to social justice went beyond sermonizing, Monsignor Malone won a great deal of respect within Youngstown’s Black community. At the same time, the pastor’s participation in an interfaith ceremony to honor the late Dr. King bore witness to a dramatic sea change that had taken place within the U.S. Catholic Church since the 1950s. This change was especially evident at the leadership level, where the “neutrality” of the past was giving way to strong official support for racial equality. In 1958, American bishops had issued a statement condemning racial discrimination, and in the altered climate that ensued, several Louisiana-based segregationists were excommunicated. Then, in 1964, Pope Paul VI, in a departure from his often cautious approach to polarizing issues, took a symbolic stand in favor of the U.S. civil rights movement by agreeing to hold an audience with Dr. King. Soon afterwards, signs appeared that the U.S. Catholic hierarchy’s long history of tolerating “local traditions” was coming to an end. In March 1965, as hundreds of White Catholics flooded into Selma to answer Dr. King’s call for support, Bishop Thomas Toolen of the Mobile-Birmingham area publicly criticized what he described as “outside agitators.”

225 “Clergy, Civic Leaders Attend Memorial for Dr. King,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 8, 1968, 8, photographic spread with captions.
226 Italiano, interview.
227 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 133.
The bishop’s pronouncement rang hollow, however, given that the most visible White leader in the local civil rights movement was Father Maurice Ouellet, the pastor of a church based in Toolen’s own diocese. Within days, Bishop Toolen faced a more damaging challenge to his leadership. Shortly before Dr. King’s march on Selma, Joseph Cardinal Ritter offered his blessing to scores of St. Louis clergy and religious who had “chartered two planes directly to Selma.”

As McGreevy writes, “priests from fifty different dioceses, lay people, and nuns flocked to Alabama to join the marches.” This event stunned many Catholics, who were accustomed to clergy and religious who carefully avoided taking stands on potentially divisive political issues. “Issues of social justice took center stage in the 1960s, as crusades on behalf of civil rights, women’s rights, and peace swept across the landscape,” Dolan observes. “These social movements for reform attracted many Catholics, and before long the Catholic religious community became a major player in the reform movements of the 1960s.”

Ironically, as U.S. Catholic leaders began to speak out more forcefully against institutional racism, many of them faced challenges that were directly related to urban demographic change. As Black non-Catholics replaced White Catholics in center-city neighborhoods, urban parishes and parochial schools lost their most reliable patrons. During this period, the media referred with greater frequency to a Catholic school “bind,” which was gradually promoted to a “crisis.” Newspaper reports on the plight of urban

228 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 155.
229 Ibid., 221.
230 Dolan, In Search of an American Catholicism, 198.
parochial schools generally focused on factors such as rising per pupil costs and declining birth rates. By the early 1970s, news reports also cited the effects of falling enrollment, which was attributed to the recent introduction of tuition. The 1971 closure and sale of St. Patrick School’s 17-year-old annex on the south side of Youngstown became a stark symbol of the “boom-to-bust” scenario that was unfolding in many urban parish school districts. While all of the trends highlighted in the media contributed in some way to the decline of urban parochial schools, newspaper reports often failed to mention another factor: the demographic shift taking place in neighborhoods where a number of these parish schools operated.

A clear indication of growing diversity within the classrooms of local Catholic school came in 1973, when the Youngstown Diocesan Board of Education announced its adoption of a resolution to forbid discrimination in diocesan high schools. The board also announced plans to develop a more inclusive secondary school curriculum. As the article points out, diocesan Catholic schools—both elementary and secondary—had signed annual compliance forms on non-discrimination since the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and such compliance was a precondition to receive funding for federal programs. Nevertheless, the board’s decision to adopt the resolution to ban discriminatory policies in Catholic high schools, along with steps to redefine the philosophy and objectives of

secondary education, signaled a heightened awareness of civil rights issues among local Catholic leaders.

During the early 1970s, a number of financially struggling urban parish schools also benefited from the public and private support of Bishop James Malone, who encouraged wealthy Catholic patrons to fund center-city institutions like Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick’s elementary schools. Indeed, Bishop Malone’s commitment to urban parish schools was evident from the outset of his tenure as leader of the Diocese of Youngstown. In 1973, the bishop emphasized that the diocese had a moral responsibility to maintain parish schools operating in “poverty areas,” and he specifically mentioned St. Patrick’s Elementary School, which served a large percentage of non-White students.²³⁴ On the bishop’s recommendation, the diocesan school board unanimously approved a resolution that St. Patrick’s School should remain open for at least three more years, “subject to an annual review of its financial situation and enrollment.”²³⁵ The board also passed a resolution that the diocese had “a commitment to provide Catholic education in those schools of the diocese that serve poverty areas and promote this education as a missionary service of the church.”²³⁶ Another resolution established a 15-member committee “to determine which schools are in poverty areas, what type of aide might be given and what students are to be served.” This committee was charged with recommending policy decisions “regarding schools with increasing

²³⁵ Ibid.
²³⁶ Ibid.
proportions of non-Catholics; regarding schools in parishes no longer able to meet all of their financial obligations, and schools serving the poor in increasing numbers.”

As the passage of these resolutions suggest, the rising number of non-Catholic, non-White students in some urban parish schools presented diocesan administrators with an unprecedented set of financial challenges. The demographic shift that had occurred within the once heavily White, Catholic neighborhoods of the south and east sides ensured that urban parishes would lose members and, by extension, donation dollars. By the late 1970s, this trend was reflected in the growing insolvency of Immaculate Conception Elementary School, located on the city’s racially diverse east side. The school, based in a neighborhood once populated by Irish- and Italian-American Catholics, now served a substantial percentage of students who did not belong to the parish. Records show that by 1976, 144 of the parish school’s 327 students were non-Catholic, and many of them belonged to minority groups. In an effort to offset the school’s deepening financial problems, supporters of Immaculate Conception proposed the implementation of a diocesan-wide tax to benefit struggling center-city parish schools. As it turned out, the proposal tested the limits of the diocese’s support for such schools and stirred an emotional debate among members of the diocesan school board, who were struggling with the dual challenges of rising expenses and declining enrollment.

237 Ibid.
238 Marie Aikenhead, “Board Refuses School Funding: Votes Against Inner City Aid,” The Youngstown Vindicator, November 17, 1976, 1.
In the fall of 1976, during a meeting held at Immaculate Conception School, the board voted six-to-five against the proposal. Opponents of the proposed tax included Raymond Pelanda, chair of the diocesan finance committee, who argued that the diocese’s overwhelming economic difficulties ruled out the possibility of supplemental aid to beleaguered center-city parishes. Pelanda’s view triumphed despite the opposition of then Auxiliary Bishop William Hughes, who favored the tax. (This would be neither the first nor the last time that the clergy and laity disagreed on the amount of financial support the diocese should devote to urban parish schools.) Bishop Hughes, a former superintendent of the diocesan school board, framed assistance to struggling urban parish schools as a social “obligation” to the community’s underprivileged. Pelanda, however, was unconvinced by this argument and responded that the “poor and minorities can get an education in the public schools.” The finance chair (and his supporters) evidently feared that the diocese was ill-equipped to support the growing number of urban parish schools that served non-traditional student populations. In Youngstown alone, two schools served large numbers of non-Catholics. Less than one year later, in April 1977, the *Vindicator* reported that 52 percent of the students at St. Patrick’s School were non-Catholic, while almost 60 percent were African American. At Immaculate Conception School, more than 43 percent of the students were reported to be non-Catholic, and

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239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
almost 38 percent were Black. Ultimately, it was only the last-minute intervention of local clerical leaders that prevented the closure of Immaculate Conception Elementary School.

The debate over supplemental aid to urban parish schools was one of many controversial issues the diocese was forced to address in the 1970s. Even as demographic change undermined the viability of certain urban parochial schools, the desegregation of Youngstown’s public schools prompted some civic leaders to question whether White-dominated Catholic schools would function as “havens” for European-American students seeking to avoid integrated classrooms. In the spring of 1974, not long after the local NAACP called for the desegregation of Youngstown’s public schools, John Augenstein, the diocesan superintendent of schools, issued a public statement. “Some people wanting to avoid desegregation will want to enroll their children in our schools,” Augenstein stated. “This we must avoid. We should not become havens for them.” At the same time, Monsignor William Hughes, a strong supporter of urban parish schools, spoke on the need to develop registration and enrollment guidelines that would discourage Whites from using Catholic schools as a means to avoid desegregation. Several weeks later, the diocese announced the adoption of application guidelines regulating “new and

244 Ibid.
transfer students to Catholic schools.”

These guidelines required meetings between parents of any student to be transferred and the principal of the parochial school in question. In addition, parish school administrators were expected to contact the principal of the public school from which the student planned to transfer, in an effort to determine possible reasons for the proposed transfer. Amid dwindling enrollment, however, it is questionable whether urban parish schools were in a position to reject applicants their administrators suspected of seeking to avoid integrated public classrooms. Meanwhile, the guidelines may have angered some Catholic parents, who resented having to “prove” that they weren’t racists.

Parish Schools as a “Foreign Presence” in Black Neighborhoods

Controversies that hinged upon the subject of race multiplied as the decade progressed. Given that urban parish schools played a larger role in the lives of urban Black families, some local leaders began to raise questions about the dearth of African-American leaders in the U.S. Catholic Church, while others pointed to a sharp decline in the percentage of non-Whites among Catholic parishioners. In 1975, critics observed that less than one million Black parishioners were reported nationwide. Although this figure represents a modest improvement upon the situation in the early 20th century (when only two percent of African Americans described themselves as Catholics), many observers claimed that the Catholic Church was “rapidly dying in the black

247 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 7.
Surprisingly, this perceived downward trend coincided with a sharp rise in the number of Black students attending urban parish schools. These apparently divergent trends prompted some observers to question whether the Catholic Church was doing everything in its power to appeal to members of the Black community, and a few went so far as to suggest that evangelizing Blacks was a low priority among Catholic religious leaders. This view was widely disseminated in the Youngstown area during the mid-1970s. In a series of feature articles published in the *Vindicator* in the late summer of 1975, Leon Stennis, the newspaper’s religion editor, posed a number of searching questions to local Catholic leaders, some of whom were connected to urban parish schools.

Stennis, an African American, often reported on relations between local White Catholic leaders and the Black community—a natural inclination, given the area’s large White Catholic population and expanding Black Protestant population. Following a series of interviews with five local Catholic leaders, the journalist concluded that only two of the interviewees had expressed a strong interest in converting Blacks to the Catholic faith. These leaders included Monsignor Breen Malone, whose parish, St. Patrick’s Church, recorded the largest percentage of Black parishioners in Youngstown—an unprecedented 10 percent. In the course of an interview with Stennis, Monsignor Malone called upon the diocese to “develop a policy that would ensure the future presence of many black people in its membership,” adding that “the very presence of

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blacks and whites, and all colors of men, in the Catholic Church is its best claim to being Catholic or universal.” Monsignor Malone’s position was evidently shared by Sister Charlotte Italiano, principal of St. Patrick’s Elementary School, who stated that the church was not doing everything in its power to reach out to minority groups. “I…just don’t feel we can be content when we are in places where what we do and what we believe can be questioned,” Sister Charlotte said. “If the church would go outside of its structure we would expose more people to what we are all about and what the Kingdom of God is all about.”

Stennis’ series of articles is more critical of the other three Catholic leaders who participated in interviews and takes them to task for what he describes as their “indifference” to the possibility of converting Blacks through ministries that included urban parish schools. Two of these Catholic leaders were connected to a parish school that served large numbers of Black students. In one article, the journalist suggested that Father John R. Summers, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, and Sister Theresa Winsen, O.S.U., principal of Immaculate Conception School, were satisfied with the church’s existing level of outreach to Blacks. In reaching this conclusion, Stennis referred to their own comments, which seemed to suggest that the church “should not make a special appeal to any specific group.” This criticism of local religious leaders undoubtedly angered many area Catholics as well as those Black urban dwellers who

250 Ibid.
251 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
benefited from the activities of Immaculate Conception Church. The pastor and principal had earned strong reputations as advocates of the poor, mostly Black, families that lived on Youngstown’s near east side. Father Summers was a visible proponent of increased diocesan support for center-city parish schools, while Sister Theresa had made headlines five years earlier when she addressed city council members about the need to extend sewage and water lines to the poverty-stricken neighborhoods surrounding Immaculate Conception Parish. Yet, Stennis’ article not only failed to highlight their contributions to the Black community; it went on to suggest that Father Summers and Sister Theresa treated African Americans as clients of—rather than as potential leaders within—the local Catholic community.

Father Nathan Willis, a Black priest active in the Youngstown area, shared many of Stennis’ concerns about the church’s relationship with the African-American community. The priest suggested that the institution’s failure to attract Blacks was rooted in the fact that it remained “entirely foreign, a closed society enclosed in a black environment.” Father Willis also contended that few White pastors working in urban areas took steps to modify the liturgy in ways that would appeal to Black parishioners. “The blacks have an identity, a culture, and heritage which we value very highly,” he said. “And we wish for the day that the church would address itself to these as she has

for the literature and history of the European culture.‖256 Overall, the series of articles
suggests that insensitivity to African-American culture was a problem even among those
Catholic leaders who provided outstanding service to the Black community. “The
diocese is not at this time concerned enough with the ‘foreign’ image of the church in the
community in which it serves,” Stennis contended.257 He went on to question the
diocese’s long-term commitment “to maintaining its two inner-city schools that have
large black enrollments”—an obvious reference to Immaculate Conception and St.
Patrick’s elementary schools.258

Leon Stennis’ criticism of the Diocese of Youngstown for its failure to turn urban
parochial schools into instruments of religious conversion might strike modern-day
readers as ironic. In subsequent decades, urban parochial schools earned the praise of
secular educators for their understated approach to proselytizing, their high academic
standards, and their apparent commitment to broader civic goals. Nevertheless, the
journalist’s complaints paralleled those expressed by Black Catholic leaders of the
period, despite the fact that Stennis himself was not a Catholic. Paradoxically, the
church’s efforts in the realm of evangelization began to falter at a time when White
Catholic leaders were becoming more vocal in their support of racial equality. Prior to
the upheavals of the 1960s, the U.S. Catholic Church—despite its failure to actively
address the issue of racial discrimination—took a more activist approach to

256 Ibid.
257 Leon Stennis, “Status Quo for ‘Church of St. Peter’: Catholic Diocese Should Lead the Way To
258 Ibid.
evangelization within the Black community. As McGreevy writes, “One of the most remarkable achievements of the pre-conciliar era had been the development of an African American Catholic community.” Given that Catholic parishes were traditionally defined in geographical terms, “structures remained even as the original parishioners fled particular areas.” McGreevy stresses that, in an era marked by active evangelization, it was hardly inevitable that these urban facilities would sit idle, and indeed, a surprising number of them were transformed into vibrant Black parishes. By the late 1950s, McGreevy notes, “researchers counted 600,000 African-American Catholics, over 3 percent of the African-American population and double the total of 1928.” Although he acknowledges that many Black Catholics of the early 1960s were “cradle” Catholics (hailing mainly from Louisiana or the West Indies), McGreevy emphasizes that “an equal number were converts.” “In the first year of that decade, about half of the nation’s 700,000 African American Catholics lived in the northern cities, but almost 12,000 converts a year were being added to the rolls,” he writes. By the close of the 1960s, however, “the mass baptisms of the past slowed to a trickle.”

Predictably, many pre-conciliar Black parishes were strictly “Romanist” in their approach to liturgy and made no effort to incorporate elements of African-American

260 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
262 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 59.
264 Ibid.
spirituality into services and sacraments. Any resentment northern Blacks might have felt over the church’s cultural insensitivity, however, was mitigated (at least to some extent) by their awareness of the institution’s interest in attracting Black converts. McGreevy quotes an urban pastor who described African-American neighbors’ positive response to the parish’s door-to-door outreach efforts: “The reaction to that was wonderful...by God, they’d say, you Catholics are really going after us.” By the late 1960s, however, it seemed as though many of those White clergy and religious who were most inspired by the civil rights movement showed almost no interest in building up Black membership in urban parishes. “In contrast to their older mentors, and with some opposition from more conservative parishioners,” McGreevy writes, “a corps of young white priests and nuns rejected the ‘triumphalist’ ethos of African American parishes.” In other words, they were more inclined “to give witness to the Christian faith” than they were to convert Blacks to a specific (Catholic) vision of Christianity. For many activist clergy, “the definition of a successful parish became its ability to address social justice issues.”

Before long, the declining number of African-American Catholics in the post-conciliar era drew the worried attention of prominent Black Catholics. African-American clerical leaders formally expressed their concerns about the decline of the center-city church at a meeting held in Detroit in 1968, just two weeks after the assassination of Dr.

265 Ibid.
266 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 59.
267 Ibid.
Shortly before a national conference of clerical leaders on the “interracial apostolate,” a Black priest invited the nation’s 170 African-American priests and single Black bishop to a “special caucus” to be held during the conference. As a result, more than 60 Black clerical leaders met “as a group for the first time in American history.” As McGreevy writes, “After a full day of unending debate, and four votes, the panel passed a resolution terming the Church ‘primarily a white racist institution’ and demanding African-American control of inner city programs.” Black religious leaders at the caucus went on to describe their frustration over the steep decline in the number of African-American Catholics and complained that they were unable to “provide a ministry for black people in the Church.” Finally, in a move that paralleled trends within the larger African-American community, Black clerical leaders expressed concern that interracial efforts to develop an “overarching religious identity” within the U.S. Catholic community would create an environment in which the church “would become wholly irrelevant to African-American concerns.” In the end, these leaders’ insistence upon equality in the context of the church did not overshadow their commitment to the maintenance of a distinct identity for Black Catholics. Seventeen years later, Black clerical concerns about flagging evangelical efforts in urban neighborhoods were reiterated once again, in the pastoral letter, “What We Have Seen and Heard.”

268 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 224.
269 Ibid.
270 Davis, The History of Black Catholics in the United States, 257.
271 Ibid.
272 Ibid.
273 Ibid, 224-225.
Significantly, the letter emphasizes the role of urban parish schools in proselytizing among African Americans. “The Catholic school remains one of the chief vehicles of evangelization within the Black community,” the letter states. “We even dare to suggest that the efforts made to support them and to insure their continuation are a touchstone of the local Church’s sincerity in the evangelization of the Black community.”

By the 1970s, younger African Americans’ alienation from the U.S. Catholic Church was fueled by many White Catholics’ hostile response to court-ordered school desegregation efforts. Angry reactions to school desegregation were especially evident in heavily Catholic northern cities like Boston, where racial violence stirred up memories of the enmity that had traditionally existed between Blacks and White Catholics. Escalating tension between these groups was no doubt compounded by mutual suspicions that had festered beneath the surface for decades. Not only were African Americans embittered over the prejudice they often experienced at the hands of (mostly Catholic) ethnic Whites; they were also conditioned by many of their own religious leaders to regard the Catholic Church with an attitude of profound distrust. Anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States, after all, was nowhere more resilient than in the staunchly Protestant South: the ancestral home of many northern Blacks.

Hence, a potent combination of racially and religiously motivated distrust permeated the atmosphere of many urban parochial schools that operated in racially

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275 Ibid, 55-61.
diverse neighborhoods. In communities like Youngstown, urban parochial school administrators were often called upon to diffuse misunderstandings that arose between staff members and students and parents. Sister Charlotte Italiano, O.S.U., recalled that some of her most daunting challenges as an administrator came during her tenure as principal of St. Patrick’s Elementary School, which was “turning from an all-White school to a mixed racial environment.” By the mid-1970s, she noted, the neighborhoods surrounding the parish school hosted growing numbers of Black residents, “who were disenfranchised, and who thought they weren’t getting a fair shake…and who became very defensive.”

As a result, teaching Black students often involved taking steps to address attitudes of suspicion that “had been passed on from the parents.” She noted that, while the school’s staff members “did really…try to get around that,” communication with parents was often limited by the fact that many were unable to attend parent-teacher conferences. “Don’t forget, parents also had to work,” Sister Charlotte explained. “So, you had the working poor. And then, you had families where the male was not present for whatever reason. So, the mothers were not only working but [also] trying to keep their kids educated and pay for that education, even though they didn’t have the real finances to do it.”

In this occasionally contentious educational environment, pastoral leadership played an important role in bridge-building efforts. Sister Charlotte stressed that St. Patrick’s School often benefited from the respect that Monsignor Breen Malone enjoyed

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276 Italiano, interview.
277 Ibid.
within the local Black community. “When I worked with people who were very supportive of the changes of the times, I found it very affirming,” she recalled. This was the case with Monsignor Malone, who, in Sister Charlotte’s words, was “very much at the forefront of this ‘let’s get along’ society.” Under his leadership, the parish experienced an emotional turning point in its relationship with the African-American residents of the neighborhood. This came in the mid-1970s, when a Black student at the school disappeared, only to be found dead in a trash receptacle several months later.

“[Monsignor Malone] invited me—and the family invited me—to be part of that funeral service,” Sister Charlotte recalled. “It was the very first time I was ever asked to be part of [something like] that.” Although apprehensive at first, she found that members of the local Black community “were so welcoming, and so happy that a Black pastor and a White pastor and a White principal were taking care of a little eight-year-old child.”

Remaining Viable in a Changing City

Leaders like Monsignor Malone, who worked tirelessly to gain the trust of local African Americans, also tried to persuade skeptical Whites to provide financial support for struggling urban parish schools. Sister Charlotte recalled that Monsignor Malone constantly looked for patrons “to keep the school going, to keep us running, to support the Black people who were there who wanted to come to school, who were not Catholic.”

Although the diocese counted on the support of wealthy White Catholic philanthropists, it was no less important for pastors and educators to issue broad appeals

278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
to the Catholic community. In the course of these fundraising campaigns, advocates of urban parish schools often challenged White, middle-class Catholics to move beyond traditional conceptions of parochial education. To the surprise of many, direct appeals to the Catholic community often proved effective. In 1978, for instance, a fundraising campaign held to benefit Immaculate Conception Elementary School exceeded its $40,000 goal by more than $10,000, ultimately raising $52,000.280

The response of largely Catholic donors remained constant throughout the 1980s, despite the economic devastation brought on by the collapse of the community’s industrial sector. The success of fundraising efforts during this period was no small achievement. The decade, after all, was characterized by a sharp acceleration of urban depopulation, which contributed to a growing percentage of minority groups in urban neighborhoods. In the wake of serial steel-plant closures, Youngstown’s population—recorded at 140,880 in 1970—fell to 115,427 in 1980. Then, between 1986 and 1990, the city’s population declined further, slipping from 104,689 to 95,732.281 While the number of Blacks and Whites living in the city noticeably declined, the White population fell more dramatically. In 1980, Youngstown’s Black population of 38,473 comprised about 33 percent of the total population. A decade later, however, the Black population, which stood at 36,482, constituted about 38 percent of the city’s population. In the same decade, Youngstown’s White population fell by almost 18,000, slipping from 74,269 to

56,760. 282 Many undoubtedly retreated to the outlying suburbs, while others left the metropolitan area altogether.

Ironically, efforts by pastors, principals and diocesan administrators to secure funding for urban parish schools that served mainly non-White and non-Catholic students occurred against a backdrop of rising tension between urban Blacks and Whites. This tension was partly a result of the city’s growing racial (and economic) diversity, which many White urban dwellers perceived as a threat to their safety and economic well-being. Urban Whites were especially concerned about the expansion of low-income housing projects into neighborhoods that were White working- and middle-class enclaves. By the late 1970s, these housing developments were a visible presence in almost every part of the city, with the obvious exception of the west side, which retained a large White population. To the surprise of few, the municipal government’s 1978 announcement that it planned to build low-income housing on the west side inspired a storm of protests from White residents of the district, highlighting the extent to which the city remained divided along racial lines. In October of 1978, during a public hearing on the proposed development, supporters of the Schenley Homes project “felt the brunt of neighboring property owners’ criticism.” 283 One concerned resident, Mrs. Frances Vernini, predicted that the project would bring about the “destruction” of the district’s “stability.” She went on to refer to the proposed duplexes as “barracks-type structures.” Another west-side

283 Tim Yovich, “West Siders Hit Housing Project,” The Youngstown Vindicator, October 26, 1978, 1
resident, Eleanor Donatiello, questioned the viability of the project’s location, pointing out that it bordered an expressway. “We don’t think the developer has much concern for the people who will live on the area,” she said.\textsuperscript{284}

The municipal government responded to the project’s well-organized opposition by abruptly announcing its abandonment. This decision, however, placed the mayor in direct conflict with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).\textsuperscript{285} HUD promptly informed the city that, in order to remain eligible for funding, it must either allow for the construction of the proposed project on its current site or find another suitable location.\textsuperscript{286} By this time, an organization known as the West Side Concerned Citizens Committee was actively distributing a petition to place a referendum on the ballot to halt the project.\textsuperscript{287} Meanwhile, the city’s efforts to relocate the project to the already racially diverse east side met the opposition of the local NAACP and Urban League.\textsuperscript{288} Over the next two years, the municipal government wrangled with HUD, threatening to file a lawsuit against the government agency for “usurping the city’s authority to plan the location of housing projects.”\textsuperscript{289} Nevertheless, in the spring of 1981, groundbreaking began for the housing development (which was renamed as Westview

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{286} “Project Vote Petitions Filed,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, January 20, 1979, 1.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{289} Bertram de Souza, “Groundbreaking for Westview Housing Is Expected This Month,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, April 2, 1981, 4.
Housing), and opponents of the project were forced to concede defeat.\textsuperscript{290} Although the issue of race was never explicitly raised in public debates on the proposed development, references to the project’s potentially “destabilizing” effects may have been intended to inspire images of a White exodus from the city’s remaining European-American enclave. In any event, perceptions of the west side as a White preserve were common among local Blacks. Five years earlier, in 1973, African-American journalist Leon Stennis wrote: “Blacks have shunned that area of the municipality almost as a tradition. Perhaps, because of some imagined and some real hostilities, or in recent years, because of the cultural and racial identity trends.”\textsuperscript{291}

It is unlikely that the controversy surrounding the west-side housing development attracted much attention among White suburbanites, who had become largely indifferent to the problems of the city. Few suburban dwellers, apart from those who were employed in Youngstown, found any reason to travel into the city. At this point, residents of the metropolitan area, including many urban dwellers, preferred suburban shopping malls to the city’s declining downtown retail outlets; and by the mid-1980s, most of Youngstown’s department stores had closed their doors. Likewise, downtown restaurants and drinking establishments, with rare exceptions, failed to draw suburban patrons. In the 1980s, Boardman-based mall developer Edward J. DeBartolo could state with

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.
confidence that the suburban township had become “the new downtown.” Hence, within less than a decade, a blue-collar community that had taken pride in its egalitarian traditions was transformed into a community of “haves” and have-nots,” with most of the former ensconced in surrounding suburbs. The fact that a disproportionate percentage of the area’s “have-nots” were people of color undoubtedly deepened the community’s longstanding racial divide. Meanwhile, Youngstown’s deteriorating downtown district, once a showcase of the city’s vitality, highlighted the extent to which the community’s White elites had “written off” the center city.

In this climate, urban parish schools fared somewhat better than one might expect. While suburbanites took an increasingly dim view of the city and seemed unconcerned about problems connected to racial inequality, nontraditional urban parochial schools were consistently able to secure the donations required to keep them open. These schools benefited, at least to some extent, from the fact that they appealed to individuals across the ideological spectrum. Political conservatives, who often characterized the public school system as “monopolistic,” were inclined to view the success of urban parochial schools as “a prime rationale for school choice.” Religious conservatives, meanwhile, pointed to the achievements of urban parish schools when arguing for the efficacy of “faith-based initiatives.” Liberal Catholic laypeople and religious, as noted, viewed the

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293 Youniss and Convey, Catholic Schools at the Crossroads, 1.
schools as a manifestation of the church’s commitment to social justice. Finally, urban Catholic schools benefited from the positive attention they received from many educational researchers. Beginning in the early 1980s, a flurry of influential empirical studies compared urban Catholic schools favorably to urban public schools, indicating that they were unusually effective at boosting achievement levels among minority, at-risk students.

Urban Catholic Schools as Vehicles of Social Uplift

Although beleaguered urban parish schools were often described as “mission” schools, it was clear that their supporters also regarded them as vehicles of social uplift for disadvantaged groups. The expanded mission of these schools reflected a dramatic sea change within the U.S. Catholic Church. This change was driven, in large part, by the ecumenical spirit of the Second Vatican Council, but it also drew sustenance from the democratic principles that were advocated almost two centuries earlier by John Carroll, the first American bishop. In the 1960s, the American Catholic Church appeared to be moving toward Bishop Carroll’s vision of an institution “engaged in contemporary culture and conveying a vision of what society could and should be.” In earlier decades, the American church seemed “more concerned about the welfare of its own

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295 Ibid., 57.
296 Ibid., 9-10.
297 Ibid., 34.
members, many of them immigrants, than with molding the national society.”

After Vatican II, however, Catholics took on a more active role in the public sphere. “An educated and thoughtful laity was thus ready to respond to the new challenges the Second Vatican Council opened up in the early 1960s,” notes Robert N. Bellah and his co-authors. “The unprecedented ecumenical cooperation that brought Catholics together with Protestants and Jews in a number of joint endeavors from the period of the Civil Rights movement to the present has created a new atmosphere in American religious life.”

Over the years, the nontraditional urban parish schools that grew up in the wake of Vatican II caught the attention of scholars, especially educational researchers, who once ignored the phenomenon of U.S. Catholic schools. Although much of the earliest research on Catholic education focused on secondary schools, these studies invariably raised the profile of urban parochial elementary schools. In 1982, Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore published their influential study, *High School Achievement: Public and Private Schools*, which concludes that Catholic schools produced relatively high levels of achievement, were less racially segregated, and created an atmosphere in which academic achievement was less dependent on family background. A preliminary draft of the “Coleman Report” served as the database for Andrew Greeley’s 1982 study, *Catholic

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299 Ibid.
300 Bryk et al., *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, 57.
High Schools and Minority Students. In his more specialized interpretation of the data, Greeley concludes that achievement levels of minority students enrolled in Catholic schools were significantly higher than those observed among minority students in public schools. In addition, he contends that the most dramatic difference in the effectiveness of private and public schools was found among the most disadvantaged students. These findings led some researchers to conclude that urban Catholic schools were more in line with the “common school” ideal than were their public counterparts.

Growing evidence of superior outcomes among Catholic schools spurred further research designed to highlight relationships between characteristics of effective schools and variables such as achievement. In 1985, for instance, Riordan set out to measure the effectiveness of co-educational and single-sex Catholic schools in relation to public schools. After testing his hypothesis that students in single-sex classrooms outperform those in co-educational classrooms because of the reduced effect of adolescent culture, Riordan concludes that, while Catholic schools produced higher levels of achievement than did public schools, single-sex Catholic schools outperformed co-educational Catholic schools. Meanwhile, Bryk and Thum, in a 1989 study on effective schools, identify a significant negative relationship between absenteeism and the presence of strong normative values in schools: a result that supported earlier findings that

organizational aspects of Catholic schools contributed to their effectiveness. In a 1993 study, Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong conclude that highly bureaucratized environments (such as those found in public school systems) had discouraged the manifestations of higher-order instructional goals among high school teachers.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study on Catholic schools and their apparent effect on urban student populations appeared in 1993, when Bryk, Lee and Holland published *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. This study concludes that the success of Catholic schools in an urban setting was related to the fact that contemporary Catholic schools expanded their traditional focus to include a greater emphasis on themes of social justice and human dignity. The study also indicates that lower dropout rates among students enrolled in urban Catholic schools could be attributed to the stronger sense of community engendered in such schools. In 1995, Sander set out to examine this “Catholic school effect” in the context of elementary schools. He found that the effect of Catholic elementary schools on minority students could not be attributed to a selection of superior students, that no clear correlation existed between expenditures per students and academic outcomes, and that urban Catholic elementary schools did not

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306 Bryk et al., *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, 11.
have a significant effect among White students, although they had a dramatic effect upon Black and Hispanic students.  

Writing in 1992, Polite observes that urban Catholic schools “most closely resemble the ideal of the common school model; that is, they educate children from different backgrounds and achieve promising academic outcomes.” Polite suggests that urban Catholic schools emerged as bastions of diversity at a time when urban public schools appeared to be “rapidly resegregating.” As Jonathan Kozol points out, urban schools in major metropolitan areas have become, if anything, more segregated than they were at the dawn of the civil rights movement. Kozol notes that, in Chicago, during the 2002-2003 academic year, “87 percent of public-school enrollment was black or Hispanic; less than 10 percent of children in the schools were white.” “In Washington, D.C., 94 percent of children were black or Hispanic; less than 5 percent were white,” he continues. Kozol refers to similar statistics in St. Louis (with a population recorded as 82 percent Black or Hispanic), Philadelphia (79 percent), Los Angeles (84 percent), Detroit (96 percent), and Baltimore (89 percent). A 2002 report on private schools sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics concludes that Catholic schools, as a whole, show higher levels of minority students than other religious schools, and are

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308 Polite, “Getting the Job Well Done.”
309 Ibid.
311 Ibid.
“much more likely than other...private schools to have students eligible for subsidized lunches.”

Ironically, in the face of abundant (if contested) research pointing to the effectiveness of urban Catholic schools, these institutions began to decline in cities across the nation—a development that rendered their supposed “superiority” a moot point for many Catholic educators. In Youngstown, center-city parish schools disappeared completely.

A System Collapses

The first signs of waning Catholic support for nontraditional urban parish schools in Youngstown became evident in the 1990s—a decade that seemed to open auspiciously. In 1991, the Diocese of Youngstown announced that special collections would be taken up in churches in Mahoning and Trumbull counties (both located within the Youngstown metropolitan area) to benefit two urban parish schools that served large numbers of non-White and non-Catholic students. The diocese also encouraged fundraising in suburban parochial school classrooms, while benefiting from limited fundraising among a number of urban Protestant churches whose overwhelmingly Black congregants had children attending the schools. Ultimately, the diocese achieved its goal of $115,000, which was needed to maintain the operation of St. Patrick’s and Immaculate Conception

313 Youniss and Convey, *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads*, 2.
315 Ibid.
elementary schools.\textsuperscript{316} Subsequent efforts to raise funds for the two schools proved less successful, however. In 1992, for instance, the diocese’s efforts to raise $125,000 for the schools fell short by $60,000.\textsuperscript{317}

Falling donations coincided with a deepening impression that the city’s parochial schools were trapped in a downward spiral. As the urban White population declined, it became evident that many traditionally stable parish schools were experiencing financial difficulties that had long been associated with center-city schools like St. Patrick’s and Immaculate Conception. Between 1980 and 1990, enrollment in Youngstown’s parish schools fell from 3,921 students to 2,369. Within a decade, fewer than half that number of students attended the schools, as enrollment fell to 1,209 in 2000.\textsuperscript{318} Despite a brief surge in 2001, with rolls rising slightly to 1,148 students, the downward trend remained fairly consistent, with enrollment slipping to 764 in 2004. This figure represented a staggering 90-percent decline in enrollment since 1970, when 7,700 students attended the city’s parochial schools.\textsuperscript{319} For some observers, the departure of Catholics from urban neighborhoods had called into question the long-term viability of Youngstown’s pattern of parochial education, as one school after another ceased operation. Moreover, as diocesan fundraising campaigns experienced chronic shortfalls, urban parish schools like St. Patrick’s were forced to confront difficult decisions. In 1994, the \textit{Vindicator} reported

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{316} John Goodall, “Fund drive spares 2 Catholic schools,” \textit{The Vindicator}, April 9, 1991, A-1.
\item \textsuperscript{317} “Bishop: Catholic schools stay open; The fund-raising efforts didn’t bring in enough money, but three diocesan schools will still be open,” \textit{The Vindicator}, April 7, 1992, B-2.
\item \textsuperscript{318} “St. Brendan’s Elementary: Declining numbers led to school closing,” \textit{The Vindicator}, March 1, 2005. 1.
\item \textsuperscript{319} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
that students enrolled at St. Patrick’s School paid an average of $750 in tuition, a figure considerably less than half the annual cost of educating each child.\textsuperscript{320} To make matters worse, St. Patrick’s and Immaculate were no longer the sole beneficiaries of diocesan fundraising campaigns. By 1995, three other urban parish schools were facing imminent closure: St. Anthony’s (north side), St. Dominic’s (south side), and St. Edward’s (north side).\textsuperscript{321}

Meanwhile, older urban parishes like St. Patrick’s were saddled with huge expenses related to the maintenance of large physical plants. St. Patrick’s neo-Gothic church building was (and is) widely regarded as one of Youngstown’s architectural treasures, and parishioners—many of whom are White suburbanites—cited the church’s appearance as a major attraction. The preservation of this attractive edifice, however, came at a steep price. In a 2007 interview, Father Edward Noga, pastor of St. Patrick’s Church, recalled that expenses related to the maintenance of the parish complex were overwhelming. “I’d be…scared if our bookkeeper took the total of my 21 years here, how much money we’ve put into that building,” he said. “It would probably be a jaw-dropper.”\textsuperscript{322} The pastor noted that parishioners were asked to make substantial donations toward the repair of the church’s massive tile roof (a $200,000 expense), and added that the structure’s elaborate stained-glass windows were also in need of repair (a project

\textsuperscript{320} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{321} Ron Cole, “Catholic schools launch fund drive: Diocese officials hope to know by March 15 if they can raise the money. If not, a school could close,” \textit{The Vindicator}, February 12, 1995, B-1.
\textsuperscript{322} Noga, interview.
expected to cost $300,000).\textsuperscript{323} Other aging urban parishes faced similar expenses as churches, social halls, and school buildings gradually fell into disrepair. St. Brendan’s and St. Edward’s parishes, for instance, financed extensive interior remodeling of their respective church buildings to reverse the effects of hasty (perhaps ill-conceived) renovations completed in the aftermath of Vatican II. In the end, the refurbishment of cherished liturgical spaces may have done more to bolster these faith communities’ collective sense of identity than the maintenance of schools whose students often did not belong to the parish.

A symbolic turning point in the decline of Youngstown’s parochial schools came in 1995, when St. Patrick’s Elementary School—one of the first institutions of its kind to serve large numbers of minority students—announced that it would close at the end of the school year. The south-side school, which had a peak population of 1,057 in 1960, served fewer than 250 students by the mid-1990s. The closure of St. Patrick’s School was followed by that of St. Anthony’s in 1996, and St. Dominic’s in 1999. In the wake of these closures, Immaculate Conception Elementary School briefly became a focal point of Catholic fundraising efforts in the Youngstown metropolitan area. By 2002, however, “the Immaculate” was hardly the only urban parish school facing an uncertain future. Dr. Michael Skube, the new diocesan superintendent, observed that four of the city’s parochial schools confronted serious financial difficulties. Immaculate Conception was joined by St. Brendan’s (west side), St. Edward’s (north side), and St. Matthias

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid.
Ironically, Immaculate Conception, which the media described as “the most vulnerable,”325 outlived two of the city’s three endangered parochial schools.)

In 2003, administrators at St. Edward’s Elementary School announced the institution’s imminent closure, and in June of that year, the 86-year-old parish school held its final graduation ceremony, a development that surprised many former north side residents. One parent of a sixth-grade student enrolled at St. Edward’s observed that the school suffered from declining enrollment that “was caused by the out-migration from the Youngstown area of working families with children, the movement of families with children to the suburbs, and the difficulty parents found paying tuition during the troubled economic times.”326 Another shock to the local Catholic community came in February 2005, when news broke that St. Brendan’s Elementary School would close at the end of the academic year.327 Given that the west-side school enrolled 119 students—a figure much higher than the number of students enrolled at Immaculate Conception and slightly lower than that of St. Matthias—the announcement raised questions about the long-term viability of the Youngstown’s two remaining center-city parish schools. At the time, the south-side parish school of St. Matthias served 124 students, while Immaculate

324 Ron Cole, “Does bell for pupils also toll for school? The school has opened early; the new principal’s attitude is that it won’t be closed,” The Vindicator, August 14, 2002, B-1.
325 Ibid.
326 Peter H. Milliken, “Many bid farewell as St. Edward School closes: St. Edward’s graduates serve this community well, the speaker said,” The Vindicator, June 6, 2003, 1.
327 “St. Brendan’s in final year: The diocese says an official announcement will be released Monday,” The Vindicator, February 26, 2005, 1.
Conception on the east side served 77 students. In each case, demographic change, coupled with urban depopulation, had played a pivotal role in undermining student enrollment.

Within a year, Youngstown’s two remaining center-city schools announced that they would cease operation at the close of the academic year. Administrators at St. Matthias School, which enrolled 63 students in the 2005-2006 school year, revealed that “the most optimistic projection for the 2006-2007 school year is 33 students.” Similarly, Immaculate Conception, which enrolled 124 students in the 2005-2006 school year, predicted it would serve only 61 students for the upcoming academic year. At this juncture, the end seemed practically unavoidable, and Monsignor Robert Siffrin, the diocesan administrator, eulogized the two schools, stating that “both the Immaculate Conception and St. Matthias parish communities have made extraordinary efforts to support and maintain their schools despite declining enrollment and the changing demographics in Youngstown.” In the wake of these closures, only one parish school remained open in Youngstown. To the dismay of those who valued urban parochial education, the system’s sole survivor, St. Christine’s Elementary School, was located in a quasi-suburban district of the west side that was overwhelmingly White and middle class.

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330 Harold Gwin, “Final bells tolls for two schools: There were some long faces as children left St. Matthias on Tuesday,” *The Vindicator*, June 7, 2006.
Thus, the era of Youngstown’s nontraditional urban parish schools had come to an end; and with the closure of all but one parochial school within the municipality, the city’s pattern of Catholic elementary education had ceased to exist.

Conclusions on Demographic Change and Local Parish Schools

The disappearance of Youngstown’s center-city parish schools cannot be attributed entirely to the sweeping demographic changes that occurred in many urban neighborhoods in the decades following World War II. Nor can it be described as the sole consequence of White Catholics’ waning support for parish schools that served nontraditional student populations. This support, after all, proved surprisingly resilient, given the cost of maintaining urban schools that no longer benefited from the donations of large numbers of parishioners. Nevertheless, demographic change was a key contributing factor to the decline of urban parochial schools in communities like Youngstown. Among others, this trend ensured that parish schools would lose traditional patrons at a time when they faced myriad economic challenges, including rising costs and declining enrollment. Notably, a few of these urban parish schools substantially altered their mission as they took on more non-White and non-Catholic students, a move that undoubtedly alienated some prospective Catholic donors, who questioned this non-traditional use of community resources. Considering that many of the Catholic community’s most reliable donors were older parishioners, it seems likely that at least some of them were skeptical about non-traditional models of urban parochial education.

Despite the prospect of strong disagreement over the mission of such institutions, however, fundraising for nontraditional urban parish schools proved relatively successful
until the early 1990s. A turning point in the Catholic community’s support for
nontraditional urban parish schools came with a drastic decline in enrollment—a partial
byproduct of the rise of charter schools. Catholic donors, who were challenged to re-
imagine urban parochial schools as instruments of social uplift for non-Catholics,
undoubtedly felt less inclined to support these schools when they served very few
students. Diocesan support for these schools also waned considerably, and parish
councils were forced to bow to the realities produced by insufficient funding, declining
enrollment, and the rise of highly competitive urban educational alternatives. As Sister
Charlotte Italiano, O.S.U., noted, in the aftermath of Immaculate Conception Elementary
School’s closure, urban parish schools could not afford to supply the amenities offered by
rival charter schools. Furthermore, charter schools had the advantage of being tuition-
free, an irresistible bonus for urban parents who were saving money for their children’s
college education.332

The influence of demographic change on Youngstown’s urban parish schools was
multi-layered and often intersected with developments in the political and religious
sectors. Tension between African Americans and White Catholics traced back to the
early 20th century, when local industrialists employed southern Blacks as “strikebreakers”
during periods of labor unrest. This tension was exacerbated by the fact that migrating
Blacks tended to settle in aging urban neighborhoods where White Catholics were
already established. In the same manner that native-born Whites viewed recent

332 Italiano, interview.
immigrants as a threat to the existing social order, “new” immigrants tended to perceive Blacks as a threat to their own lifestyles. Although the migration of thousands of African Americans to center-city neighborhoods, especially in the postwar era, was bound to transform the city’s social, religious, and political landscapes, the discriminatory policies of the FHA played a key role in fueling the White exodus from the city that came later. In the wake of concurrent trends like deindustrialization, urban White Catholics, like other European Americans, came to associate the decline of the city with the advent of demographic change, ignoring the fact that myriad factors had contributed to this phenomenon.

Moreover, the internal debates that divided the Catholic community in the wake of Vatican II ensured that White Catholics would have difficulty agreeing upon a common response to the plight of urban parish schools. Diocesan leaders, influenced by the conciliar emphasis on “social justice,” stressed the importance of maintaining a Catholic “presence” in the center city, despite the decline of urban parishes. The Catholic laity, on the other hand, was divided on this issue, and many questioned the use of the Catholic community’s resources to benefit non-Catholics. In addition, some White Catholics were sensitive to the fact that a large percentage of non-Catholic beneficiaries of urban parish schools were African American—a significant factor, given that relations between Blacks and urban Whites were less than harmonious in the decades that led up to the 1960s. Indeed, this relationship became more complicated over time.

During the 1970s, race-related conflicts erupted over issues related to the city’s growing racial and economic diversity. Many urban Whites resented desegregation
programs aimed at urban public schools and also resisted municipal efforts to build low-income housing in districts that were traditional White strongholds. Furthermore, tension between Blacks and White Catholics was exacerbated by misunderstandings arising over confessional differences, and notably, these religious differences sharply limited opportunities for interracial interaction.\footnote{333 The small number of Black Catholics in the United States, as noted, was a partial consequence of the U.S. church’s indifference to the prospect of evangelizing African Americans throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.} The fact that most African Americans were Protestant also ensured that it would be difficult for them to become integrated into urban parishes, and it seems likely that some Black parents had reservations about sending their children to Catholic schools, despite their reputedly high academic standards. (Such reservations, which were no doubt shared by Black Protestant leaders, may have played a role in facilitating the shift of Black students from parish schools to charter schools in the late 1990s and early 21st century.) Meanwhile, the low rate of religious conversation among Black students at nontraditional urban parish schools raised serious questions about their long-term efficacy among those Catholics who perceived these schools as potential instruments of evangelization.

Ironically, low rates of conversion among African Americans contributed to some civic leaders’ perception that Catholic parishes and schools were a “foreign presence” in Black neighborhoods.\footnote{334 Leon Stennis, “Leadership’s View on Diocese’s Approach Toward Blacks Differ,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, September 6, 1975, 7.} Ultimately, post-conciliar urban pastors, who were generally more sensitive to the realities of racial injustice, proved less committed than their pre-
conciliar counterparts to the evangelization of Blacks. Nevertheless, the Black Catholic population experienced modest growth in the 1980s and 1990s, reaching 1.5 million by the end of the 20th century—an expansion that dovetailed with increasingly urgent calls for Black leadership in the Catholic community. In time, a number of African-American Catholic leaders (notably George Stallings, a former priest) came to support the establishment of a separate rite that would grant Black Catholics “semiautonomous status” within the church.\textsuperscript{335} Other leaders continued to push for greater Black control over urban ministries. That said, additional research will be required to determine whether the absence of Black leadership in Youngstown’s Catholic community (until recently) played a role in shaping local African-American attitudes toward urban parish schools. Clearly, local Black leaders, most of whom were Protestant ministers, did not feel particularly invested in these schools, although some acknowledged the positive role they played in urban neighborhoods. In the end, many African-American leaders threw their support behind the charter school movement, whose success may have sealed the fate of urban parish schools in cities like Youngstown.

Youngstown’s parish schools provided quality education to urban youth (some of whom were disadvantaged) over several decades, often in the face of extraordinary odds. Non-traditional parish schools not only softened misunderstandings that had long existed between White Catholics and Black Protestants; they drew much-needed attention to the problems of the center city. Given the obstacles many of these schools were compelled

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\textsuperscript{335} Davis, \textit{The History of Black Catholics in the United States}, 260.
\end{footnotesize}
to overcome, their resilience seems remarkable. The durability of urban parish schools owed much to the shared commitment of a small group that included members of religious orders, educators, philanthropists, and diocesan leaders. Significantly, when urban diocesan leaders placed less emphasis on the maintenance of urban institutions (which may have happened during the tenure of Bishop Thomas J. Tobin), the city witnessed a rapid series of parochial school closures. (The community’s last two center-city parish schools closed during the year-long period when the Diocese of Youngstown was without a bishop.)

There is, of course, no way to determine whether Youngstown’s urban parish schools would have fared better under the leadership of Bishop George R. Murry, an African American who emphasizes the church’s obligation to remain a presence in urban neighborhoods. Many contend that Bishop Murray’s appointment bolstered the morale of Black Catholics throughout the diocese, raising the prospect of the community’s revitalization. Shortly after Bishop Murry’s appointment, one African-American parishioner in Canton, Ohio, predicted that the new bishop “could bring back a lot of fallen away Catholics,” especially African Americans. “We’ve lost a lot of black Catholics,” he added, “but he will bring a lot of other people back to the Church.”

Given the dramatic economic setbacks that Youngstown has experienced in recent decades, however, the suggestion that one leader could have saved the city’s beleaguered parochial school system appears far-fetched. The fact that some local Catholics believe

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that visionary leadership could have made a crucial difference is revealing, however.

This perception calls attention to the delicate combination of circumstances that enabled these schools to survive as long as they did.
CHAPTER VI

OUT OF THESE ASHES: VATICAN II AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

For five decades, the granite, neo-Gothic edifice of St. Columba’s Church dominated a bluff overlooking Youngstown’s central retail district. The parish, which operated the community’s oldest parochial school, was described by locals as a “fortress of the faith,” a name that reflected (perhaps unconsciously) the defensive mentality prevalent among the White Catholic working classes at the time the building was completed in 1903. ¹ The Catholic community’s insularity was encouraged, in part, by the highly centralized and Romanized model of American Catholicism that emerged from the internal controversies of the late 19th century. This mentality was reinforced by the distrust and intolerance that held sway among “old stock” European Americans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 1910s, a Vindicator editorial condemned the widespread dissemination of rumors that local Catholics “were drilling for civil war in St. Columba’s church, that they had guns and ammunition stored in the Phelps street parish school and...finally...that on the night before the city elections all Catholic servant girls in the city will assassinate their employers.”² By the 1920s, the growth of the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan was stimulated by “a rapid influx of numerous southern and

¹ Lou Jacquet, “The Cathedral: New St. Columba’s rose from ruins of the old: After fire destroyed a Youngstown landmark the demolition and rebuilding were a story in themselves,” The Catholic Exponent, May 7, 1993, 5, supplement for 50th anniversary of the Diocese of Youngstown.
eastern European immigrants." Significantly, a large percentage of these newcomers were Catholic.

By the time St. Columba’s was designated as a cathedral in 1943, inter-religious tensions had largely subsided, and most area residents—regardless of religious background—viewed the structure as one of the community’s architectural treasures. Yet, for some middle-aged Catholics, the wounds of the past remained fresh, and more than a few were sensitive to any hint of religious discrimination. Some local Catholics went so far as to question the motives behind the municipal government’s refusal to relocate high-voltage wires that stretched across the cathedral’s rose-petal window like a ragged scar, marring the structure’s beauty. On the evening of September 2, 1954, these high-voltage wires posed a challenge that transcended aesthetic considerations. Their presence hampered—perhaps even doomed—local firefighters’ efforts to contain a blaze that swept the cathedral. Firefighters believed the fire broke out in the cathedral’s choir loft around 9:30 p.m., shortly after the building was struck by lightning during a violent storm. There were no witnesses to the outbreak of the fire, with the possible exception of Mrs. Mary Clarke, an elderly parishioner who resided at a nearby boarding house.

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6 Ibid.
Mrs. Clarke, however, was widely seen as “confused,” and her landlady ignored her warning.\(^7\)

The fire that Mrs. Clarke all but predicted blazed undetected for an hour-and-a-half before a passerby noticed the flames and contacted the municipal fire department. By the time firefighters arrived on the scene, flames had engulfed the cathedral’s organ and choir loft, eerily illuminating the building’s massive rose-petal window.\(^8\) Those on hand were disturbed by evidence that the fire was creeping along a catwalk and loft that ran the length of the cathedral’s nave. Firefighters recognized that, if the massive timbers of the ceiling and roof were to catch fire, the blaze would burn out of control, reducing the cathedral to a shell.\(^9\) The department’s fire hoses, however, were unable to reach the top of the building. Youngstown Fire Chief John R. Lynch later explained that the department could not “get the aerial ladder to its full height because of high-voltage wires, which carried 2,000 volts.” The firefighters’ efforts to contain the blaze in the choir loft ultimately failed, and they watched helplessly as the blaze “spread across the roof toward the rear of the building.”\(^10\) As the fire progressed, the cathedral’s northern spire burst into flames and collapsed on to Elm Street, which ran to the immediate west of the building. Meanwhile, the structure’s stately twin spires, which soared 98 feet

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\(^7\) Paula (Lehnerd) McKinney, interview by the author, June 14, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.


\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid.
above Wood Street, to the south, showed signs of structural damage and instability. At one point, the western spire veered dangerously close to the high-voltage wires that stretched before the edifice. By the time the blaze was contained, at around 2:30 a.m., St. Columba’s Cathedral was ruined and presumed to be a total loss.

The following morning, Youngstown Bishop Emmett M. Walsh calculated damage to the cathedral at “more than $1,250,000,” adding that insurance would cover just $940,000 of rebuilding expenses. An able administrator and effective fundraiser, Bishop Walsh quickly launched a drive for contributions; and on April 12, 1959, less than five years after the destruction of the old cathedral, a new structure was dedicated on the site. For many Catholics around the diocese, however, the new cathedral came as nothing less than a second shock. Overall, the structure could not have been more different in design and dimension than the one it replaced. A 1997 anniversary booklet for the cathedral parish described the building as follows:

The new cathedral was noteworthy for its simplicity of design. Statues were replaced with bas-reliefs over the altar. Pastels and neutral tones in mosaic and marble make for a bright and airy structure. More modest dimensions called for a central aisle of 102 feet as opposed to the 130-foot long Gothic church. The sanctuary was significantly smaller, 44 X 49 feet, as opposed to the 78-foot wide

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
sanctuary in the old cathedral. The exterior of the new cathedral was a cream Mankato stone.\(^{14}\)

The new building’s most salient quality was its self-consciously modern style, which stood in stark contrast to the neo-Gothic style of its predecessor. Not surprisingly, local Catholics, who viewed the former cathedral as a cherished icon, showed mixed reactions to the new building, whose appearance struck many as unfamiliar, even alienating. On a Sunday morning in the fall of 1958, when Father Glenn W. Holdbrook sang the first high Mass in the new cathedral, he appeared to speak to these reservations as he compared the new edifice to the reconstructed temple of King Solomon in the Old Testament. “On the day of the viewing…the young men and women stood in amazement and open awe at the beauty of the new building,” Father Holdbrook told the assembled congregants. “But the old men and women sat down and cried because the temple did not compare to the old place of worship.”\(^{15}\)

Paula McKinney, a longtime parishioner of St. Columba’s, recalled her own impressions of the new building. “We didn’t like it,” she said. “It’s like ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes.’ You were afraid to admit that you didn’t like it. And then, all of a sudden, it would come out in conversation that nobody liked it.”\(^{16}\) In fact, the designer’s decision to eschew the medievalist aesthetic that characterized much of U.S. Catholic

\(^{14}\) The Cathedral Parish of St. Columba, Youngstown, Ohio: 150 Years of Faith, 1847-1997 (Youngstown, OH: Diocese of Youngstown), 11.


\(^{16}\) McKinney, interview.
architecture before World War II reflected a sea change that had occurred within the American church itself. This shift became more apparent in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, a decade later. Thus, in certain ways, the destruction and rebuilding of St. Columba’s Cathedral presaged the theological and liturgical changes of the post-conciliar era that helped transform American Catholicism. These changes, in combination with the social and political upheavals of the 1960s, severely undermined the medievalist brand of Catholicism that had thrived in America since the mid-19th century.17

Given that many U.S. Catholics took a decidedly unhistorical view of their Church, a position consistent with official characterizations of the institution as “eternal and unchanging,” many of them failed to grasp that American Catholicism’s “love affair” with medievalism was a relatively recent development. As Philip Gleason, S.J., points out, the brand of medievalism eventually embraced by U.S. Catholics had its origins in the 19th-century Romantic Movement. Although Catholics were not conspicuously involved in the romantics’ positive re-evaluation of the Middle Ages, “the Church could not fail to be positively affected by the reversal of feeling toward the period in which she had been the dominant spiritual and cultural force in Europe.”18 What Gleason terms as “antirevolutionary romantic medievalism” captured the imagination of conservative European intellectuals, many of whom converted to Catholicism. A subsequent wave of

conversions within the German intelligentsia witnessed its counterpart in England’s Oxford Movement; and within a few decades, a number of English “convert-medi evalists,” notably August Welby Pugin and Ambrose Phillips de L Isles, exerted an influence on American Catholics. 19

Perhaps the most tangible manifestation of American Catholic medievalism was the rise of neo-Gothic cathedrals in northeastern urban centers like New York City. In 1858, New York Bishop John Hughes laid the cornerstone for what became the country’s most famous Catholic house of worship, a massive, twin-towered structure that set a new standard for U.S. Catholic religious architecture. In 1879, when St. Patrick’s Cathedral was finally dedicated, the ceremony harked back to the pomp and pageantry of the medieval Church. 20 The impact of medievalism was not limited to architecture and ritual, however. As Gleason observes, medievalism had, by the mid-19th century, “become thoroughly mixed up with the critique of individualism and industrial capitalism, with efforts to restore this sense of community, with anti-urbanism, with the ‘arts and crafts’ approach, and with various philosophies of the dignity of work and the importance of good workmanship.” 21 In a Catholic context, a medievalist critique of the modern world was most apparent in the “social encyclicals” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. 22 American Catholics gravitated to medievalism mainly because it was “the obverse of

19 Ibid, 22.
20 Morris, American Catholic, 13-14.
21 Gleason, Keeping the Faith, 22.
22 Ibid, 22-23.
Catholic antimodernism and its intensity [reflected] the degree of uneasiness felt by Catholics about the dominant tendencies of the modern world.”23 During a period of sweeping change and interminable social conflict, Catholics admired what they regarded as the most salient feature of the Middle Ages—its emphasis on social unity.24

Well into the 1950s, the corporatist underpinnings of American Catholic thought were reflected in a Catholic community that focused on tight-knit neighborhoods, vibrant parishes, and replicated organizations. “Underlying this institutional and local sensibility were particular conceptions of both the human person and the sacred,” McGreevy notes. “Crucially, the natural law tradition so central to Catholic thought in the modern period described humans as fundamentally social.”25 U.S. Catholic leaders “deliberately created a Catholic counterpart for virtually every secular organization,” and most Catholics believed that their religion “could not flourish independent of a Catholic milieu; the schools, parish societies, and religious organizations were seen as pieces of a larger cultural project.”26 Indeed, the Catholic parish became such an essential ingredient of neighborhood identity that urban Catholics, when asked “Where are you from?” routinely responded with the name of the parish to which they belonged.27 In Rome, Pius XII gazed with approval on this thriving subculture, and took special pride in its parallel

23 Ibid, 26.
24 Ibid, 29.
27 Ibid, 21.
system of education.\textsuperscript{28} Clerical observers of the American scene, after all, had long recognized that the “great instrument of Catholic separatism was the parochial school.”\textsuperscript{29} Firmly traditional in his educational views, Pope Pius “valued Latin in the curriculum” and observed “that one of the great values of Catholic schools was that they inculcated religious vocations.”\textsuperscript{30} A large percentage of Catholic schools were attached to urban parishes. Through their sponsorship of religious processions and other events, many of these parishes claimed surrounding neighborhoods as “sacred ground.”\textsuperscript{31}

Beginning in the late 1950s, a tide of events culminating in the Second Vatican Council began to erode the theological, philosophical, and material foundations of this urban “cultural project.”\textsuperscript{32} Once thriving urban ethnic enclaves gradually fell into decline as more Catholics relocated to the suburbs—a trend briefly masked by the postwar “baby boom.”\textsuperscript{33} During the same period, parish schools were deprived of a vital source of “cheap labor” as teaching nuns retreated from the classroom and moved into other service-oriented fields. Buetow notes that, “by 1960 the number of lay teachers increased by 537% over the 7,422 lay teachers in the Catholic schools of 1948.”\textsuperscript{34} Then, in the 1960s, the combined influence of Vatican II and the civil rights movement placed “the

\textsuperscript{28} Glen Gabert, Jr., \textit{In Hoc Signo? A Brief History of Catholic Parochial Education in America} (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), 95.
\textsuperscript{29} Morris, \textit{American Catholic}, 110.
\textsuperscript{30} Gabert, \textit{In Hoc Signo?}, 95.
\textsuperscript{31} McGreevy, \textit{Parish Boundaries}, 22.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 5.
Catholic struggle over race and religion at the center of the nation’s cultural turmoil.” As McGreevy observes, the well-organized Catholic neighborhoods that were “admired by contemporary intellectuals at one historical moment…proved unable to separate ‘community’ from racial mythology at another.” As Catholics retreated from the “ghetto” and entered the American mainstream, their leaders expressed concern about a loss of Catholic “distinctiveness.” Less than two decades after the council, theologian Frans Jozef Beeck, S.J., warned that, whenever the Catholic Church “finds itself in the diaspora of a modern, open, secular society, she will also feel the subtle impact of the tendency to level and equalize, which is the dark side of the prevailing atmosphere of toleration and civil liberty.”

The Calm Before the Storm

At the close of World War II, most American Catholics were connected to “territorial parishes, whose borders were strictly defined and whose churches were permanent fixtures of the cityscape.” After decades of institution building, the U.S. church had successfully established “a virtual state-within-a-state so Catholics could live almost their entire lives within a thick cocoon of Catholic institutions.” Faced with a well-organized, robust, and seemingly permanent subculture, observers of American

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36 Ibid.
Catholicism in this period could hardly have anticipated the ruptures and controversies that came with the 1960s. As Gabert observes, for a decade-and-a-half following the end of the war, the growth of Catholic parish schools reached a high-water mark. The number of Catholic schools in the country grew by 50 percent between 1940 and 1960, rising from 7,597 to 9,897.\textsuperscript{40} Enrollment practically doubled, jumping from 2,108,892.\textsuperscript{41} During this same period, the U.S. Catholic community expanded from 21 million people to 42 million.\textsuperscript{42} Surprisingly, the growth rate of Catholic schools exceeded that of public schools. Buetow notes that, between 1950 and 1960, “public school growth on the elementary level was 142 percent,” while Catholic elementary schools “increased 177 percent.”\textsuperscript{43} According to Gabert, the number of parochial schools in the United States rose from 7,914 to 9,897 between 1950 and 1960.\textsuperscript{44}

In Youngstown, as elsewhere in the northeastern United States, parochial schools were attached to parishes that served as focal points of Catholic social life, especially for young people. During the 1940s and 1950s, young parishioners participated in church-sponsored field trips, youth organizations, and fundraising activities. Many of these young people were members of families whose connections to a particular parish spanned several generations. Elizabeth Fleisher Fekety, a Youngstown-area resident who recalls

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\textsuperscript{40} Gabert, \textit{In Hoc Signo?}, 131.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 94.
\textsuperscript{44} Gabert, \textit{In Hoc Signo?}, 131.
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the postwar era, described the “homey” atmosphere she enjoyed at St. Joseph’s Church, a German-American national parish on the city’s north side. “It wasn’t like just people walking in and out,” Mrs. Fekety recalled. “Every generation sent their kids there… Everybody knew somebody [in your family], from two years before, or four years before.”45 Most members of St. Joseph’s Church were involved, in some capacity, in the maintenance of parish institutions. The parish, in turn, provided schooling, religious ceremonies, limited forms of social welfare, and scores of social events. “Catholic schools at the time were always trying to make money,” Mrs. Fekety recalled. Parishioners attempted to sustain the parish school by organizing paper collections and raffles, including an annual lottery for a Thanksgiving turkey. Like other former parishioners of St. Joseph’s Church, Mrs. Fekety retained pleasant memories of the pastor, Father John H. Lenz, who distributed boxes of candy to students every Christmas and “made sure that everybody always had what they needed.”46

The quasi-communal arrangements Mrs. Fekety described at St. Joseph’s were typical of the era. Robert Casey, who attended Immaculate Conception Elementary School in the 1950s, recalled an institutional ethos that stressed cooperation and orderliness.47 He noted that “students swept the classroom floors and hallways every day,” an activity that reinforced the prevailing impression that the students themselves

45 Elizabeth (Fleisher) Fekety, interview by the author, April 19, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
46 Ibid.
were stakeholders in the parish school. “Since Immaculate was our school, there was no graffiti on the exterior,” he writes, in a memoir. “Students did not jam up toilets so they would overflow and cause damage to the school. There were no holes punched in the walls. The students were no more likely to cause damage to Immaculate than they would in their own homes.”48 Many of the city’s parochial school students participated in parish communities that were cohesive and all-encompassing. Father Joseph Rudjak, raised in the shadow of St. Casimir’s Church, a Polish-American national parish in the Brier Hill district, spent much of his early childhood in the environs of parish and parochial school, where he was exposed to religious indoctrination on an almost daily basis. Besides attending weekly Mass, Father Rudjak joined his family at religious devotions three times a week. “And then, we’d go to daily Mass at school,” he added.49

Postwar urban parish schools attracted even those “solitary” ethnic groups, especially Italian Americans, who had once avoided them. “The traditional rancor that had existed between the newcomers and the ‘Americanized’ parish was largely a thing of the past,” Gabert writes. It appeared as though a parish school system once characterized by ethnic tension had “survived and was entering into a time of expansion.”50 As shrewd observers recognized, however, the vitality of urban parish schools depended on the viability of neighborhoods where they operated. By the 1950s, a growing number of urban Catholic neighborhoods were in transition. McGreevy notes that the enforcement

48 Ibid.
49 Father Joseph S. Rudjak, interview, June 22, 2008, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
50 Gabert, In Hoc Signo?, 93.
of highly restrictive immigration quotas in the 1920s “and the lack of economic mobility (at least upward) during the Depression inspired a false sense of stasis on Catholic life.”

While many of the replicated institutions of the Catholic ghetto “remained, and even flourished, much of what made the Catholic experience distinctive faded into the larger American kaleidoscope.” Significantly, the decline of urban Catholic culture kept pace with the growth of urban Black neighborhoods and the retreat of Whites to the suburbs.

By the mid-1960s, the traditional mission of urban schools had fallen under close scrutiny, as Catholics confronted urban change, the civil rights movement, theological reform, the polarizing debate over the Vietnam War, and other developments that challenged their community’s traditional insularity.

The Road to Vatican II

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, most establishment liberals would not have described Catholics as a group on the threshold of assimilation. Respected scholars railed against the “antidemocratic” influence of “Catholic power,” and critics complained that Catholics were immune to the currents of progressive change then sweeping the country. In the wake of the unprecedented human rights violations committed during World War II, “an enhanced sense of individual autonomy emerged from the world of politics and

51 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 79.
52 Ibid.
54 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 5.
law.”\textsuperscript{55} Activists and members of the legal community, “working in the shadow of the Holocaust…made the decade after 1945 a golden age for those devoted to human and civil rights.”\textsuperscript{56} This new emphasis on personal autonomy not only galvanized the civil rights movement in the South; it also raised questions about longstanding legal restrictions on abortion and assisted suicide.\textsuperscript{57} Meanwhile, the war undermined traditional Catholic domestic values by driving six million women into the U.S. workforce.\textsuperscript{58} Significant portions of these women chose to remain employed after the war, and by the late 1940s, they comprised 31 percent of the labor force. “As the trend of working women grew stronger,” Dolan writes, “the objection to it from Catholic voices became louder, intensifying the contrast between the ideal and the reality.”\textsuperscript{59}

The church’s critique of liberal postwar trends drew a withering response from progressives; and by the late 1940s and early 1950s, many liberal intellectuals described the U.S. Catholic subculture as a veritable “mini-state” that eschewed democratic principles. Influential monographs criticized Catholics for their “separatist” habits and “collectivist” values, while defining “Catholicism and Soviet Communism as parallel threats to American democracy.”\textsuperscript{60} McGreevy observes that critical examinations of U.S. Catholicism, “along with criticism of racial segregation and opposition to fascism and

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 251.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} McGreevy, \textit{Catholicism and American Freedom}, 166.
communism, helped define the terms of postwar American liberalism." Postwar liberals held that “religion, as an entirely private matter, must be separated from the state, and that religious loyalties must not threaten intellectual autonomy or national unity.” For many liberals, the Catholic Church posed a problem of “integration,” because its insularity was believed to prevent Catholics from participating in a “culture” of democracy. Although liberals and Catholics crossed swords earlier in the 20th century—on issues ranging from the legalization of birth control to the merits of the Mexican Revolution—few Catholics were prepared for Paul Blanshard’s *American Freedom and Catholic Power* when it appeared in 1949. Blanshard called the U.S. Catholic hierarchy “antidemocratic,” “blamed Catholics for producing the bulk of white criminals,” and warned of the “divisive” influence of Catholic schools.

Yet, while the church drew the wrath of establishment liberals, the U.S. popular media was practically celebrating American Catholic values. Former *Commonweal* editor Peter Steinfels notes that during the postwar era, “the Catholic Church was to morality and uplift what General Motors was to industry and the Yankees were to baseball.” Films ranging from *Boys’ Town* to *On the Waterfront* portrayed priests as “virile, wise, good-humored, compassionate, and in emergencies possessed of a

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61 Ibid, 168.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid, 171-172.
65 Ibid, 166.
remarkable knockout punch.” Paradoxically, the quality of apartness that “made the church so suspect now enabled it to step forward as a repository of the old-fashioned, tried-and-true American values that had lost some of their hold on the rest of the culture.” Celluloid images of a harmonious, fervently patriotic Catholic subculture left some viewers unmoved, however. For many liberals, the American clergy bore less resemblance to the jovial parish priests in Hollywood films than to right-wing prelates like Francis Cardinal Spellman, the powerful archbishop of New York. Secular and Protestant leaders alike were alarmed at Cardinal Spellman’s apparent disregard for the principle of church-state separation, which the archbishop dismissed as a “shibboleth.”

Liberal anxieties about the political instincts of Catholics gained wider currency during the anticommunist “witch hunts” that were led by Joseph R. McCarthy, a Catholic senator from Wisconsin who enjoyed the support of many of his co-religionists, including Cardinal Spellman. McCarthy’s strong connections to the Catholic community weren’t lost on Reverend Robert McCracken, pastor of New York’s Riverside Church. In a widely publicized 1954 sermon, the minister compared McCarthy’s tactics to those of the Catholic Church, an institution that had “never disavowed the Inquisition, that

makes a policy of censorship, that insists on conformity.”72 The “signs were ominous” for Protestant and secular liberals, notes McCarthy biographer David M. Oshinsky. “More Catholics meant more Catholic power. More Catholic power meant more pressure for federal aid to parochial schools, more campaigns to censor objectionable books and movies, and more votes for politicians like Joe McCarthy.”73 Survey results lent credibility to liberal claims that McCarthy enjoyed disproportionate support among Catholics. Indeed, Catholic support for the senator “ran 7 to 9 points ahead of national and Protestant support”—a disparity that widened in September 1954, after the televised “Army-McCarthy” hearings that resulted in McCarthy’s censure. At the nadir of McCarthy’s public career, Catholic support for the Wisconsin senator was recorded at 40 percent, while Protestant support, following a “dramatic nosedive,” stood at just 23 percent.74

Most of the church’s sharpest critics were secularists, but a significant number of liberal Protestant leaders (along with Reverend McCracken) expressed reservations about Catholic political power and its implications. This group included Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, who in 1947 helped organize Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.75 Three years later, in 1950, the Protestant establishment’s reservations about Catholicism surfaced in a less overt manner, when the Federal Council of Churches “yielded…to a more vigorous National Council of

72 Oshinsky, A Conspiracy So Immense, 305.
73 Ibid.
74 Hennesy, American Catholics, 292-293.
75 Ibid, 295.
Churches,” which “incorporated orthodox bodies” while ignoring Catholics. As James Hennesy, S.J., puts it, liberal Protestant ecumenists who reached out to Orthodox Christians proved “less anxious to relate to Roman Catholicism.” Nevertheless, Catholic scholars like John Courtney Murray viewed the U.S. liberal establishment’s rising hostility to Catholicism as a symptom of something beyond resurgent “nativism.” Murray writes that this new species of anti-Catholicism “was not so much Protestant as it was naturalist, operating on the premise that democracy demanded a naturalist, secularist philosophy.”

While Murray’s concerns about “creeping secularism” in American society intensified over the years, he found a good deal to criticize in the Catholic Church’s official position on church-state relations. His carefully worded articles on the subject rankled influential churchmen, and in the 1950s, the Holy Office (once known as the Inquisition) officially silenced Murray for his views: a standard procedure since Pius X’s condemnation of the Modernists in the early 20th century. “The ordeal of these men is hard to describe,” writes Wills, “since they were disciplined in secret, under strict orders to keep quiet about being silenced.” In Murray’s case, the Holy Office’s decision to impose silence came partly in response to an act of political imprudence. In 1954, while lecturing at Catholic University, Murray criticized a speech delivered a year earlier by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviano, the presiding officer of the Holy Office. During the speech,

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
Ottaviano “restated the traditional position on church-state relations—that only the true religion should be recognized, since all others are subject to the rule that ‘error has no rights.’” Murray’s criticism of Ottaviano’s speech suggested that it had contradicted “a later speech delivered by Pope Pius XII, Ci Riesce, an address to Italian jurist.” Although he strongly denied that he perceived the constitutional separation of church and state in the United States as a universal ideal, a position Leo XIII condemned in the late 19th century, the American theologian’s defiance of a powerful member of the Roman Curia probably sealed his fate. For the duration of the 1950s, Murray found “his outlets for publishing and lecturing cut off.”

Murray’s cautious critique of the Vatican’s official stance on church-state issues reflected a liberal trend among American Catholic intellectuals, who—decades behind their European counterparts—began to develop “their own criticisms of Catholic conformity.” In 1955, Catholic historian John Tracy Ellis, S.J., provoked controversy by “castigating American Catholics for neglect of the intellectual life” and criticizing U.S. Catholic universities for their “betrayal of the West’s most distinguished intellectual tradition.” During this period, thousands of Catholic graduate students enrolled at the nation’s top universities, against the advice of conservative clerical leaders, who

79 Ibid, 216.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom, 212.
83 Ibid, 212-213.
dismissed secular colleges as “hotbeds of anti-Catholicism.”  

By the late 1950s, a growing number of emancipated” Catholics “were embarrassed by, or openly ridiculed, the largely Irish Catholic folkways that still permeated their Church.” These developments dovetailed with a gradual softening of anti-Catholic sentiment in liberal circles, where earlier comparisons of the church to totalitarian movements like fascism and Communism lost favor.  

In this climate of growing acceptance, and accelerated integration, more liberal Catholics sought to reconcile “the church’s insistence on universal moral principles with a pluralist America by cultivating those strands of Catholic tradition…that distinguished between law and morality, neither divorcing the one from the other nor equating them either.”

Then, in 1960, Murray’s fortunes revived in a way that his opponents could hardly have imagined. When John F. Kennedy launched his presidential campaign, “all the charges of Paul Blanshard were renewed,” and a growing number of U.S. Catholics came to regard the church’s official position on church-state relations (which few had actually examined) as an “embarrassment.” Murray, the onetime theological outcast, emerged as a useful “defender of the faith.” One month after Kennedy’s election as the first Catholic president of the United States, the theologian’s image appeared on the cover

84 Ibid, 213.  
85 Morris, American Catholic, 276-277.  
86 McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom, 211-212.  
87 Steinfels, A People Adrift, 83.  
88 Wills, Why I Am a Catholic, 219.
Murray won liberal plaudits for his attempt to reconcile Catholic ideals with American principles of religious freedom in his landmark treatise, *We Hold These Truths*. “It remains only to insist that in regarding the religious clause of the First Amendment as articles of peace and in placing the care for them on the primary ground of their necessity, one is not taking low ground,” Murray writes. “Such a case does not appeal to mean-spirited expediency nor does it imply a reluctant concession to force majeure…. Behind the will to social peace stands a divine and Christian imperative.”

By 1962, even Murray’s powerful enemies in Rome, who had prevented him from attending the first session of Vatican II, were unable to block his participation in the second session, although they did prevent him from attending the first session. The dramatic alteration of Murray’s status, while influenced by events in America, was also facilitated by unexpected developments in Rome.

More than two years before President Kennedy assumed office, the Vatican had set a course that “radically altered the parameters by which the American Catholic community measured itself and the world around it.” The 1958 papal election of Angelo Roncalli marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Catholic Church. At the outset of his brief pontificate, John XXIII “stunned the world by calling an ecumenical council” that was intended to “throw open the windows of the church to the

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89 Ibid.
modern world.”

Traditionalists in the U.S. hierarchy recoiled from Pope John’s appeal for aggiornamento (“updating”), in much the same way they later retreated from the prospect of a Kennedy presidency. Cardinal Spellman, particularly hostile, snapped to aides that Roncalli was “no pope” and added sarcastically, “He should be selling bananas.”

As Catholic writer James Carroll notes, Spellman, in the wake of Roncalli’s election, “commissioned a life-size wax dummy of Pius XII,” which he “displayed…in a case at the rear of St. Patrick’s Cathedral—the image of the real pope.”

Nevertheless, Pope John’s call for openness in the church proved irresistible. Through small gestures and acts of inclusion, he “undercut what had been taken to be Catholic absolutes,” including perceptions “that Protestants and Jews are doomed, that priests are ontologically superior beings, that error has no rights, that the pontiff himself, no mere ‘bridge,’ is a kind of God.”

The international mass media “beamed” Pope John’s “joyful, avuncular presence…around the world” as he “embraced Orthodox patriarchs and Jewish rabbis.” Jewish leaders “rejoiced that the head of a church that had seemed to consider them Christ-killers would remove the most odious anti-Semitism of the Christian liturgy and speak to them as brothers.”

Communists and non-believers,

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96 Ibid.
97 Appleby et al., Creative Fidelity, 285.
who instinctively “assumed that the Catholic faith was their antagonists, found
themselves drawn to the humanity of John.”  

These developments failed to impress Pope John’s powerful detractors in the
Roman Curia, and conservative Catholics in the United States became increasingly
concerned about the “sea change occurring in the papacy’s apprehension of world
problems and its prescription for them.”  

The first ideological skirmish in the U.S. Catholic community occurred in 1961, when Pope John’s social encyclical, Mater et
Magistra (“Mother and Teacher”), “signaled the divisions between so-called liberals and
conservatives that would intensify after 1968 over the legacy of Vatican II.”  

A commentary in the conservative National Review—irreverently titled “Mater, si;
Magistra, no,” a riff on the popular maxim of Cuban refugees: “Cuba, si; Castro, no”—
criticized Pope John for stressing the inequalities that arose in capitalist economies while
downplaying the abuses committed by authoritarian powers like the Soviet Union.  

“The most obtrusive social phenomena of the moment are surely the continuing and
demonic successes of the Communists, of which there is scant mention,” wrote the
magazine’s founding editor, William F. Buckley, Jr., a conservative Catholic. Buckley
argued that the pope’s encyclical took “insufficient notice” of “the extraordinary material
well-being that such free economic systems as Japan’s, West Germany’s and our own are

99 Ibid.
100 Hennesy, American Catholics, 309.
101 Appleby et al., Creative Fidelity, 166.
102 Wills, Why I Am a Catholic, 43-47.
generating.” Buckley’s commentary precipitated a firestorm among Catholics, and some liberals went so far as to brand him as “anti-Catholic.” Overall, the controversy seemed inevitable, given that John’s encyclical represented a sharp departure from the insistent anti-Communism of Pius XII. At this point, a “pattern” had been set that “marked the social teaching of John XXIII and his successor, Paul VI.” While popes John and Paul “continued to challenge the atheistic materialism and totalitarianism ways of world communism,” they “abandoned ritual denunciations and initiated dialogue with communists,” while directing criticism “with greater force at western cultural imperialism and liberal capitalism.” Hennesey observes that, for Americans who “expressed their Catholicism largely in terms of emotional anti-communism or uncritically accepted the assumptions of the American and Western economic system, an era had ended even before the Second Vatican Council began.”

Criticism of unfettered capitalism had been part of the Vatican’s stock in trade since the late 19th century, but papal leaders before John tended to attract more attention for their condemnation of modern trends than for any pronouncements that could be interpreted as liberal. This was true even for the late 19th- and early 20th-century popes, whose social encyclicals drew uncharacteristic praise from liberals. After the long, reactionary reign of Pius IX, who openly criticized democracy, liberal Catholics in the

103 Appleby et al., Creative Fidelity, 177.
104 Wills, Why I Am a Catholic, 43-47.
105 Hennesy, American Catholics, 309.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
United States took comfort in the “social justice” rhetoric of his successor, Leo XIII, who assumed the papacy in 1878. Popular among working-class American Catholics, Leo earned a reputation as a liberal because of his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* ("Of New Things"), which affirmed the dignity of work and insisted that each worker had a right to a decent wage.\(^\text{109}\) Although these positions dovetailed with liberal views of the era, Leo’s outlook was shaped by his profound admiration for the Middle Ages. Even the pope’s laudatory assessment of labor unions was based “on the misconception that they resemble medieval guilds.”\(^\text{110}\) By 1899, the medievalist sensibilities that inspired Leo to criticize *laissez faire* capitalism drove him to condemn a vaguely defined “heresy” he termed as “Americanism.” Leo’s irritation with U.S. churchmen who sought to accommodate the Church’s teachings with liberal democratic values reflected his distaste for republics that relegated religion to the private sphere.\(^\text{111}\) “The union of church and state with the church ruling over the state has been a key Catholic doctrine since at least the Middle Ages,” Dolan writes. To praise the American model of church-state relations “was to challenge the legitimacy of an ancient, and indeed seemingly immutable, Catholic doctrine.”\(^\text{112}\)

Pope Leo XIII’s distrust of the modern world was reflected in his support for the neo-Thomist philosophical revival launched during the reign of his predecessor. In 1879, Leo’s encyclical, *Aeterni Patris* ("On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy"),

\(^{110}\) Ibid.
\(^{111}\) Ibid.
\(^{112}\) Ibid.
“enjoined on the Church universal the study of St. Thomas Aquinas.” Central to neo-Thomism was a “doctrine of revealed truths essential to salvation and entrusted to the church,” which justified the institution’s hierarchal structure and authority, and belief in “a universal moral law that is embedded in nature and accessible to rightly ordered reason.” The church’s philosophical adherence to neo-Thomist principles was reaffirmed in Pius X’s 1907 encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (“On the Doctrine of the Modernists”), which condemned the so-called Modernist “heresy.” The targets of this searing encyclical were European Catholic intellectuals who “resembled in some ways the American Transcendentalists.”

It is not at all surprising that Pope Pius discerned a threat in the Modernist movement, given that many of its theological propositions anticipated the guiding principles of Vatican II. According to *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, “the Modernists taught that God revealed divine truth through, and not apart from, history and the experience of ordinary people,” a position that could be seen as a challenge to a strictly hierarchal model of the church. Although the handful of American clerics influenced by European Modernists “did not see themselves as radicals bent on revolutionizing the Church according to the demands of modernity,” they did “hope to fashion a new Catholic apologetic that would speak more effectively to the democratic,

114 Appleby et al., *Creative Fidelity*, 247.
scientific worldview of their fellow Americans.”

Like their European counterparts, Catholic Modernists in America undertook “the critical study of the Bible; the historical study of the development of Christian doctrines, practices and institutions, and the comparative study of religion.”

Their opponents criticized these activities, advocating a largely sacramental approach to spiritual wisdom. Anti-Modernists emphasized the “sacerdotal power” of the ordained priesthood, defined the Church in clerical terms, and understood the sacred “to be utterly transcendent—remote from ordinary experience and inaccessible apart from the mediation of the Church.”

When the Vatican officially condemned Modernism in 1907, William L. Sullivan, an American Paulist priest, was among those who sensed the presence of a “political” motive. Sullivan contended that Modernism was denounced not because it “violated biblical or spiritual truths,” but because its “major tenets…undermined the absolutist claims of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.”

Yet, in a dramatic break with the past, the council initiated by John XXIII welcomed the contributions of liberal thinkers who had been forced into “ecclesiastical exile” for their unorthodox views. These scholars and theologians “infused” the documents of the Second Vatican Council “with biblical and patristic emphases, a

117 Ibid.
118 Appleby et al., Creative Fidelity, 247.
119 Ibid, 248.
121 McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom, 237.
sensitivity to diverse liturgical forms, and a focus on laypeople.”

In addition, their efforts imbued Catholicism with “a new sense of the church moving through history…and directly addressing the problems of the current age.” Among the most relevant documents for U.S. Catholics was the council’s *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, which was “framed to a significant degree by Father Murray.” This declaration “explicitly affirmed what American Catholics had long held: there should be no coercion of conscience on matters of religious belief; the state need not profess or privilege the one true church; all faiths, rather, could enjoy civil tolerance.”

From a liberal Catholic perspective, the document—which drew on the American tradition of church-state separation—effectively “rescued American Catholics from the equivocal position in which they had always been placed…by older church teachings.”

The Second Vatican Council’s apparent resolution of the church-state issue was one of its many achievements. As John W. O’Malley observes, one of Vatican II’s most distinctive characteristics “was the broad scope of issues it addressed.” Under the council’s influence, the church softened its focus on individual eternal salvation and stressed the need to witness “to God’s love and compassion by striving to bring justice

122 Ibid, 237.
123 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
and healing to the world right here.”\textsuperscript{128} In addition, the council modulated the church’s position on modernity, “from one of almost blanket suspicion and antagonism to one of critical sympathy and engagement.”\textsuperscript{129} Consequently, the Catholic Church “not only recognized the importance of culture in shaping religion, but also underscored the need for religion to transform culture.”\textsuperscript{130} Still more surprising was the council’s drastic redefinition of the church’s relationship with other branches of Christianity. As Steinfels writes, the conciliar documents “acknowledged the need for church reform, emphasized the place of scripture in the church’s life and liturgy, stressed the calling for the laity and the need for collegial structures in church governance—all implicit bows to features of Protestant Christianity.”\textsuperscript{131} This spirit of openness, however, created new challenges as Catholics struggled to redefine their collective religious identity. “Catholic identity no longer excluded a positive approach to ecumenism and evangelization,” writes theologian Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J. “But the change in focus…called for the elaboration of a new, very precarious balance between Catholic identity and openness.”\textsuperscript{132}

The reforms of Vatican II, while they “sounded the death knell for prickly apartness,” also smoothed the path for the U.S. church’s participation in the controversies of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{133} The post-conciliar church, as Dolan notes, “abandoned its sectarian

\textsuperscript{128} Steinfels, \textit{A People Adrift}, 74.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Dolan, \textit{In Search of an American Catholicism}, 194.
\textsuperscript{131} Steinfels, \textit{A People Adrift}, 74.
\textsuperscript{132} van Beeck, \textit{Catholic Identity After Vatican II}, 18.
\textsuperscript{133} Steinfels, \textit{A People Adrift}, 75.
posture, and sought to become a major force in American public life.\footnote{134} American clergy and religious, inspired by the council’s message of social justice, became participants in the civil rights movement, and religiously motivated antiwar activists “put a distinctly Catholic stamp on the seizure and burning of draft records and other dramatic nonviolent protests.”\footnote{135} “Radical sixties Catholicism left a permanent mark on the church’s presence in the public square,” Steinfels writes. “It melded the imperatives of the Council with the civil rights movement’s techniques of civil disobedience and nonviolent direct action and with the antiwar movement’s nearly apocalyptic mood of urgency.”\footnote{136} Not surprisingly, the church’s decision to address divisive social and political issues generated internal conflict that “spread through the entire community, dividing families and parishes, bishops and priests.”\footnote{137}

Significantly, many changes later described as factors contributing to the “crisis” in the U.S. Catholic Church actually helped create conditions similar to those found in other religious communities. If, for instance, U.S. Catholics were notorious for their “knee-jerk” anti-Communism in the 1950s, their political attitudes became more difficult to predict in the late 1960s. As Dolan observes, “Catholics in the United States were becoming more like the rest of the American population.”\footnote{138} On political issues, American Catholics often “described themselves as more liberal and less conservative

\footnote{134} Dolan, \textit{In Search of an American Catholicism}, 194.  
\footnote{135} Steinfels, \textit{A People Adrift}, 75.  
\footnote{136} Ibid.  
\footnote{138} Ibid, 426.
than the rest of white America.” According to a survey conducted in 1967, “24 percent of the Catholic population opposed the war, while only 16.5 percent of Protestants adopted such a position.” While this result was not duplicated in every study conducted during the Vietnam War, overall research on Catholic attitudes toward the war suggests that their views did not differ substantially from those of Protestants. In short, Catholics were no less divided than Protestants were on what was arguably the most polarizing issue of the day. Not surprisingly, the “liberalization” of the U.S. Catholic community coincided with a dramatic upsurge in social and economic mobility. Dolan noted that by the 1960s, Irish-American Catholics “were especially successful educationally and economically.”

During the 1960s, many American Catholics watched closely as reforms were promulgated at Vatican II—a significant departure from the past, when few eyes were turned toward Rome. In 1870, for instance, U.S. Catholics were practically oblivious to the first Vatican Council, mainly because they were still “struggling with the question of what it meant to be American.” By 1965, most Catholics seemed comfortable with their American identity. As Catholics discovered, however, the moment they “solved the first half of the riddle—what it meant to be an American—the other half unraveled.”

139 Ibid.
140 Ibid, 426-427.
142 Dolan, The American Catholic Experience, 426.
143 Ibid, 427-428.
144 Ibid, 428.
Vatican II not only challenged “Catholics to rethink the meaning of Catholicism in the modern world,” it also “sanctioned” and “accelerated” reform. Hence, U.S. Catholics were pressured to “solve the riddle of religion and modernity overnight”—a goal that some Protestant leaders regarded as overly ambitious. Protestant theologian Langdon Gilkey notes that Protestantism, unlike Catholicism, had been trying “for 200 years or more to deal with, absorb, and reinterpret the culture of modernity—a modernity that has developed more and more radically over those two centuries.” Yet, the Catholic Church, in the wake of the council, “tried to absorb the effects of this whole vast modern development from the Enlightenment to the present in the short period between 1963 and 1973.” Consequently, the political, social, and economic forces “that had structured and transformed the modern history of the West…impinged forcefully on her life” and needed “to be comprehended, reinterpreted, and dealt with by Catholicism in one frantic decade.” In the process, Catholics were treated to the extraordinary spectacle of episcopal leaders engaged in heated exchanges that resembled parliamentary debates.

The “Catholic Moment”

The 1960 election of President John F. Kennedy, as one observer writes, “suggested more than any proclamation could that Catholics at long last were

145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
comfortably integrated into American society.‖\(^{149}\)

Nowhere did the election results elicit greater enthusiasm than in Youngstown, a working-class community with a large Catholic population. By the fall of 1960, the presidential candidate was no stranger to the city. Kennedy first visited Youngstown in 1946, while attending the funeral of former PT-109 crewmember Leonard Thom, who had died in an automobile accident, leaving behind a pregnant wife and a child.\(^{150}\) Kennedy was asked to serve as a pallbearer at the funeral, which was held at St. Edward’s Church on the north side. He remained in Youngstown for several days. As his political career gained momentum, Kennedy kept in touch with Thom’s widow, Catherine Jane Thom Kelley, who developed friendships with other members of the Kennedy family.\(^{151}\) Then, in 1959, the Massachusetts senator served as the keynote speaker at a testimonial dinner for influential Youngstown congressman Michael J. Kirwan, an event held at the city’s Idora Park Ballroom.\(^{152}\) Kennedy’s final visit to Youngstown came in October 1960, when he addressed a huge crowd in the main square of the city’s downtown.\(^{153}\) Apart from his personal decision to attend a friend’s funeral in the 1940s, however, Kennedy’s awareness of Youngstown probably reflected little more than the city’s political and economic importance.

\(^{149}\) Dolan, In Search of an American Catholicism, 192.


\(^{151}\) Ibid.

\(^{152}\) Howard C. Aley, A Heritage to Share: The Bicentennial History of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley (Youngstown, OH: The Bicentennial Commission of Youngstown and Mahoning County, Ohio, 1975), 449.

Youngstown, after all, was viewed as a crucial northeastern Democratic stronghold until well into the 1970s.\textsuperscript{154}

Hundreds of those who gathered in Youngstown’s central square in 1960, however, were drawn to Kennedy for reasons that seemed personal, given their connection to deeply rooted religious and ethnic identities. Despite the candidate’s wealth and glamour, many ethnic Whites viewed Kennedy as “one of them”—a descendant of immigrants who belonged to a marginalized religion.\textsuperscript{155} Local Catholic educators, who understood the candidate’s “parochial” appeal, released students from classrooms so that they could catch a glimpse of Kennedy as his motorcade moved along Belmont Avenue on the city’s north side. Among the “scads of kids” who gathered along the main artery that October afternoon was Father Edward Noga, then a student at a local parish school. Like most of his classmates, Noga took pride in the presidential candidate: a Catholic, a war hero, and a “debonair-looking fellow.” Yet, the future priest was also aware of the controversy that swirled around the prospect of a Catholic president. “Some people were ecstatic,” Father Noga said. “But there was also that fear among people [who] kind of felt if he won, the pope was going to run America—all that unfounded stereotypical talk. But nevertheless, it was real.”\textsuperscript{156}

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\textsuperscript{156} Father Edward P. Noga, interview by the author, June 18, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
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Conservative prelates like Cardinal Spellman shared none of the Catholic laity’s enthusiasm for Kennedy’s candidacy. Spellman, who supported the Republican candidate, Richard M. Nixon, was outraged by Kennedy’s public comments on the minimal role his faith would play in shaping his policies as chief executive.\footnote{Cooney, \textit{The American Pope}, 265-266.} In March 1959, 15 months before the Democratic Convention, Kennedy took preemptive measures to neutralize critics who warned of the dangers of a Catholic president. Kennedy, in an interview with \textit{Look} magazine, said that an office holder’s private religious beliefs should not take “precedence over the oath to uphold the Constitution and all its parts—including the First Amendment and the strict separation of church and state.”\footnote{Timothy Walch, \textit{Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present} (Washington, DC: The National Catholic Educational Association, 2003), 209.} At one point, the youthful senator “brusquely” dismissed the option of public aid for parochial schools, terming it “unconstitutional under the First Amendment as interpreted by the Supreme Court.” He added that “fringe matters” such as transportation and lunches were “primarily social and economic concerns and not religious.”\footnote{Ibid.} “With this one bold statement,” Walch writes, “Kennedy dashed the hopes of millions of Catholics who prayed that one of their own would champion public aid for parochial schools.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Kennedy’s firm position on church-state issues could be seen as a product of political expedience, given that the issue of religion loomed large in the 1960 presidential campaign. The religiously motivated “distrust” Kennedy confronted “spanned the

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\item \footnote{157 Cooney, \textit{The American Pope}, 265-266.}
\item \footnote{158 Timothy Walch, \textit{Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present} (Washington, DC: The National Catholic Educational Association, 2003), 209.}
\item \footnote{159 Ibid.}
\item \footnote{160 Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
cultural spectrum,” ranging from “a crude prejudice against ‘micks,’ pressed by hooded ‘patriots’ who burned crosses in the night to highly literate, liberal concerns, voiced by some of the most respected seminary professors in the nation, about the hegemonic designs of a religious institution that had held, for many centuries, that ‘error has no rights.’”161 Yet, it seemed “ironic” that Kennedy’s religion had become an issue at all, given that he had “never been accused of being overly pious at any point in his life.”162 Discerning Protestant critics of the “Catholic candidate” rejected the idea that Kennedy was “constitutionally suspect,” and several of them voiced “reservations on opposite grounds.” Presbyterian scholar Robert McAfee Brown “thought the Look article revealed ‘a rather irregular Christian,’ and Lutheran writer Martin Marty feared Kennedy was ‘spiritually rootless and almost disturbingly secular.’”163 James Pike, the Episcopal bishop of California, made a similar observation in a book published several months after the Look interview. Bishop Pike describes Kennedy as “a thorough-going secularist who truly believes that a man’s religion and his decision-making can be kept in water-tight compartments.”164

Meanwhile, Kennedy’s detractors in the Catholic community were hardly limited to Cardinal Spellman, whose views reflected those of many other American prelates.165 Some bishops regarded the senator as “soft” on Communism, and one prominent lay

161 Mark S. Massa, Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 129.
162 Ibid.
163 Gleason, Keeping the Faith, 308.
164 Massa, Catholics and American Culture, 135.
165 Cooney, The American Pope, 270.
leader argued, in an “open letter” to U.S. Catholics, that Kennedy had “chosen to identify himself with that segment of American society which is either unwilling or unable to regard Communism as more than a childish bugaboo.” The candidate’s comments on church-state issues even raised eyebrows at the Vatican. Kennedy’s public vow that “he would never appoint an American ambassador to the Vatican” shocked influential observers in Rome. On the heels of one of Kennedy’s speeches on church-state relations, an editorial in the Vatican’s official newspaper, L’Osservatore Romano, asserted that the church was obliged “to tell Catholics how to vote.” Shortly after the editorial’s publication, Kennedy snapped to a confidant, “Now I understand why Henry VIII set up his own church.” In the course of his campaign, the candidate distanced himself from the church and vigorously attacked every attempt to portray him as “a Catholic candidate for president.”

Most U.S. Catholic voters were unaware of John Kennedy’s contentious relationship with the Catholic hierarchy, and some anticipated a chief executive who would share their particularistic concerns. After Kennedy’s inauguration in January 1961, the new president disappointed these co-religionists when he resisted all efforts to reopen the debate on public assistance for parochial schools: a response that underlined

166 Ibid., 267.
167 Ibid., 266.
168 Ibid., 270.
169 Ibid., 271.
170 Ibid., 270.
the fundamental sincerity of his public statements on the issue.  

“In retrospect it is not surprising that Kennedy would hold a position so at odds with the Catholic community,” writes Walch. “The president was a millionaire’s son who had gone to private preparatory schools and then on to Harvard. He had never attended parochial or Catholic schools and had only a few friends who were Catholic.” Notably, even John Courtney Murray—whose writings on church-state issues helped ease public concerns about a Catholic president—strongly advocated public tax support for parochial schools. Murray, in his famed treatise, *We Hold These Truths*, argued that the resolution of “the School Question reached in the nineteenth century reveals injustice, and the legal statutes that establish this injustice are an abuse of power.”

If Kennedy’s position on “the School Question” troubled some of his co-religionists, it also emboldened the rising number of Catholics who regarded religious schools as divisive (and expensive) relics of the past. Most Catholic critics of parochial schools conceded that such institutions might have been necessary in the past, when public school textbooks reflected an anti-Catholic bias. Indeed, public schools in earlier decades often promoted Protestant religious values. Historian Joseph Moreau observes that, as late as the 1870s, U.S. textbooks “classed Catholics as papists and lamented the

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172 Ibid.
lack of ‘pure’ religion before the Reformation.”  

Anti-Catholic sentiment reached another high point in the 1920s, when a resurgent Ku Klux Klan promoted public schools as “agents of Americanization,” while arguing that Catholicism was “actually and actively alien, un-American and usually anti-American.”

By the early 1960s, however, most Catholics believed that anti-Catholicism had ceased to be a potent force in American society. “The Roman Catholic Church…is certainly not under siege from Protestantism,” asserts Mary Perkins Ryan, in a preface written three years after Kennedy’s election to the presidency. “We no longer need to learn Catholic teaching ‘against’ Protestantism.”

Despite Kennedy’s indifference to so-called “Catholic issues,” his presidency benefited many of the nation’s Catholics. The election of a Roman Catholic as president weakened “the psychological defensiveness that had historically marked the Catholic American.”

Kennedy’s landmark speech to Baptist ministers in Houston blunted the edge of liberal allegations—made by Blanshard and others—that Catholics were hostile to pluralism. No less important was Kennedy’s endorsement of civic-minded voluntarism, enshrined in his inaugural address, which pointed to new outlets for the idealism of younger Catholics. Although large numbers of American Catholics continued

177 Hennesy, American Catholics, 308.
178 Garry Wills, Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy, and Radical Religion (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 79-83.
to enter the religious life, “a growing number...became secular American missionaries in the Peace Corps and later in VISTA and similar programs.”

Significantly, the timing of Kennedy’s election coincided with the first rumblings of reform in Rome, which enabled Catholics to “claim the best of both worlds.”

“Balancing the secular respectability of Kennedy in office,” writes Wills, “there was the added joy, for Catholics, of a very religious man on the chair of Peter, restoring an air of saintly love to an office that had looked too harsh—authoritarian, doctrinally imperialist—under Pius XII.” Steinfels notes that, during the early 1960s, “all the residual stress points between Catholicism and America’s political ethos seemed to collapse.”

Kennedy’s truncated presidency, in particular, became a powerful symbol of this development, in large part because it coincided with the deterioration of the old U.S. Catholic subculture. Morris notes that “Kennedy’s election—the moment that was hailed as the Church’s greatest triumph—was an unmistakable signal that the old separatist, ethnic wellsprings of Catholic power were finally running dry.”

As Catholics moved “into the mainstream of the culture,” many assumed a “dramatically new identity,” one that helped “unleash a traumatic identity crisis for American Catholics by the end of the twentieth century.”

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179 Hennesy, American Catholics, 309.
180 Wills, Bare Ruined Choirs, 81-83.
181 Ibid.
182 Steinfelds, A People Adrift, 73.
184 Morris, American Catholic, 281.
185 Massa, Catholics and American Culture, 5.
First Sunday of Advent 1964

For many U.S. Catholics, the most obvious symbol of change in the post-conciliar era was the vernacular Mass, introduced in churches across the country on the first Sunday of Advent in 1964. While the impact of the liturgical changes is often downplayed, the new liturgy “helped to shape new cultural nuances of ‘being Catholic’ in America.”186 Along with the social encyclicals of Pope John, the introduction of the “new Mass” encouraged Catholics to label each other as “liberals” or “conservatives”—“based on (among other things) their reception of the mandated liturgical changes.”187 Thomas Day makes this point in his controversial meditation on Catholic culture, Where Have You Gone, Michelangelo? “Meteorologists should investigate a very bizarre phenomenon,” Day writes. “During a polite, ordinary conversation among a group of Catholics, someone casually slips in two words, ‘Latin Mass.’ Suddenly, there is a chill in the room.”188 If older Catholics were to describe “the inexpressible beauties” of a Latin Mass, Day continues, “that drift of the conversation [would] be quickly halted by someone who, with cold reasoning, denounces the utter wickedness of worship in Latin.”189

Indeed, the controversy that surrounded liturgical reform should not have surprised anyone. Wills notes that the liturgy “is the one point where religion touched

186 Ibid, 155.
187 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
most Catholics, where they communicated not only with God but with their fellow believers and their own past.” While the Vatican Instruction of September 26, 1964, outlined a “gradualist timetable” for what it called the “restoration” of the Mass, “the nature of the changes mandated held the seeds for both a liturgical and ecclesial revolution.” The instruction granted wide latitude to individual celebrants on the details of the Mass—a flexibility that paved the way for innovation and experimentation. By the early 1970s, the Mass “had become unrecognizable to many—a thing of guitars instead of the organ, of English instead of Latin, of youth-culture fads instead of ancient rites.” The experimental nature of liturgical reform at the parish level often obscured the fact that the internal debate over the Latin Mass was centuries old. Catholic scholars had discussed the possibility of a vernacular Mass well before the Reformation; and in the 16th century, the Council of Trent’s edict on the liturgy merely stated that the Mass could “rightly and properly continue to be celebrated in Latin”—a far cry from condemning all usages of the vernacular.

In Youngstown, as elsewhere, the liturgical changes were carefully explained and aroused little initial resistance. On October 23, 1964, Bishop Emmett M. Walsh announced that English-language services would be held in diocesan churches on the Sunday of November 29. Bishop Walsh summarized “a series of eight sermons on

190 Wills, Bare Ruined Choirs, 64.
191 Massa, Catholics and American Culture, 160.
192 Ibid.
193 Wills, Bare Ruined Choirs, 64.
liturgical reform to be preached each Sunday preceding the change.”¹⁹⁵ The bishop also noted that classes had been scheduled for the 1,700 lay commentators of the diocese who were to “lead the responses of the congregation”—a move that heralded a new level of lay participation.¹⁹⁶ Father Edward Noga, a junior high school student at the time, recalled that his co-parishioners were “curious” about the “new” Mass. “They were surprised,” he said. “There were some things that made their jaws drop a bit, their eyes open.” Noga himself was unfazed by the changes, however. “When I first starting serving Mass [as an altar boy], everything was in Latin,” he said. “And I loved it. I was in the choir. I sang a lot of songs in Latin. I can still hum and sing many of them.” He did not recall being unsettled by the introduction of a “transitional card” that featured translations of four Latin hymns into English, and he indicated that he was equally receptive to the vernacular Mass introduced some time later. “I didn’t ever look upon it as some kind of liberal-conservative, pre-Vatican II-post-Vatican II issue,” he said. “It was just like: ‘I’m an American. We speak English. Our prayers now are in English, and we’re going to sing in English.’”¹⁹⁷

The liturgical changes, of course, involved more than the translation of prayers and songs from Latin into the vernacular. The reforms also played a critical role in expanding the Catholic laity’s understanding of the Bible. After November 29, 1964, U.S. Catholics were exposed to readings presented in English rather than in Latin, a

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁹⁷ Noga, interview.
reform that highlighted “the biblically based nature of worship.” Furthermore, assigned readings became “the basis for the homily preached by the celebrant, thus sponsoring a more scriptural (as opposed to doctrinal, ‘disciplinary,’ or financial) weekly application of the Tradition to the lives of the faithful.” Kathleen Zimmerman, an administrator at a Catholic social-service agency in Youngstown, recalled her openness to this aspect of the “new” Mass. A native of Renton, Pennsylvania, a coal-mining town about 85 miles east of Youngstown, Mrs. Zimmerman described her impressions of a newly assigned pastor who “started to truly teach.” “It was just so stimulating to me, to be listening to theology coming from homilies,” she said. She noticed, however, that most parishioners did not seem to share her enthusiasm for the pastor’s homilies. “Coal-mining people in the pews didn’t like him,” she recalled. “And they really didn’t want to know more.” During sermons, older parishioners “were saying their Rosary, or else reading out of their…missalettes.” Mrs. Zimmerman, on the other hand, welcomed these biblically grounded homilies as a refreshing alternative to the brief, moralizing sermons she recalled from her early childhood. “The old church was labeled as ‘pray, pay, and obey,’” Mrs. Zimmerman said. “And I think…they’re still people who feel more comfortable in a ‘pay, pray, and obey’ environment. It’s easier.”

198 Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 162.
199 Ibid.
200 Hank and Kathleen Zimmerman, interview by the author, February 19, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
201 Ibid.
While the introduction of the English-language Mass appeared uneventful, Catholics were deeply divided in their responses to liturgical reform. As Massa notes, most Catholics “welcomed the ‘reformed’ liturgy introduced at the end of 1964 like water in an arid desert,” while others “used ‘betrayal’ language to describe their new worship—betrayal language often of a particularly fierce kind.” Among those parishioners who were alienated by the reforms was Jack O’Connell, a Youngstown-area labor leader, who argued that the Tridentine (Latin) Mass “had a mystique to it that was taken away by Vatican II.” O’Connell was shocked by the elimination of Latin, and he disliked the fact that the congregation was forced to rely on hymnals. “All the old songs disappeared: ‘Pange Lingua,’ and all the rest of the old ones,” O’Connell said. “In fact, after Vatican II, we started to learn [from] a whole new hymn book. And to tell you the truth, I resented it.” O’Connell’s dissatisfaction with the post-conciliar liturgical changes remained evident four decades later. “I will not…pick up the hymnal book,” he insisted. “I won’t pick up that book. I grew up knowing, memorizing every song that was done in the Catholic Church, and it isn’t the same today.”

O’Connell’s concerns were shared by a small, often vocal, minority of his co-religionists who also preferred the Latin Mass. Paula McKinney, a long-time parishioner at St. Columba’s Cathedral, argued that, in the wake of reform, the liturgy had “lost its sparkle.” Although Mrs. McKinney said she welcomed Pope John’s call to “update” the

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202 Massa, Catholics and American Culture, 155.
203 Martin “Jack” O’Connell, interview by the author, April 13, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
church, she nevertheless regretted that church leaders “threw out all of the lovely devotions.” The Latin Mass, she said, was more “dignified” than its reformed counterpart. “And we did know what we were saying,” Mrs. McKinney added. “I mean the prayer book was in two sections—Latin on one side and English on the other.”

Other local parishioners mourned the loss of something less tangible: a liturgical space that offered refuge from the pressures of everyday life. Elizabeth Fekety, who did not criticize the vernacular Mass, still looked back with nostalgia on the liturgical atmosphere of the pre-conciliar era. “You weren’t allowed to talk in church,” Mrs. Fekety said. “And so, the serenity of [the Mass] was what kind of drew you to it.”

For communicants “accustomed to the familiar and comforting world of Catholic popular devotions to the Virgin Mary and one’s ‘household saints’...the sudden ‘intrusion’ of congregational singing appeared foreign, even suspiciously Protestant.” Feminist theologian Denise Lardner Carmody, writing about her own mother, observes that the older woman would probably agree with psychologists that her commitment to devotional Catholicism was “a way to console herself.” Carmody adds, however, that her mother would also insist that “God’s therapy...was much cheaper and more highly recommended” than the services of a psychologist.

The liturgical changes, which

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204 McKinney, interview.
205 Fekety, interview.
206 Massa, Catholics and American Culture, 161.
207 Carmody, The Double Cross, 3.
“touched the very soul of Catholic devotional life,” deprived many Catholics of an important means of coping with life, and some “openly rebelled.”

The introduction of the vernacular liturgy was one of several potentially off-putting changes that awaited traditionalists on the first Sunday of Advent in 1964. A detail that caught parishioners’ attention “on just entering the church building” was the repositioning of the altar. The high altar “which formed the locus of attention of all present for the celebration was now to be ‘pulled away’ from the wall, so that the priest would face the congregation rather than stand with his back to the people—a simple, logistical move that, while restoring liturgical practice of the twentieth century to the tradition of the early church, overturned the style of worship that had obtained for over a thousand years.” The new arrangement presented a “theological conundrum” to some parishioners. “Who, many Catholics would soon ask, was being ‘addressed’ in the rite?” Massa writes. “And on ‘whose side’ was the priest: representing the congregation before God, or standing in persona Christi (and thus on the side of God) before the gathered people?”

Meanwhile, the renovation of church interiors offended other Catholics for reasons that had little to do with theology. Ornate, well-kept church buildings were a source of pride for many parishioners, who gave generously to maintain parish physical plants. These quaint interiors were not valued by everyone, of course. Wills, writing in

209 Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 160.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
1971, observes that, upon entering a pre-conciliar church, “one might think history was a
rummage sale, and this place had been fitted out after a visit to this sale.”\footnote{Wills, \textit{Bare Ruined Choirs}, 17.}
James Carroll, as a young priest in the 1960s, felt a need to drastically remodel the student
chapel at Boston University, with its “grim Stations of the Cross, dull smoked-glassed
windows…and formal altar raised on a small pyramid of stairs.”\footnote{Carroll, \textit{American Requiem}, 243.}
Even Thomas Day, an occasional critic of the post-conciliar renovations, concedes that some churches
erected before World War II were “half-baked imitations” of European monuments.\footnote{Day, \textit{Where Have You Gone, Michelangelo?}, 98.}
Traditionalists, however, were scandalized by the “stripping down” of elaborately
furnished church interiors; and they watched in horror as high altars were dismantled,
baldachinos pulled down, communion rails removed, and statuary placed in storage.\footnote{Dolan, \textit{The American Catholic Experience}, 430.}

In Youngstown, the renovation of church interiors was carried out on a sweeping
scale after Vatican II. In the spring of 1969, the uncluttered interior of Youngstown’s
rebuilt cathedral was further simplified when Bishop James W. Malone ordered “removal
of the heavy marble altar, bronze reredos screen and baldachino.”\footnote{―Plan Cathedral Renovation,‖ \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, April 11, 1969.}
Monsignor Glenn
Holdbrook, the cathedral rector, said it was “doubtful that the marble altar can be
removed without destroying it,” and the \textit{Vindicator} reported that there were “no plans to
salvage or retain these art treasures.”\footnote{Ibid.}
Some local Catholics complained that these
renovation projects were not only destructive, but they also showed a lack of respect for
older parishioners. “If you remember the remodeling of the churches, we had to throw out all the gold,” O’Connell stated. “These were brought in as monuments and remembrances of people, and we threw them out and replaced them with wood.”

Burdened by the same feelings of loss, Paula McKinney, looked back on the fire that destroyed “old” St. Columba’s Cathedral a full decade before the liturgical reforms. She suggested that the neo-Gothic building’s destruction was “for the best.” “It would have been painful to see them strip down the interior in the wake of Vatican II,” Mrs. McKinney said. “It would have been like seeing Ethel Barrymore in toreador pants.”

Despite the myriad controversies generated by liturgical reform, a substantial number of Catholics treated the elimination of the Latin Mass as evidence of the church’s newfound openness and flexibility. McGreevy observes that the pre-conciliar church prided itself on “its ability to unify various cultures across the globe with one set of liturgical rituals and practices.” Likewise, the U.S. hierarchy’s intolerance for “immigrant practices,” along with its insistence that Black parishes adopt “a rigidly Romanist style,” reflected a “pervasive confidence in ‘integration’ broadly conceived.” Vatican II’s “openness to a variety of liturgical forms,” on the other hand, conveyed the bishops’ desire “to create a pluralistic institution, one more deeply rooted in local cultures.”

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218 O’Connell, interview.
219 McKinney, interview.
220 McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 223.
221 Ibid.
222 Ibid.
American community, where even those who had converted to Catholicism often expressed “great difficulty with some of its rituals and use of Latin.”\textsuperscript{223} One Cleveland-area Black Catholic admitted in an interview that she did not feel “a part of her religion” until the implementation of the post-conciliar liturgical changes.\textsuperscript{224} In a similar vein, a Chicago-based Catholic interracialist praised the reforms and dismissed “traditional pietistic practices as odd and rather occult.”\textsuperscript{225}

Nevertheless, the potential benefits of liturgical reform were lost on most traditionalists, who experienced the disappearance of the Tridentine Mass as a personal tragedy. “The laymen, coming home, found it a strange house, cluttered with signs of an alien occupancy,” Wills observes, writing seven years after the council. “He was asked to do things against which elaborate inhibitions had been built up all his life—touch the communion wafer, chew it, receive it standing instead of kneeling, even drink from the chalice.”\textsuperscript{226} Such changes troubled conservatives, who struggled to retain a meaningful connection to the values and practices of their religious upbringing. “The only thing I…have left of the heritage that I grew up with in the Catholic Church [is] going to Communion,” said Jack O’Connell. “And to this day, if the priest is there, I’ll take Communion by mouth [rather than by hand]. It’s the only thing that I have left of the

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{225} McGreevy, Parish Boundaries, 206.
\textsuperscript{226} Wills, Bare Rumen Choirs, 65.
Catholic Church that I grew up with.” Amid the protests of traditionalists like Jack O’Connell, Pope Paul VI made the reformed vernacular liturgy official in 1969.

As church officials discovered, however, resistance to the liturgical changes was not limited to traditionalists within the laity. On the international stage, Paul VI was challenged by schismatics such as French churchman Marcel Lefebvre, and such resistance was occasionally echoed on the local level. In the Diocese of Youngstown, the most serious case of clerical resistance to liturgical reform emerged in Vienna Township, a semi-rural community about 20 miles north of Youngstown. Through much of the 1970s, Bishop James W. Malone engaged in a battle of wills with Father John F. Roach, the traditionalist pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church. Father Roach, over the complaints of liberal parishioners and diocesan officials, “continued to say the old Latin Mass, which he termed ‘The Liturgy,’ as opposed to the ‘new Mass.’” After years of conflict, Father Roach appeared to capitulate to diocesan pressure, and he reluctantly agreed to retire. When a new pastor arrived at St. Vincent de Paul Church, however, he was shocked to discover that the altar, statuary, and Stations of the Cross had all been removed. Within days, a group of former parishioners announced their plan to build a

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227 O’Connell, interview.
231 Ibid.
new church that would host Latin Masses celebrated by the “retired” Father Roach. Bishop Malone, who acknowledged he could not prevent the group from building the church, warned them against identifying with the diocese.

In the early 1990s, a relatively mild controversy involving liturgy surfaced in neighboring Girard, Ohio, where supporters of the Tridentine Mass had established an “independent” parish. In February 1991, Our Lady of Sorrows Parish hosted a confirmation ceremony officiated by Bishop Tissier de Mallerais, a schismatic French churchman. “It’s the American Catholic Church,” one parishioner said. “It’s not the Roman Catholic Church—the Diocese of Youngstown…. They’ve left the church. We haven’t left the church.” This stubborn resistance to the vernacular Mass mystified erstwhile liturgical reformers, who expected all Catholics to welcome a liturgy that addressed them in their own language. As Morris writes, “Theologians blithely assumed that if people didn’t understand the Latin liturgies, they couldn’t be attached to them, missing the ritualistic significance that the liturgies had acquired.”

Paul VI’s 1968 decision to ban the Tridentine Mass was rooted in his conviction that “two forms of the Roman or Latin rite within the one church would bring

233 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
disunity.‖ Indeed, the church’s emphasis on liturgical conformity grew stronger in subsequent decades. Since the 1978 papal election of Karol Wojtya, the Vatican has taken bold measures to re-impose “theological order and central control.” Consequently, John Paul II’s decision, in 1984, to permit the Latin Mass “to be more widely celebrated” precipitated an outcry among international bishops, who feared a rollback of the council’s liturgical reforms. The papacy’s conservative position on the liturgy came into play, once again, in 2003, when the Vatican shelved a 1998 missal that had been prepared over a 13-year period by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), a commission established in the late 1960s to oversee the English translation of the reformed liturgy. Critics of the Vatican’s decision to suppress the ICEL’s missal praised its gender-inclusive language as well as its fluid, elevated prose, which avoided the colloquialisms of the widely criticized 1973 missal. Although it remains unclear whether conservatives intend a complete restoration of the Tridentine Mass, opponents of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II have taken “heart” from the policies of John Paul II and his successor, Benedict XVI.

Overall, the debate concerning the post-conciliar liturgical reforms crystallized the conflict between liberal and conservative Catholics. In the mid-1960s, a majority of American Catholics embraced the reformed liturgy as a more authentic form of worship

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238 Wilkins, “Lost in Translation.”
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid.
than the Latin Mass, and most of them still do. While liberal Catholics welcomed the fact that the new liturgy reflected “a degree of diversity and adaptability unknown in the recent past,” traditionalists mourned the loss of a heritage and clung to vestiges of the “old church.” If liberals reveled in the church’s new openness to mainstream culture, conservatives were more likely to lament the erosion of a well-defined religious identity that distinguished them from other Americans. Whatever the outcome of the ongoing debate over liturgy, there is little doubt that American Catholicism was irrevocably altered by the post-conciliar changes. Writing in the late 1990s, Massa refers to a scene from Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* to describe the momentous impact of liturgical reform: “Like the opening of the windows to let the streaming sunlight into Miss Havisham’s house, which instantaneously destroyed the timeless, death-defying world of her jilted wedding day decades before, all of that former world was gone.” Naturally, the replicated institutions that were an integral part of that “former world” experienced transformation in the wake of the conciliar reforms.

**Post-Conciliar Reevaluations of Catholic Schooling**

Despite its wealth of scholarly output, the council produced no groundbreaking documents that dealt specifically with education. Buetow notes that the council’s “relatively weak and traditional” *Declaration on Christian Education* essentially
reaffirmed “the special status of the Catholic school” and emphasized parents’ “duty to entrust their children to Catholic schools.” While the declaration did not directly endorse the (mainly American) fight for public aid to parochial schools, it nevertheless affirmed the principle of *subsidiarity* “as a guiding policy in education.” This principle, formulated in Pius XI’s encyclical letter, *Quadragesimo Anno* (translated as “In the Fortieth Year,” a reference to the fact that it was issued 40 years after *Rerum Novarum*), was defined by the council as follows: “Just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to the community at large what private enterprise and endeavor can accomplish, so it is likewise unjust and a gravely harmful disturbance of right order to turn over to a greater society of higher rank functions and services which can be performed by lesser bodies on a lower plane.” In the context of education, the principle of subsidiarity suggested that governmental bodies should “aid private schools so that they do not have to price themselves out of existence”—a situation that would produce “an undesirable ‘school monopoly’ …where there would be only public schools.” As Gabert notes, however, the principle of subsidiarity led to a rather flawed, even “dangerous,” argument in support of state aid to private religious schools. “The pivotal question rests with the word ‘can,’” he writes. “If the family ‘can,’ the state should not. If the state ‘can,’ the federal government should not.” Gabert questions

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249 Ibid., 302-304.  
251 Ibid., 105.  
252 Ibid.  
253 Ibid.
whether the financial difficulties facing U.S. parochial schools reflected Catholic’s inability to “foster an independent school system.”\textsuperscript{254} “If Catholics ‘can’ but simply ‘will’ not pay the cost of a separate school system,” he continues, “then the Declaration on Christian Education itself, drawing on a long series of traditional writings, condemns plans for state aid.”\textsuperscript{255}

The relative conservatism of the Declaration on Christian Education was largely overshadowed by the general impact of the council, however. As Walch observes, the drastic reforms “in doctrine and liturgy mandated by Vatican II seemed to transform Catholicism into a new religion.”\textsuperscript{256} Buetow notes that the council’s central document, Guadium et Spes (“The Church in the Modern World”), “evidenced a positive concern for the whole world” that encouraged Catholic educators to broaden their mission.\textsuperscript{257} On the one hand, Guadium et Spes asserted that any assistance the church “offers to society is based on her religious role.” On the other, it stressed that every Catholic should live up to “his temporal duties…toward his neighbor.”\textsuperscript{258} It was, therefore, the council’s enveloping theme, rather than its specific educational recommendations, that inspired Catholic educators to reconsider the mission of religious schools. Buetow points out that among the “tangible results of Vatican II as applied to the United States Catholic education” was the 1968 revision of the National Catholic Education Association

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{256} Walch, Parish School, 173.
\textsuperscript{257} Buetow, Of Singular Benefit, 302-303.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 303.
(NCEA) constitution.\textsuperscript{259} The altered constitution, as he observes, placed the organization “at the service of society through Catholic education, rather than only at the service of Catholic schools.”\textsuperscript{260} This subtle shift in focus was important, because it enabled the NCEA to expand its goals “to promote Christian ideals, encourage educational cooperation, and contribute to the national educational effort.”\textsuperscript{261}

Notably, the influence of Vatican II contributed to the rise of non-traditional urban parish schools that served the needs of the underprivileged. In 1972, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a directive called, \textit{To Teach as Jesus Did}, which “fleshed out the council’s themes of active, publicly engaged schools.”\textsuperscript{262} The directive outlined “a threefold educational ministry: to teach the message of hope contained in the gospel; to build community ‘not simply as a concept to be taught, but as a reality to be lived’; and ‘service to all mankind which flows from a sense of Christian community.’”\textsuperscript{263} In the wake of the directive, U.S. Catholic leaders took steps to prevent their urban schools from becoming “havens” of racial segregation in “changing” neighborhoods. Amid sweeping demographic change, many U.S. dioceses “moved firmly and aggressively, in many cases against its own members, in resisting a tide of racially motivated enrollments.”\textsuperscript{264} Parish schools in changing neighborhoods resisted

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., 305.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid, 52.
pressure to relocate, despite the migration of traditional clients to the suburbs.  

Anthony S. Bryk and his co-authors observe that, if Catholic educators had obeyed “economic logic,” they would have “closed “all fast-emptying inner-city institutions” and shifted their resources to suburban schools, “but often this course was not followed.”

Such decisions were made by diocesan officials in cities like Youngstown beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1973, the Diocese of Youngstown publicly affirmed its commitment to urban parish schools, especially those that served large numbers of minority students. To illustrate this commitment, the diocese established a committee to recommend policies for schools based in “poverty areas.” Alert to the possibility that Catholic schools could become “havens” for Whites seeking to avoid integrated urban public schools, the diocese initiated guidelines in 1974 to prevent this development. The diocese observed that, when a student attempted to transfer from a local public school “to the Catholic school of the attendance area in which their parents reside,” the following provisions would need to be met: 1) parents would be required to complete an application for admission; 2) the principal of the “receiving” Catholic school would be required to confer with the principal of the “sending” public school to discuss “his or her knowledge of the transfer”; and 3) a conference regarding the reason for the transfer would need to be held among the parents, the pastor, and the

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265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
268 Ibid.
principal of the “receiving” Catholic school. Moreover, the diocesan school board’s policy on registration and transfer of students was amended to include the following statement: “It is of utmost importance that principals and pastors of diocesan schools must refuse admission to anyone who is, in their opinion, attempting to circumvent the laws or court orders affecting the integration of public schools.”

Given the difficulty of discerning parents’ motivations for transferring their children from one school to another, however, it is questionable whether these policies did much to prevent urban parish schools from serving as havens. Meanwhile, the efficacy of such policies may have been undermined by the fact that many urban parish schools were struggling with the effects of declining enrollment—a situation that limited their capacity to turn away prospective students.

That said, a policy of fostering support for non-traditional urban parish schools (those serving primarily non-White and non-Catholic students) continued for decades. In the late 1960s, Immaculate Conception Elementary School, located on the city’s east side, was among the first of Youngstown’s parish schools to accept large numbers of non-White, non-Catholic students. By 1976, about 44 percent of Immaculate Conception’s 327 students were non-Catholics, and many of these were members of...

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270 Ibid.
271 Ibid.
272 Internal Records for Immaculate Conception School, 1969-1970, reproduction, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
Likewise, St. Patrick’s Elementary School, located on the south side of Youngstown, served an increasingly diverse student population. By the early 1970s, diocesan leaders cited St. Patrick’s as one of two urban parish schools based in Youngstown that enrolled large numbers of non-White, non-Catholic students. In 1976, following a heated debate, the diocesan school board rejected a proposed diocesan-wide tax to assist struggling urban parish schools like Immaculate Conception. Some board members evidently rejected the proposed tax because the beneficiaries were schools that served primarily non-White and non-Catholic students. This position was articulated by Raymond Pelanda, chair of the diocesan finance committee. “If there were no public schools in Youngstown, I would think differently,” Pelanda said. “The poor and minorities can get an education in the public schools. We are backed up to the wall.” However, several months later, in January of 1977, the board succumbed to pressure from local clerical leaders to secure alternative funding that would help to keep these schools operational. Among others, the board drew resources from the home mission fund of the Youngstown Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which was

276 Ibid.
designed to support evangelical ventures.\textsuperscript{278} As late as the early 1990s, two of Youngstown’s eight remaining parish schools served a majority of Black students.\textsuperscript{279}

While the American church’s stated commitment to maintain a presence in urban neighborhoods drew plaudits from liberal Catholics, this period in the history of U.S. Catholic education was characterized by setbacks and disappointments. Indeed, many Catholic observers have traced the decline of parish schools to the tumultuous period following Vatican II.\textsuperscript{280} Amid internal conflict that Dolan describes as “unprecedented in…scope,” U.S. Catholics began to question the efficacy of institutions that were once considered beyond reproach, especially parish schools. The first salvo in the battle over the relevance of Catholic education was fired in 1964 by Mary Perkins Ryan, who wrote, “the parochial school system does not and cannot answer present needs.”\textsuperscript{281} Ryan, a layperson with no previous experience as a researcher, criticized an unwieldy “alternative” school system that could be sustained only through an enormous outlay of resources. Drawing on figures taken from the \textit{Official Catholic Directory}, Ryan noted that, in 1963, “an estimated 4,534,393 children would be attending 10,322 parochial elementary schools and institutional schools and an additional 84,636 would be in private Catholic elementary schools under a total of 111,091 teachers.”\textsuperscript{282} She added that another 623,897 “would be attending 1,537 diocesan and parochial high schools,” while

drawn from...

\textsuperscript{278} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{279} “Bishop: Catholic schools stay open,” \textit{The Vindicator}, April 7, 1992, B-2.
\textsuperscript{281} Ryan, \textit{Are Parochial Schools the Answer?}, vii.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid, 8.
“an additional 381,048 would be attending 895 private Catholic schools, all these staffed by 46,625 teachers.” Ryan concluded that, despite the enormous expenditures needed to support Catholic education ($100,000,000 in 1958 alone to maintain, operate, and refurbish U.S. parochial schools), religious schools were not used by a significant percentage of American Catholics. Only 55 percent of Catholics patronized religious elementary schools, she observes, and this percentage was likely to decrease as the cost of maintaining these schools became untenable.

Inspired by liberal theologians who reinterpreted church history to justify institutional reform, Ryan argued that the church had persisted for centuries without relying on a system of separate schools. Her book had an immediate—and profound—impact on American Catholic opinion. “Ryan was not a sociologist or educator and her book at times seems shrill and wrong-headed,” Walch writes. “Yet like the child questioning the emperor’s new clothes, Ryan created something of a panic.” An adherent to the pre-conciliar Liturgical Renewal movement that promoted congregational participation, Ryan “argued that Christians should be formed by the liturgy, not by classroom teaching.” By the early 1970s, she had abandoned this position, dismissing it as “astoundingly naïve.” Her dramatic reversal on the issue made little impact,

283 Ibid.
284 The term “parochial” generally refers to schools operated by parishes, while “diocesan” applies to schools that are managed by a diocese. Terms like “institutional” and “private” can be applied to schools operated by religious orders or Catholic laypeople.
285 Ryan, Are Parochial Schools the Answer?, 8.
286 Walch, Parish School, 177.
287 Gleason, Keeping the Faith, 188-189.
however. In the face of influential research pointing to the effectiveness of Catholic elementary and secondary schools, many Catholic leaders across the country continued to view Catholic schools with skepticism.288

In 1985, Greeley described the post-conciliar condition of Catholic schools as “paradoxical.”289 “On the one hand, the evidence is overwhelming that the schools are remarkably successful both religiously and academically,” Greeley writes. “On the other hand, enrollment in the schools is dwindling and Catholic leadership does not appear to be committed to Catholic schools as it was before the Vatican Council.”290 Greeley appeared uncertain about the connection between the conciliar reforms and flagging support for Catholic schools. In his 1985 report, American Catholics Since the Council, he notes that many U.S. Catholic leaders cited the conciliar document, Guadium et Spes, when they sought to justify the nontraditional mission of certain urban parish schools. He adds that the U.S. church, while publicly affirming its “obligations to the poor,” had “phased out as quickly as it could much of the most effective service it has ever done for the inner-city poor in the Catholic schools.” Meanwhile, parochial schools in non-urban areas fared only slightly better.291 Crucially, this trend raises questions about the depth of U.S. Catholic leaders’ commitment to the preservation of urban parish schools, despite the prevalence of public statements affirming the church’s responsibility to maintain a presence in the cities.

288 Greeley, American Catholics Since the Council, 141.
289 Ibid, 130.
290 Ibid.
291 Ibid, 141.
Not all observers agree with Greeley that a failure of leadership at diocesan and parish levels was a primary factor in the decline of parish schools, however. Some point to other developments, especially the exodus of religious teaching orders from parochial school classrooms after Vatican II.292 Former New York Times religion editor Kenneth Briggs, in his journalistic account of the decline of women’s religious orders in the U.S. church, argues that the virtual disappearance of the teaching nun was an unintended consequence of conciliar reforms. “The resolve with which sisters proclaimed and practiced their imperative in the years following the Council fueled their incentive to fulfill the highest aims of Gaudium et Spes for justice and service to the world,” Briggs writes. Many religious communities, he continues, turned “their energies away from certain kinds of activities such as teaching in Catholic schools in favor of projects to combat racism, feed the hungry, and find shelter for the homeless.”293 Briggs notes that the council’s emphasis on civic engagement coincided with a decisive shift away from a traditional hierarchal model of the church that once minimized the role of the laity.294 This model was displaced by a more inclusive vision of the church as “the people of God,” which diminished the “special” status previously accorded clergy and religious. Thus, Vatican II “flattened the playing field regarding vocations, lowering the status of a nun or upgrading the vocation of marriage, depending on your perspective.”295

293 Ibid.
294 Ibid, 121.
295 Ibid.
author does not take into account that many former nuns pursued alternatives to religious life that did not involve marriage.) In Briggs’ view, this alteration in status, along with other controversies of the post-Vatican II era, facilitated the sharp decline in religious vocations that began in the late 1960s. Consequently, religious orders, who were already starting to focus on service-oriented activities outside of the classroom, found themselves dealing with a drastic reduction in membership. Between 1966 and 1976, the number of women living and working in religious communities fell from 181,421 to 130,995. This trend profoundly affected urban parochial schools. James Youniss notes that, between 1965 and 1995, the number of religious teachers in the nation’s Catholic schools fell from 114,000 to 15,600. In 2001, Dale McDonald reported that, in the wake of widespread retirements, religious women comprised only five percent of the teaching staff of urban parish elementary schools.

In Youngstown, the decline of teaching religious orders was underscored by the final departure of nuns from the classrooms of St. Christine’s Elementary School in the late 1980s. Located in a relatively affluent district of the city’s west side, the parish school achieved its peak enrollment in 1964, when 18 religious instructors served 1,554

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296 Ibid, 117.
297 Ibid.
students. By February of 1988, however, only two nuns were included on a staff of 25 administrators and teachers, who served 600 students ranging from pre-school to eighth grade. That year, Sister Mary Stella Aquilina, principal of St. Christine’s, announced that she, along with her co-worker, Sister Cecilia Ann West, would leave the school at the end of the academic year. Their departure, she explained, came at the request of their religious order, the Daughters of Charity. As the Vindicator noted, events at St. Christine’s parish school reflected a larger trend of laicization among the community’s parochial elementary schools. In a statement, Sister Nancy Dawson, O.S.U., general superior of the Ursuline Sisters of Youngstown, one of the area’s largest teaching orders, placed the departure of nuns from local classrooms in the context of recent trends. “Our institutions were built and staffed to respond to the needs of an immigrant church,” she said. “Today…religious [orders] with fewer, aging members and limited financial resources simply cannot afford to own or staff the institutions. However, we have nurtured and trained competent lay teachers and administrators with Catholic, Christian values, to replace us.” In a more pessimistic assessment, Sister Mary Stella described the decline of teaching orders as “another phase in the church that will not be without pain.”

301 Ibid.
302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
304 Ibid.
For Catholic schools, this “phase” yielded more difficulty than many observers could have predicted. The retreat of thousands of teaching nuns from the classroom not only diluted the religious atmosphere of parish schools; it substantially drove up the cost of maintaining these institutions. Members of religious orders were gradually replaced by lay teachers who required—and soon demanded—greater remuneration. To make matters worse, these economic demands overlapped with a steep decline in church-related donations by U.S. Catholics, which prevented dioceses around the country from offering teachers “adequate salaries and benefits.”

Few communities were immune to this dilemma, and reports of salary disputes involving lay teachers at parochial schools surfaced in Youngstown as early as the mid-1980s. In February 1985, teachers opted for union representation at eight diocesan parish schools, including four that were based in Youngstown—St. Dominic (south side), St. Christine (west side), Holy Name (west side), and St. Patrick (south side). Diocesan officials responded cautiously to this news. On the one hand, they emphasized that the diocese was “not bound by the National Labor Relations Act” to engage in collective bargaining. On the other, they “affirmed the Catholic Church’s support for the right of workers to unionize.”

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306 “Parochial teachers vote for union at eight schools, says no at six others,” *The Youngstown Vindicator*, February 13, 1985, 2.
307 Ibid.
response offered little comfort to parochial schoolteachers, who had reason to question the church’s commitment to offer them a livable wage.\textsuperscript{308}

Earlier, in December 1984, Superintendent John Augenstein told parish teachers that “they would no longer receive a county-wide salary base, but would need to negotiate with principals and pastors of individual schools.”\textsuperscript{309} One lay instructor described the policy as a “power play” and complained that it worked to the disadvantage of teachers at poorer parishes. “And if the power play doesn’t work,” the teacher added, “they pull out their spirituality and make you feel like you are someone with less faith.”\textsuperscript{310} Naturally, as teacher salaries became less competitive, parish schools had more difficulty securing qualified staff.\textsuperscript{311} In 2000, educational researcher Maryellen Schaub noted that “Catholic school teachers are, on average, less educated and less likely to be certified in either their main or any other teaching field.”\textsuperscript{312}

The virtual disappearance of teaching nuns also raised questions about the possibility of maintaining a satisfactory religious atmosphere at parish schools. To meet this challenge, diocesan leaders developed policies that would assist them in evaluating the “fitness” of lay teachers to serve in Catholic schools. Unlike the past, when religious orders comprised the bulk of the teaching staff, diocesan officials felt they could no

\textsuperscript{308} “Elementary Teachers Miffed by Shift of Talks to Parishes,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, December 5, 1984, 10.

\textsuperscript{309} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{310} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{312} Ibid., 74-75.
longer assume that teachers held “appropriate” religious views. Therefore, in the 1980s, diocesan officials in Youngstown introduced a policy on the “religious development” of teachers. Superintendant Nicholas Wolsonovich, who stressed the need for such a policy, reaffirmed that the primary purpose of Catholic schools was “to teach the Catholic faith.” Given the central importance of religious instruction, Wolsonovich argued, it was essential “that the teachers and administrators have a thorough understanding of the Catholic faith so that they can pass it on to younger people.” The superintendent’s comments echoed those of Sister Patricia McNicholas, diocesan director of religious education, who suggested that the new policy was “based on the diocese’s belief that a teacher’s actions in the classroom have an impact on students’ faith.” As a later newspaper account revealed, the policy featured a “provision in the contracts of diocesan teachers” that required them “to abide by church law.”

Subsequent critics of the diocesan policy, however, complained that it was applied to issues that did not necessarily affect a teacher’s ability to serve in a religious educational setting. In January of 1988, an emotional controversy erupted over the diocese’s dismissal of a long-time elementary-school instructor who was accused of

314 Ibid.
315 Ibid.
316 “Hubbard group will picket diocese if dismissed teacher is not reinstated,” The Vindicator, February 2, 1988.
violating the policy.\textsuperscript{318} Parents and faculty alike were shocked to discover that Kathy Koker Doslovik, a teacher at St. Patrick’s Elementary School in nearby Hubbard, Ohio, had lost her job because “she married a Yugoslavian man whose previous marriage ended in divorce.”\textsuperscript{319} Within days of Mrs. Doslovik’s dismissal, a protest petition was signed by 300 people, “representing 97 percent of all parents who have children enrolled in the school.”\textsuperscript{320} One parent described Mrs. Doslovik, a fourth-grade teacher with 13 years of experience, as “a very loving person” who was popular with students.\textsuperscript{321} In the face of widening opposition, Wolsonovich, defended the dismissal of Mrs. Doslovik, insisting that Catholic school teachers “are required to abide by the laws of the church, which does not recognize marriages in which one person is divorced.”\textsuperscript{322}

The controversy stretched on for weeks. Angry parents in Hubbard noted that Mrs. Doslovik “had sought advice from a diocesan tribunal before getting married,” and fully believed that “the diocese understood the unusual circumstances of her situation and would work with her through the annulment process here.”\textsuperscript{323} In February of 1988, the St. Patrick Home and School Association in Hubbard threatened to picket the offices of the Diocese of Youngstown in the event that Mrs. Doslovik was “not allowed back in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{318} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{319} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{320} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{321} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{322} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{323} Ellen J. Sullivan, “Students’ parents defend diocese teacher’s actions,” \textit{The Vindicator}, January 30, 1988.
\end{itemize}
Although concerned parents protested outside the diocesan offices for five hours on February 4, 1988, they agreed to suspend their activities on the following day, while attorneys representing Mrs. Doslovik and the diocese worked out the “final details” of an “agreement.” The parents did not remain silent, however. On February 8, 1988, the Vindicator published a letter signed by two of the concerned parents that questioned whether “parents of children enrolled at St. Patrick School in Hubbard” were true partners in Catholic education “when we, who are paying for our children to attend this school, are not notified or consulted about the advisability of dismissing one of our teachers.”

The letter appeared on the same day that Mrs. Doslovik announced her resignation as an instructor at St. Patrick Elementary School, where she had taught for 10 years. Mrs. Doslovik indicated to a reporter that she “wanted to explain to her students why she was forced to leave but was nearly at a loss of words.” She noted that the details of her agreement with the diocese were expected to remain “confidential.” Two days later, on February 10, Mrs. Doslovik and her husband, Mladen, suggested in an interview that recent events had “strengthened their faith in God but undermined their confidence in the hierarchy of their church.”

324 “Hubbard group will picket diocese if dismissed teacher is not reinstated,” The Vindicator, February 2, 1988.
325 “Parents vow to keep pressuring diocese over teacher,” The Vindicator, February 5, 1988, 6.
327 Ibid.
328 Ibid.
Significantly, the laicization of the parish school staff coincided with a drastic narrowing of differences between Catholic and public education that displeased some Catholic parents. In 1971, the diocesan school board faced a storm of protests when it announced plans to introduce a sex education program in elementary and secondary schools.  

Superintendent Monsignor William A. Hughes told the *Vindicator* that the 15-member board had already approved the diocese’s “Family Life” education program. He added, however, that board members would “consider the objections.” Among those who opposed the program was James O’Connell, a policeman from nearby McDonald, Ohio, who predicted “if this program is introduced, you will not have a Catholic school in McDonald.” O’Connell’s concerns were shared by several local Catholic physicians who questioned the need for any kind of sex education program. Dr. C. E. Pichette recommended that the diocese “go back to teaching parents to teach children [about] sex as [they] did 15 years ago.” Dr. William Moskalik, another opponent, predicted that the program would “not be implemented in Byzantine Catholic schools in Youngstown and Warren.”

The introduction of a diocesan-wide sex education program was one of many developments that blurred the distinction between public and parochial schools in the Youngstown area. Two years earlier, in 1969, guidance counseling programs had been...

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331 Ibid.
332 Ibid.
333 Ibid.
334 Ibid.
set up at the diocese’s 78 schools.\textsuperscript{335} By the late 1970s, many diocesan schools benefited from psychologists, who were provided “under the auxiliary services provision of the Ohio Revised Code.”\textsuperscript{336} Still more surprising was the introduction of innovative curricula such as the Individually Guided Education (IGE) program, which was implemented at several of the city’s parish schools in the mid-1970s.\textsuperscript{337} Such developments were generally opposed by conservatives who believed that Catholic schools should focus on the transmission of traditional religious values.\textsuperscript{338} For some of these traditionalists, the connection between the reforms of Vatican II and the decline of U.S. parish schools was self-evident. Catholic schools, they argued, were intended to disseminate Catholic moral values that differed significantly from those encouraged in mainstream American society. According to this view, Vatican II encouraged Catholics to believe that the church had become flexible on matters of morality—an impression that severely undermined the enterprise of religious schools, all but divesting them of their \textit{raison d’être}.\textsuperscript{339}

By the 1980s, many traditionalists had concluded that Catholic schools offered a diluted version of church doctrine, and a vocal minority lobbied for the reinstitution of the widely criticized \textit{Baltimore Catechism}.\textsuperscript{340} Debates over classroom “catechistics,”

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{335} “78 Diocese Schools Have Total Guidance Program,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, November 23, 1969.
\bibitem{337} “Parochial Rolls Dropping: Down to 27,690 Students,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, September 3, 1972.
\bibitem{339} Ibid, 232-234.
\bibitem{340} Ibid, 234.
\end{thebibliography}
more often than not, pitted liberals against conservatives. As Walch observes, “progressive educators pushed for a religious education that centered on issues of war and peace, social justice, and the environment,” while traditionalists promoted the unembellished transmission of Catholic doctrine. 341 Conservatives and liberals “often talked past each other in promoting specific changes in Catholic school religious education.” 342 Such controversies unfolded in dioceses throughout the country. Officials of the Diocese of Youngstown were forced to intervene when “irreconcilable differences” over the “new” catechism resulted in the removal of three teaching nuns from Holy Trinity Elementary School, in nearby Struthers, Ohio. In April 1985, Sister Mary Regis, superior of the Vincentiane Sisters of Charity, said she decided to withdraw the nuns after learning that the pastor, a traditionalist, prevented them from teaching post-conciliar catechism. 343 Sister Mary Regis ignored diocesan requests to reconsider the move and carefully outlined her position. “Our concern is the religious foundation for the children,” she said. “We are not at liberty to train the children in the religion the way they should be trained; therefore, our presence is divisive rather than cohesive.” 344

As noted, parents were frequently involved in debates over catechistics, and efforts to promote a post-conciliar model of religious education elicited strong feedback. At the center of some disputes was theologian Karl Rahner’s concept of “anthropological theology,” which influenced conciliar documents on catechistics. A firm believer in the

341 Ibid, 233-234.
342 Ibid, 233.
344 Ibid.
church’s need to engage with the modern world, Rahner encouraged an approach to religious education that was grounded in social realities.\textsuperscript{345} As early as the 1960s, parents accustomed to “a traditional presentation” began to criticize many of the religious textbooks used in parish schools.\textsuperscript{346} Buetow, writing in 1970, observes that such “complaints had similar patterns: pictures of the Rev. Martin Luther King, modern art illustrations, ‘political’ issues included in the text, the recommendation of folk songs by Pete Seeger, and a de-emphasis of the question-and-answer approach.”\textsuperscript{347}

Changes in religious instruction came under heightened criticism in 1981, when a National Opinion Research Center survey revealed that Catholic schools, while they reinforced some traditional Catholic practices, “had no effect on student attitudes toward prayer and sexual morality.”\textsuperscript{348} Vocal conservatives called for “a return to old-fashioned moral education.”\textsuperscript{349} Catholic educators, in response, argued that only the “method” of moral instruction had changed; the “content” remained the same. They asked traditionalists “to concentrate on substance, not on form.”\textsuperscript{350} Meanwhile, amid rising concerns over “religious illiteracy” among parochial school students, William D. Kelly, executive director of the National Catholic Education Association’s religious education department, launched a 12-year plan that encouraged “more testing of students’

\textsuperscript{345} Buetow, \textit{Of Singular Benefit}, 319.
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid, 319-320.
\textsuperscript{348} Walch, \textit{Parish School}, 232.
\textsuperscript{349} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid, 233.
knowledge of religious content” as well as “the direct involvement of parents in the catechistic process.”

The protracted debate over curricular changes in Catholic schools left many traditionalists disillusioned, and some questioned the long-term relevance of parochial schools. One conservative Catholic, a product of parish and diocesan schools, outlined his reasons for transferring his own children to public schools. Post-Vatican II religious education programs, in his opinion, failed to provide parochial school students with an adequate moral compass. “Although conscience plays a role in your daily life, the rules when I was growing up were bigger,” said T. Gordon Welsh, a parishioner at St. Patrick’s Church. “So, you weren’t permitted to make decisions about behavior. It was too clear.” For traditionalists like Welsh, the unraveling of this sort of moral conditioning, which often occurred in parochial school classrooms, can be traced to the council. “In my world, [Catholic education] was the strictest, most rigid approach to education,” he said. “When it stopped, so did parochial school education. John XXIII…a loving man, screwed it up.” Welsh recalled that, in the late 1960s, he was pressured to transfer his eldest son to a public school when the boy complained to his mother about the strict discipline maintained at the neighborhood parish school. When he ignored his wife’s request to transfer their son to another school, she contacted the parish pastor and asked him to intervene. “[The pastor] said to me on the phone, ‘Hey, let your kid come out of

351 Ibid, 235.
352 T. Gordon Welsh, interview by the author, May 1, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
the school,’” recalled Welsh. “John XXIII...Vatican II.... Imagine Father [Maurice] Casey saying that? Father Casey would say, ‘Knock his block off.’”

Overall, there is strong evidence that parish schools—especially those in urban areas—experienced sharp decline during a period that many liberals described as an era of “restructuring.” What’s more, these schools have seen little in the way of a comeback during the conservative retrenchment that began in the Catholic Church during the late 1970s and early 1980s. “Catholic schools simply are no longer as important to the ecclesiastical institution as they were at the time of the Vatican Council,” writes Greeley, more than 20 years after its fourth and final session. He suggests that the U.S. Catholic community had lost its “confidence in Catholic schools even though they are now more important both to Catholics and to disadvantaged non-Catholics than they used to be.”

In recent decades, even episcopal support for urban parish schools has weakened. O’Keefe and his co-authors note that, while U.S. bishops “gave firm and unequivocal support to inner-city schools” in 1979, this commitment “can be eroded by competing demands, personnel problems, and serious financial constraints.”

353 Ibid.
355 Ibid.
As urban parish schools continue to close, a growing number of educators have lamented the so-called “eliting” of Catholic education. David P. Baker and Cornelius Riordan observe that, in the wake of sharp tuition hikes, almost 50 percent of students attending Catholic elementary schools “come from wealthy, upper-middle-class homes.” This average holds true, they point out, “for students in both the city and the suburbs.” Baker and Riordan interpret these averages as a byproduct of the sweeping demographic changes that occurred in urban neighborhoods after World War II. Similarly, O’Keefe and his co-authors report that urban parish schools, which once “created a non-elitist, egalitarian-type institution,” have been adversely affected by “the strain of serving students, regardless of their family’s ability to pay.” According to Baker and Riordan’s research, those seeking to identify the causes of decline among urban parochial schools should examine the altered realities of U.S. urban life rather than concentrating exclusively on the “failures” of Catholic educators.

Undoubtedly, administrators charged with maintaining urban parish schools have faced overwhelming challenges. Trends negatively affecting these institutions have ranged from urban demographic change, to deindustrialization, to the impact of internal religious reform. Under these circumstances, even exceptionally talented administrators

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359 Ibid.
360 O’Keefe et al., *Sustaining the Legacy*, 3.
361 Baker and Riordan, “It’s Not About the Failure of Catholic Schools.”
have been unable to prevent mass closures. In 2001, when Dr. Nicholas Wolsonovich ended his 16-year tenure as superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Youngstown, he was praised for his effectiveness. At no point was the administrator criticized for the fact that five of the 10 parish schools operating in Youngstown in 1985, the year of his appointment, had closed their doors by the time he resigned in 2001. Evidence suggests that Dr. Wolsonovich’s supervision of diocesan schools was rated an overall success. Indeed, he moved on to become superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Chicago, the largest Catholic school system in the country. Although his responsibilities at the Diocese of Youngstown extended beyond the boundaries of Youngstown itself, the city’s beleaguered pattern of parish schools posed a singular challenge. Many observers, it seems, interpreted his success in keeping half of the community’s parish schools operational as a remarkable accomplishment.

The Decline of Traditional Catholic Identity and Urban Parish Schools

The pressures that came to bear on U.S. Catholic educators in the aftermath of Vatican II were hardly the exclusive byproduct of changes that occurred within the church. Nevertheless, the reforms of the council inspired U.S. Catholics to become more engaged with mainstream American society, a development that represented a significant departure from the separatist tendencies of the past. Furthermore, under the influence of the council, the corporatist values that permeated the Catholic subculture subsided, giving

363 Ibid.
way to a new emphasis on personal autonomy. These developments overlapped with external trends that dampened the vitality of urban Catholic neighborhoods, while undermining the cohesiveness of the U.S. Catholic community. Significantly, many changes connected to the council were amplified—even foreshadowed—by urban trends that contributed to the breakup of Catholic enclaves and led many Catholics to relocate to ethnically and religiously diverse suburban neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, the election of President John F. Kennedy alerted Catholics to the fact that they were no longer perennial outsiders in American society. Under these circumstances, many U.S. Catholics were drawn into the polarizing national debates that surrounded issues like the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. Ultimately, they were no less divided than American Protestants on many of these issues, and internal ideological disagreements were exacerbated by the fact that many religious leaders took public stands on issues once regarded by the church as political rather than moral concerns. Such developments, in concert, worked against the conformity (and apparent uniformity) that traditionally characterized the U.S. Catholic community. In this period of accelerated integration, many Catholics began to question the need for replicated institutions like parish schools, which they tended to dismiss as insulating and divisive.

Given that the broader social commitment encouraged by Vatican II inspired many Catholic educators to envision urban parish schools as vehicles of social uplift for disadvantaged students (many of whom were non-Catholic), the role that the conciliar reforms played in the decline of these schools seems ironic. Undoubtedly, the council’s reevaluation of the “special” status of priests and nuns contributed to a precipitous
decline in religious vocations, as idealistic Catholics chose other (often secular) ways to be of service to their communities. Ultimately, the virtual disappearance of teaching nuns from the classroom was a substantial factor in rising costs among parish schools, given that members of religious orders were invariably replaced by laypeople with greater financial requirements. At the same time, post-conciliar debates regarding the efficacy of Catholic schools most likely encouraged some Catholic leaders (including bishops) to reconsider their commitment to these institutions, especially in the wake of trends like soaring costs, dwindling enrollment, and the Catholic laity’s growing ambivalence about the maintenance of parish schools that served mainly non-Catholics. As a result, many urban parish schools are dealing with severe challenges. Walch notes that, despite the well-documented contributions of these schools, they “face a troubled future.” The cost of maintaining these institutions, he adds, is “much higher than the spreadsheets reveal,” and the poverty confronting urban parish schools “is an obstacle that has been almost insurmountable, even for the most dedicated Catholic educators.” In the absence of decisive support from Catholic leaders and members of the laity, many patterns of parochial education throughout the country may suffer the fate of Youngstown’s system of parish schools.

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CHAPTER VII

A HOUSE DIVIDED: CONCLUSIONS

In May 2008, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a homily to American clergy and religious who had gathered at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. In an address one reporter described as the “most effective” of his American tour, Pope Benedict “brilliantly used the metaphor of the cathedral for the entire Catholic Church.”¹ The pope gestured to the building’s elaborate stained-glass windows, “which on the outside are dark, but which on the inside ‘reveal their splendor.’”² Benedict then spoke to the challenge of drawing people “into the church who see only its darkness,” a reference to the growing skepticism toward organized religion that characterized the era.³ At that point, the pope encouraged the gathering to view the neo-Gothic cathedral itself as a “symbol of church unity.”⁴ He noted that the massive structure had been “born of the dynamic tension of diverse forces.”⁵ The pope concluded by describing the cathedral’s spires, which soared 330 feet above midtown Manhattan, as a “reminder” of the “constant craving of the human spirit to rise to God.”⁶

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
Benedict’s address, while effective, may have drawn unwanted attention to the fact that the church he led did not conform to any definition of unity, especially its American branch. Liberals and conservatives disagreed on issues ranging from sexual ethics to the church’s response to U.S. immigration policies. Moreover, since the 1970s, the American hierarchy’s public stance against legalized abortion has taken on political overtones that have alienated large portions of the laity. As one priest observed, “Any American bishop today who comes out publicly to identify with a Democratic candidate would be shunned by his fellow bishops.” More recently, critics of the religious right, notably Damon Linker, have identified a strong Catholic influence in what appears to be a well-orchestrated political effort to elide America’s longstanding distinction between church and state. On the other end of the ideological spectrum, however, conservatives have criticized the U.S. hierarchy’s defense of the “basic human rights” of illegal immigrants. In April of 2008, several weeks before Benedict’s visit, Congressman Tom Tancredo, a Colorado Republican, remarked sarcastically that it was not in the pope’s “job description to engage in American politics.” In the face of widening ideological divisions, it would appear that U.S. Catholics do not even agree on what it means to be Catholic. “We’re all in a boat that has been rocked,” writes Kerry Kennedy, in her recent

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11 Ibid.
Amid internal conflicts that have arisen since the late 1960s, the U.S. Catholic community has struggled to come to terms with a clergy abuse scandal that undermined the church’s clerical leadership. Writing in 2002, six years before Benedict’s visit, Dolan observes that, despite the church’s myriad “good works,” the abuse scandal had “shaken to its foundation the sacred trust between priests and their parishioners.” Meanwhile, the church’s public image has suffered greatly. Greeley concludes that, in the decades that have elapsed since the final session of Vatican II, a church “so attractive during the time of Pope John” has “lost much of its respect and esteem.” Not surprisingly, the U.S. church’s loss of prestige has had negative consequences for institutions like parochial schools. Writing in 2005, Joseph O’Keefe, S.J., notes that “[d]isenchantment in the wake of the recent sexual-abuse scandal” contributed to “a drop not only in enrollment, but in the number of teachers and donations.” Then, in 2008, shortly before Benedict’s arrival in the United States, an article released by the Associated Press reported that “massive payouts to settle sexual abuse lawsuits” were a likely factor in the closure of many urban Catholic schools in the six years since the

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14 Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 257.
scandal had broken. The article quotes an NCEA report indicating that 1,267 Catholic schools had closed since 2000, while “enrollment nationwide…dropped by 382,125 students, or 14 percent.”

These figures surprised few people acquainted with the challenges confronting urban parish schools, which include dwindling donations, aging physical plants, the high cost of technology, and declining enrollment. In a 2004 report on urban parish schools, O’Keefe and his co-authors acknowledge the extent of these difficulties and suggest that they “have not only persisted, but have arguably gained vigor.” At the same time, they assert that U.S. Catholics are well equipped materially to “sustain the legacy of inner-city schools.” The report, sponsored by the NCEA, states that 43 percent of Catholics recorded an income of $25,000 or more, while only 37 percent of Protestants showed a comparable income. Yet, according to the report, the material well-being of U.S. Catholics offered no guarantee that these beleaguered institutions would be preserved. O’Keefe and his colleagues question whether Catholics had the “will” to support parish schools that were “totally reliant on resources beyond themselves, either in diocesan

18 Ibid.
19 O’Keefe, “How to Save Catholic Schools.”
20 O’Keefe et al., Sustaining the Legacy, 2-3.
21 Ibid, 71-72.
22 Ibid, 71.
structures or among philanthropists.”

This trend came to the public’s attention in the late 1980s, when Andrew Greeley released a study showing that Catholics contributed “half as much of their income to the church as they did 25 years ago.” The study, which was based on six national surveys taken between 1960 and 1984, showed that “contributions to Catholic churches have fallen to 1.1 percent of parishioners’ income, as opposed to 2.2 percent for Protestants.” Significantly, the study reveals that, during the same period, Catholic contributions to non-church charities “kept pace” with those of Protestants. “People thought that Catholics would either ‘knuckle under’ or leave the church,” Greeley stated. “But neither happened. And the result is a protest through money.”

The trends Greeley highlighted have remained constant. In 2000, Charles E. Zech reported that Catholics continued to give “at about half the rate of Protestants.” According to some research, material losses related to this decline have been staggering. Zech refers to a 1994 study that estimated “low Catholic giving costs the church about $1.934 billion a year”—a figure that

23 Ibid, 72.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Zech, Why Catholics Don’t Give...And What Can Be Done About It, 13.
reflected the amount the church could collect annually “if Catholics gave at the average rate for all Americans.”³⁰

Catholics tend to disagree on the reasons for this dramatic decline in giving, and some theories reflect strongly held ideological convictions. Greeley, for instance, argues that lower rates of giving have reflected “resentment about what Catholics perceive as insensitive church teachings and authority,” especially regarding birth control.³¹ Greeley’s theory, while “controversial,” is not without merit.³² Liberals, after all, have experienced their share of disappointments in recent decades. Many assert that the Second Vatican Council was compromised by conservative members of Paul VI’s cabinet, who took steps to undermine “democratizing” reforms.³³ According to this view, the first casualty of the conservative backlash was the “flattening” concept of collegiality, “the notion of [bishops’] shared responsibility.”³⁴ In the first of many interventions on behalf of the assembly’s conservative minority, Pope Paul took steps to ensure that the document on collegiality would include an “explanatory note” that diluted its impact.³⁵ Other papal measures to shore up pre-conciliar policies and practices followed.³⁶

A momentous turning point came in July 1968, when Pope Paul issued \textit{Humanae Vitae}, an encyclical letter that upheld the church’s ban on “artificial” birth control.

\begin{itemize}
\item³⁰ Ibid.
\item³² Zech, \textit{Why Catholics Don’t Give…And What Can Be Done About It}, 15.
\item³⁵ Wills, \textit{Why I Am a Catholic}, 233.
\item³⁶ Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Released only two years after a papal commission found no justification to continue the ban, *Humanae Vitae* has been called “the Vietnam War of the Catholic Church.” News of Paul’s encyclical met an outcry in the United States, where a letter of protest was signed by more than 600 Catholic scholars. In 1969, alone, prominent theologian Charles E. Curran edited two works highly critical of *Humanae Vitae*. At the same time, surveys conducted in “country after country showed Catholics overwhelmingly in disagreement with the papal position—and more and more so as time went on.” Within a decade, the damage the encyclical had inflicted on the U.S. church became evident, as scores of disillusioned clergy and religious opted for secular life. Throughout the 1970s, the institution “saw the number of priests leaving their ministry swell, church attendance drop, and financial contributions decrease.” In addition, the church’s vast network of parallel institutions was adversely affected “as nuns shed not only their peculiar head-to-foot garb, but, in many cases, their traditional roles as schoolteachers and nurses, and not a few left their strife-ridden orders altogether.” It is unclear, of course, whether this exodus was precipitated entirely by the ideological divisions that emerged in the post-conciliar era. Briggs points out, for instance, that many participants

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41 Ibid., 256.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 6-7.
in religious life reconsidered their vocations when Vatican II reevaluated the “special” status of priests and nuns. Nevertheless, the timing of many of these departures raises the possibility that disillusionment over the apparent reversal of conciliar reforms played a role in this development.

Further efforts to reign in the liberalizing influence of the council were to come. In 1978, following the short pontificate of John Paul I, the College of Cardinals elected a decisive leader, whose position on the conciliar reforms betrayed none of Paul’s ambivalence. “Paul VI seemed to yearn back, beyond the intervening council, to a more settled time, a kind of blissful status quo ante,” Wills writes. “John Paul II was ready to take people back there.”

John Paul II promoted a vision of the church that was strictly hierarchal, far removed from the conciliar model, which envisioned the church as “the people of God.” He appointed “extremely conservative” bishops to the church’s far-flung dioceses, and he “rarely engaged in serious consultation with episcopal leaders.”

The pope’s cabinet, above all, reflected his stringently conservative agenda. As head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the former Holy Office), Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (the future Benedict XVI) condemned “the council’s emphasis on the ‘People of God,’” claiming that the concept had been “transformed into a Marxist myth” that

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46 Ibid., 261-263.
introduced a “false democracy” into the church.\textsuperscript{48} These developments, along with the Vatican’s refusal to discuss controversial issues such as women’s ordination, galvanized liberal opposition to John Paul’s pontificate.\textsuperscript{49} As Catholic sociologist Michele Dillon observes, even some of those theologians who sympathized with the pope’s position on ordination criticized his “faulty theology.” In their view, he should have acknowledged “differences in women’s equality cross-nationally” and appealed to “the communal unity of the global church,” rather than insisting that the church lacked the authority to ordain women because Jesus did not do so.\textsuperscript{50}

Meanwhile, liberals, who were already acutely aware of the Vatican’s conservative “domestic policy,” became increasingly concerned about a rightward tilt in its “foreign policy,” as John Paul forged close ties with Western powers to undermine Soviet Communism and curb Communist influence in Latin America.\textsuperscript{51} Some observers complained that the pope’s failure to identify with the victims of right-wing regimes in Latin America was inconsistent with his outspoken support for the Solidarity labor movement in his native Poland.\textsuperscript{52} By the mid-1980s, a growing number of U.S. bishops expressed concern about the pope’s close ties with the Reagan administration.\textsuperscript{53} Although John Paul II “didn’t hesitate to confront the excesses of capitalism or

\textsuperscript{48} Wills, \textit{Why I Am a Catholic}, 261.  
\textsuperscript{49} Steinfels, \textit{A People Adrift}, 255.  
\textsuperscript{50} Michele Dillon, \textit{Catholic Identity} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 228-229.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 462.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 474.
materialism in global terms,” he consistently refrained from attacking the Reagan administration’s economic policies and “prevailed on the U.S. bishops to water down their criticism of Reaganomics.” President Ronald Reagan, for his part, even quoted the pope when he condemned “certain economic theories that use the rhetoric of class struggle to justify injustice,” and his own rhetoric took on “religious cadences” that made him “sound like the pope.”

Liberal U.S. bishops were especially concerned about John Paul’s apparent desire to roll back the reforms of Vatican II. Among the more outspoken critics of the Vatican’s conservative policies was Youngstown Bishop James Malone, who served as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1983 to 1986. “The prophets of gloom, of whom John XXIII spoke, are still very much with us,” announced Bishop Malone in the mid-1980s. “They would have it that the last two decades have witnessed nothing but dissolution and collapse and that the church can be saved only by returning to some earlier, fictitious, golden age.” Although liberal critics like Bishop Malone acknowledged John Paul’s “global stature” as a leader “who had shaken the foundations of the Soviet empire,” they feared that his approach to “internal leadership” gave “new life to the old conservatism and only put off the day of reckoning with necessary changes that the Council had prefigured.” Not surprisingly, criticism of the pope continued to

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54 Ibid.
56 Ibid, 429.
57 Ibid.
58 Steinfels, A People Adrift, 35.
mount, and in the waning years of his pontificate, John Paul’s popularity among American Catholics plunged. This was markedly evident after 2002, when his response to the burgeoning clergy abuse scandal seemed “less vigorous than was appropriate.”

Although the ailing pope had ordered an extraordinary summit of American cardinals to Rome to address the scandal, he failed to meet with a single victim of abuse, despite multiple requests to do so. Those who looked forward to the Vatican’s symbolic acknowledgement of the victims’ collective trauma would need to wait until the spring of 2008, when Benedict XVI met with a group from the Archdiocese of Boston while visiting the United States.

In the face of the conservative policies of John Paul II and his successor, Benedict XVI, most U.S. Catholics have remained faithful to the legacy of Vatican II. Some critics of the conservative retrenchment have questioned whether, at this point, it is even possible to restore pre-conciliar policies and practices. “No one person or no collection of people would be able to shut the windows that John XXIII had opened to aggiornamento—the letting in of fresh air,” writes Catholic novelist William X. Kienzle. “To try to close the windows of change would be to try to put the toothpaste back in the tube.”

Greeley, along with other liberal observers, argues that the Vatican’s emphasis

61 Ibid, 589-590.
63 Wills, Why I Am a Catholic, 272.
on centralized authority has alienated Catholics, and this dissatisfaction has been reflected in falling donations. Moreover, Greeley’s 1987 study suggests that the decline of church-related contributions that began in the 1960s exacerbated the “crisis” in Catholic schools. In the epilogue of Greeley’s study, Bishop William McManus, formerly of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, notes that the sharp decrease in contributions was “especially ominous” for the thousands of lay workers employed by the church, particularly those working in schools. “We’ve got lay workers with family obligations living on a pittance,” Bishop McManus writes. He adds that “the wages of most Catholic lay teachers were far below those of their counterparts in the public schools.” McManus estimates that, if “salaried” parishioners “paid 2 to 3 percent of their salary income for the support of their parish and dioceses, the church would have more than enough to pay all employees adequate salaries and benefits.” Like many critics of the church’s vertical power structure, McManus urges parishes “to allow lay people a larger role in the administration of church funds.” Since then, lay control has remained a relevant issue for many American Catholics. Dr. Frank Butler, in an address delivered at a 2004 conference on church leadership at Boston University, complained that “despite a Vatican II understanding of the church as a communion of

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
people…clericalism has prevailed and is robbing the church of the rich sense of belonging to and being responsible for one another.”

Interestingly, not all researchers attribute the steady decline in church-related giving to ideological disagreements within the Catholic community. Charles E. Zech suggests that this trend is connected to generational differences rather than ideological ones. Zech writes that today’s U.S. Catholic Church “is really composed of three generations: the pre-Vatican II generation; the Vatican II generation; and the post-Vatican II generation.” He argues that those Catholics who came of age before the council were exposed to a “hierarchal church, where the emphasis was on tradition.” According to this theory, when Catholics of the pre-Vatican II generation “speak of the Church, they are most likely referring to the magisterium.” Such Catholics are inclined “to regard the Church as an institution, and are more likely to support it financially.” On the other hand, members of the post-Vatican II generation “were raised in a Church with a decreased emphasis on tradition and an increased emphasis on democratic processes and the primacy of individual conscience.” Zech argues that members of this generation, who envision the church as “the people of God,” show “less of an institutional commitment to the Church,” and are “more reluctant to support it

71 O’Keefe et al., Sustaining the Legacy, 72.
72 Zech, Why Catholics Don’t Give…And What Can Be Done About It, 43.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid, 43-44.
financially.”\textsuperscript{77} Finally, those who came of age when the reforms of Vatican II were being implemented seem to be “caught in middle,” though they tend to show giving patterns comparable to those found among the post-Vatican II generation.\textsuperscript{78}

While Zech emphasizes generational differences in his study, it is difficult to ignore that ideology deeply affected the trends he described. In light of his conclusion that models of the church influence levels of giving, Zech’s study seems to complement Greeley’s position that flagging donations reflect the presence of ideological differences among parishioners. At one point, Zech’s study actually draws a correlation between lower patterns of giving and disagreement with official church positions. Using data collected in 1993 for the Lilly Endowment’s American Congregational Giving Study, a survey of five U.S. religious denominations, Zech attempted “to analyze religious giving only in the Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{79} He found that Catholics who took issue with the church’s position on abortion contributed far less on an annual basis than those who supported this position, with the former contributing about $588 and the latter giving about $790.\textsuperscript{80} Similarly, those who disagreed with the church’s position on contraception contributed somewhat less annually than those who concurred, with the former giving about $643 and the latter contributing about $778.\textsuperscript{81} The study highlighted one unexpected departure from this trend, however. Parishioners who disagreed with the church’s ban on the

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
ordination of women actually tended to contribute more than those who accepted it, with the former contributing about $719 and the latter giving about $644. Curiously, this pattern suggests that Catholics who take a more progressive stand on this particular issue show a greater material commitment to the church.

Significantly, liberals are hardly alone in their frustration with the institutional church. Many conservatives mourned the loss of cherished symbols and traditions in the wake of Vatican II, and some left the church altogether. Traditionalists who blame the council for many of the church’s difficulties are inclined to point out that some conservative dioceses record exceptionally large numbers of religious vocations. Although it is difficult to establish a clear connection between declining donations and the reforms of the post-conciliar era, there is little doubt that conservatives found the changes jarring. Moreover, as Day notes, many parishioners, regardless of ideology, resented shouldering the cost of expensive church renovations, especially when they were granted no role in the decision-making process. He cites the example of an unnamed cathedral parish, a “massive neo-Gothic extravaganza” that “needed repairs and a more post-conciliar look.” Day notes that the cathedral staff, after consulting with a decorator, presented a plan for “a spaceship modern interior so artistically bare that it looked as if it had been sterilized for surgery.” The renovation plan called for the

82 Ibid, 54.
84 Day, Where Have You Gone, Michelangelo?, 133.
85 Ibid, 133-134.
removal of an elaborate marble altar, the replacement of stained-glass windows with clear-glass panels, and the “obliteration” of “a continuous mural along the walls of the building.” When publicized, the plan was widely criticized. “The parishioners and the people of the diocese, who had to pay for this Star Wars throne room, were not impressed,” Day writes. “In fact, some of them screamed bloody murder.” Ironically, pastoral efforts to bring church interiors into conformity with post-conciliar liturgical standards often called attention to the fact that “the people of God” had little control over funds that were largely comprised of their own donations. Once again, amid widespread lip service to a Vatican II model of the church, it seemed that clericalism “prevailed.”

The decline of urban parish schools, however, cannot be entirely attributed to dwindling donations in the Catholic community. In Youngstown, as elsewhere, parish schools were affected by a combination of urban trends—including demographic change, deindustrialization, and depopulation—that eroded the traditional Catholic enclaves that supported these institutions. The disappearance of these neighborhoods ensured that urban parishes would lose many of the patrons needed to maintain schools. At the same time, American Catholics were separated from their traditional urban milieu. For decades, U.S. parochial schools had served as centerpieces of an insular subculture that encouraged (and was sustained by) the growth of replicated institutions. During the late

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86 Ibid., 134.
87 Ibid.
88 O’Keefe et al., Sustaining the Legacy, 72.
1950s and 1960s, however, the removal of Catholics to religiously and ethnically diverse suburbs overlapped with destabilizing societal trends as well as sweeping reforms within the Catholic Church. These developments coalesced to undermine the static, separatist model of American Catholicism that inspired the building of the nation’s largest parallel school system.\textsuperscript{90} Postwar urban trends not only starved parish schools materially; they also contributed to the erosion of a “ghetto” that exemplified the U.S. church’s “stiff-necked resistance to the great American assimilationist engine.”\textsuperscript{91}

Post-conciliar efforts to broaden the mission of urban parish schools drew mixed responses from Catholics. While liberal Catholics were initially receptive to the idea of supporting parish schools that served non-White, non-Catholic students, the political landscape became more complicated during the 1980s. As Baker and Riordan note, Catholic schools, in the wake of contested research claiming they were more effective than public schools at boosting achievement levels among at-risk minority students, became implicated in a conservative agenda to undermine public education.\textsuperscript{92} Baker and Riordan point out that “the once moribund Catholic schools had become the darlings of the political Right and of influential social scientists bent on ‘saving public schools.’”\textsuperscript{93} The researchers assert that “the whole movement toward the privatization of schools

\begin{footnotes}
\item[90] Morris, \textit{American Catholic}, 176-177.
\item[91] Ibid., vii.
\item[92] Baker and Riordan, “The Eliting of the Common American Catholic School and the National Education Crisis.”
\item[93] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
gained momentum largely as a result of studies on Catholic schools.” 94 Catholic educational researcher James Youniss agrees, noting that “the work of Coleman and others was drawn into a larger assault on public schools and the philosophy behind them.” 95 This development not only ensured that debates on school vouchers (and other issues connected to the “school choice” agenda) would become increasingly contentious, it also precipitated the creation of charter schools, which posed a lethal challenge to urban parish schools. 96

While these controversies undoubtedly dampened the enthusiasm of some Catholics for urban parish schools, many of these institutions were hobbled by the very forces that had facilitated their transformation into vehicles of social uplift for disadvantaged urban youth, regardless of religious background. Ironically, the conciliar reforms that enabled Catholic educators to broaden the mission of many urban parish schools also contributed to the decline of America’s religious teaching orders. Without question, these teaching orders had served as the backbone of America’s parallel system of Catholic schools, and their virtual disappearance had consequences for parish schools. As Briggs points out, the Ursuline religious community, one of the largest and most influential of America’s religious teaching orders, revised their constitution after Vatican

94 Ibid.
95 Youniss and Convey, Catholic Schools at the Crossroads, 1.
II, granting sisters greater choice in their work assignments. Hence, the community’s dwindling members redirected their efforts toward other forms of community service.

When analyzing developments in Youngstown, a community that lost all but one of its 18 parish schools between 1964 and 2006, it is tempting to consider what Catholic educators might have done differently. Some observers have suggested that popular resistance to diocesan consolidation efforts in the 1980s doomed the city’s remaining parish schools. A smaller number have pondered whether local Catholic leaders could have taken advantage of opportunities in the areas of interracial outreach and evangelization. Is it possible that a more aggressive program of evangelization could have resulted in thriving Black urban parishes and parish schools? Naturally, this question is tinged with controversy. One aspect of urban parish schools that made them palatable to many secular observers was that they were not envisioned as instruments of religious conversion. Indeed, after Vatican II, many priests and nuns involved in urban ministry “rejected the ‘triumphalist’ ethos of African American parishes.” More than a few of them eschewed proselytizing in favor of activities that conformed to their ideas of social justice. As admirable as this behavior might appear, it led some Black leaders to question the church’s seemingly tepid approach to evangelization. In the mid-1970s, African-American observers in Youngstown interpreted the low rate of conversion within

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97 Briggs, Double Crossed, 16.
98 Father Edward P. Noga, interview by the author, June 18, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, The Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
the Black community as evidence of the church’s “indifference” to minority groups.\textsuperscript{100} These critics also suggested that the dearth of Black leaders in the Catholic community, and the inability of African Americans to assume “ownership” of urban parish schools, ensured that Catholic institutions would remain a “foreign presence” in many center-city neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{101} Questions about the “outsider” status of some urban parochial schools that operated in Black neighborhoods could provide the impetus for further research.

Unquestionably, Youngstown’s pattern of parish schools was the victim of a “perfect storm” scenario, one involving a formidable combination of social, political, economic, and religious trends. All of these trends contributed to a steep decline in traditional conceptions of Catholic identity, which tended to place a strong emphasis on the parish structure and replicated institutions such as parish schools. Although the reforms of Vatican II contributed to the transformation of many urban parochial schools, as they broadened their mission to include more non-Catholic students, these changes also facilitated the decline of traditional religious teaching orders. At the same time, the council’s emphasis on engagement with the world inspired many American Catholics to question their commitment to a system of private religious schools. In the wake of these developments, the traditional parish school—still regarded as the most reliable provider of Catholic elementary education—appears unlikely to experience resurgence within the city limits.

\textsuperscript{100} Leon Stennis, “Leadership’s View on Diocese’s Approach Toward Blacks Differ,” \textit{The Youngstown Vindicator}, September 6, 1975, 7.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
Evidence of the system’s deterioration abounds. The Ursuline Motherhouse, built in the early 1960s on 100 acres of undeveloped land in semi-rural Canfield, now sits virtually empty. The vast majority of the sprawling complex’s 80 rooms are vacant, and a small—and shrinking—community of elderly nuns occupies an infirmary located on the second floor. The facility’s chapel, designed to seat about 400 people, rarely draws more than a handful of worshippers for services—unless of course, they happen to be associated with funerals or jubilee celebrations. Younger members of the religious order often elect to reside in private apartments or vacant diocese-owned properties, a situation that has led some residents of the motherhouse to decry a “loss of community.” Among them is Sister Julia Baluch, O.S.U., a vibrant septuagenarian who once worked as a principal and teacher in local parish schools. During a 2007 interview, Sister Julia recalled that, in the recent past, communication among members of the order routinely occurred “at table.” Camaraderie among the nuns was strengthened by their collective participation in classroom teaching.  

“We were strictly education,” Sister Julia said. “I would liken it to Youngstown being strictly [steel mills].” Sister Julia, then working as a pastoral minister at local hospitals, pointed out that since the community’s vocational diversification, the sisters no longer had “much time with each other.” She predicted that, if current trends continued, the Ursulines would have difficulty maintaining a cohesive community. “I think the big adjustment is that with diversified missions and not

102 Sister Julia Baluch, O.S.U., interview by the author, April 24, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
having enough community, we can’t hold it [together] any longer…only in smaller groups.‖105

Nevertheless, Sister Julia, like many other Ursuline nuns who embraced the reforms of Vatican II, seemed convinced that her order was moving closer to its original purpose. Founded in the 16th century by St. Angela de Merici, the Ursuline order was initially dedicated to protecting exploited women living in the vicinity of Brescia, Italy. Sister Julia suggested that many of the order’s younger members were engaged in work that harkened back to that mission. “We’re going back to what Angela really and truly wanted her daughters to do,” she said. “It was to live the gospel, be a witness to the gospel, [by protecting the women] from the soldiers living up in the garrison about half a mile from where they were.”106 The order’s early history, which the community’s leaders started to explore in the 1950s, appeared consistent with the post-conciliar church’s emphasis on social justice. Over time, a growing number of Ursuline sisters began to question their order’s emphasis on formal teaching. By the end of the 1980s, nuns of all orders were practically absent from the classrooms of Youngstown’s parish schools.107 Sister Julia noted that only a handful of her community’s active members were then involved in classroom teaching. One active member of the community worked at a local food bank. Another served as a diocesan director of religious education. Several were employed with Catholic Charities, a philanthropic organization. She observed that the

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
Ursulines also operate two transitional homes for disadvantaged women and children. “Very few are classroom teaching,” Sister Julia added.108

This vocational diversification represented a sharp departure from the order’s recent past. In the spring of 1961, when construction began on the motherhouse, more than 10,000 students in Youngstown were “under instruction by the Ursulines.”109 By 2007, however, most of the facility’s residents were retired, and a large percentage of them were physically disabled. Ninety-two-year-old Sister Virginia McDermott, O.S.U., though lucid and lively, was confined to a motorized wheelchair. In a 2007 interview, the former elementary and secondary school teacher spoke philosophically about the decline of the Catholic school—an institution she believed had run its course. “Everything says something about that—the economic situation, the social situation,” Sister Virginia said. “Everything contributes to the fact that the public schools probably better be the schools that people turn to.”110 It was difficult to ignore that Sister Virginia was calmly predicting the demise of a system to which she had devoted at least two decades of her life. She began her teaching career in the 1940s, at Immaculate Conception Elementary School, on the city’s east side. When Sister Virginia retired from teaching in the 1960s, she was working as a journalism instructor at Ursuline High School, the older of the city’s two Catholic secondary schools. In the years that elapsed since her departure from the classroom, she watched parochial school enrollment fall precipitously.

108 Baluch, interview.
109 “Open Drive for $1,000,000 Ursuline Motherhouse,” The Youngstown Vindicator, April 25, 1961.
110 Sister Virginia McDermott, interview by the author, May 31, 2007, transcript, Hogan-Cullinan Family Collection, #314, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, OH.
Sister Virginia described these changes with an apparent air of serenity. “It’s a difficult thing for [many other] people to face,” she noted, “especially if they have a lifetime ahead of them.” The community’s youngest members, most of whom approached late middle age, faced an uncertain future, she said. Amid dwindling vocations, the area’s Ursulines might be compelled to “have a union with some other community.” While Sister Virginia recognized that the community’s altered mission reflected a need to adapt to changing circumstances, she nevertheless looked back nostalgically on an era when Ursuline sisters staffed many of the city’s Catholic schools. “When we were all in education,” she said, “you wished that it would be passed along to somebody else—somebody else would be carrying on the job and doing the work you were doing.” Sister Virginia’s desire to bestow a legacy of teaching to a new generation of Ursuline sisters, however, did not prevent her from coolly assessing the likely future of parish schools. “It isn’t going to be again for Catholic schools, I don’t think,” she said. “Maybe our work in teaching is finished.”

111 Ibid.
112 McDermott, interview.
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