

# 1 *What a School Means*

Cause everybody dies in the summer / wanna say your  
goodbyes, tell 'em while it's spring / I heard everybody's dying  
in the summer / so pray to God for a little more spring.

—Chance the Rapper, “Pusha Man (Paranoia)”

And finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the  
bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?

—W. E. B. Du Bois

**F**or an August day in Chicago the weather is unseasonably cool, and many of the people sitting in the park have blankets draped over their laps or around their shoulders. In many ways this looks like any family gathering in Washington Park—older faces and younger faces in a circle of fabric lawn chairs and coolers, chatting amiably. But rather than pop, picnic food, or snacks, many of the coolers are filled with infused water or high-nutrient juices. Thermoses of hot broth are propped against a tree. And there are people here you wouldn't see at a family picnic: visitors from across the city, reporters and photographers from across the country. Worried nurses flit from person to person. No music is playing. Sometimes folks laugh and joke cheerfully; other times they look off into space, exhausted.

Behind it all a tremendous black building looms, its windows dark. And that is the reason these people are here—not for any

family reunion or summer gathering, but in the name of this shuttered building, Walter H. Dyett High School. They are not picnickers, they are hunger strikers. And they are putting their lives on the line in hopes of seeing their vision for this school become reality.



Why do people fight for schools like this? While the Dyett hunger strike would rise to public prominence as one of the most visible examples of community members fighting to save a school, it is hardly the only one. Across the country, school stakeholders who are culturally and geographically very different have waged notably similar battles to get their schools off district chopping blocks. In Detroit in 2017, hundreds of parents and community members rallied in front of the state of Michigan's offices to protest the closing of schools that others referred to as "consistently failing" and "the worst of the worst."<sup>1</sup> In Shreveport, Louisiana, in 2011, parents held meetings and circulated a petition to save Blanchard Elementary, which the district called "small," "lacking," and "old."<sup>2</sup> In Austin, Texas, in 2016, parents organized high turnouts at community meetings and picketed to fight the district's closure of ten schools it said were in poor physical condition and underenrolled.<sup>3</sup> In Dyett's case the media declared that "by just about any definition [the school] has failed."<sup>4</sup>

To outside observers—concerned neighbors and friends, informed citizens reading about education issues in the news or seeing these protests on television—it may be hard to reconcile these characterizations. If the schools are *small*, *the worst*, *lacking*, and so on, why is anyone fighting for them? This question may be amplified by the image of public schools we see and hear in the media, from *A Nation at Risk* to *Dangerous Minds*. As someone who attended public schools and later taught in one, I can't count how

many times a stranger remarked to me in casual conversation that I was an "angel" or a "saint" because public schools were "just so bad," with no clear reasoning about why or in what way.

This chapter tells the story of one group of people fighting to keep a school open—and, moreover, to see it reflect their vision for their community and their children's education. We see that this community's choice to resist a school's being characterized as "failing" is in fact about much more than the school itself: it is about citizenship and participation, about justice and injustice, and about resisting people in power who want to transform a community at the expense of the people who live there.

## THE DYETT TRADITION

So much of black life in Chicago happens in Washington Park that if you are African American, even if you are from the West Side or (like me) the North Side, it is hard not to find yourself there at least once each summer. The African Festival of the Arts, the Bud Billiken Parade, and family barbecues all find a home in the massive park. Sitting at the southern edge of Bronzeville, it covers 367 acres landscaped by Frederick Law Olmsted, the architect most famous for his design of New York City's Central Park. At the northern end of the park, facing Fifty-First Street, a low building of black glass looks out over a broad expanse of grass. In summer 2015 the building is empty, but the flag still flies above it. The sign still says "Welcome to Walter H. Dyett High School" in black against a yellow background, bright against the backdrop of the dark building and Chicago's more often than not gray weather. But no doors are open. No teenagers gather to talk or to run, to flirt or gossip or tease, to play football or scramble for forgotten homework or do the things teenagers do. Walter H. Dyett High School is closed.

Not many schools are named after teachers, so it is notable that this building is as much a living monument to Walter H. Dyett as it is an educational institution. It is also notable that this man, arguably the most renowned and respected educator ever to emerge from Bronzeville—a community famous for its musical venues and figures—was a bandleader and music teacher.

Walter Henri Dyett was born in 1901 in Saint Joseph, Missouri. His mother was a pianist and soprano vocalist, and his father was a pastor in the AME church. Dyett began his musical life as a violinist after his family moved to California; as a student at Pasadena High School, he became concertmaster of the orchestra and also played clarinet, bassoon, and drums. After graduating in 1917, he attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he was first violinist in the school's symphony orchestra while he completed his premed studies. In 1921 Dyett received a scholarship to the Illinois School of Medicine and moved back to Chicago to pursue his studies. However, his mother and sister, already living there, needed financial help, and he took on work as a musician to support his family. In a curriculum vitae dating from 1960, Dyett described the early days of this work: "One year violinist in Erskine Tate's Vendome Theatre Orchestra playing the silent pictures and stage presentations along with Louis Armstrong and other now internationally known musicians. Transferred to orchestra leader in the Pickford Theatre—one of the Vendome chain—and remained until talking pictures came in and orchestras went out." He next became youth music director at a church, then a private teacher of violin and music theory. Finally, in 1931 Dyett began the work for which he would become beloved: he became a music teacher at Phillips High School in Bronzeville. When Phillips was relocated in 1936 and renamed Du Sable High School (after the city's founder, the Haitian Jean Baptiste Point du Sable), Dyett went along to the new school.



FIGURE 1 Dyett (far right) addressing the Du Sable High School band, December 22, 1954. Source: Walter Henri Dyett Papers, box 7, folder 89, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

Tribute concerts, memorials, and articles about Dyett often cite his influence on the Bronzeville musical legends who were his students, such as Von Freeman and Nat King Cole. But while these figures loom large in history, they were far outnumbered by the thousands of average Bronzeville teenagers who discovered a love of music through his schoolwide concerts and community initiatives during his thirty-eight years as a teacher (fig. 1).

Dyett was intentional about the pedagogical principles he brought to his work. He explained them in detail in his 1942 master's thesis for the Chicago Musical College, which explored methods for teaching the fundamentals of rhythm to high school students and argued that music education could help students develop joy and discipline. "The student learns from experience," Dyett argued, "and these experiences must be enjoyable ones if

the proper interest necessary for this learning is to be motivated and sustained.” In another chapter he wrote, “If, in our music classes, we can kindle a spark which will inspire the students to be satisfied with only the best work that they are capable of performing, this development will surely be carried over into whatever field of endeavor they may choose for a vocation.” In a 1969 letter to the musicians’ union celebrating Music Appreciation Week, Dyett echoed the importance of such disciplined determination to do one’s best work: “The world today calls for dreaming possibilities and developing these possibilities into live realities and actualities. Creativity development comes by: becoming receptive to ideas—welcoming new ideas; by being experimental . . . by accepting the opportunity to do more; by asking how can I do more—how can I improve the quality of my performance—how can I do better?”

These principles were to serve as the core of the school that would bear Dyett’s name—a middle school with the motto “develops individuality, encourages responsibility, and provides opportunity.”

When Walter H. Dyett Middle School was dedicated in 1975, the program reflected the scope of Dyett’s influence on his students:

Few musicians, living or dead, have brought music into the lives of so many young people and made them a part of the world’s music. . . . He was the complete musician: an artist who could teach, a musician’s musician, a student’s inspiration, able tutor, and friend. . . . [H]e personally taught or supervised the music education of some 20,000 young people. He brought music appreciation and serious awareness of good music to another half million youth through his activities as a conductor of bands and orchestras in school assemblies and public programs and concerts. . . . Dyett was well known for his practice of sharing his

baton and podium with promising young musicians and many of them are continuing the “Dyett tradition,” as they enrich school systems in Chicago and elsewhere as music educators, or in the music profession as performers or entertainers.

The decision to name a school after Dyett—a local titan who dedicated his life to young people not on a citywide or national stage but in one specific community, someone who in sharing his passion and his care with generations of students did what all teachers set out to do—appears to be a tacit way of celebrating the community itself. It is a way of saying that a life lived in the service of Bronzeville is a notable life, and that the legacy of someone so dedicated to the community is worth memorializing with something important. Dyett, like many all over the intensely segregated city, was an all-black school, and its daily social happenings took place within what renowned sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois called “the Veil”<sup>5</sup>—the border of an all-black world. In a society that for centuries has drawn absolute boundaries between black people and white people—social boundaries, legal boundaries, economic boundaries, physical boundaries—black social life under conditions of segregation has developed its own reason and rhythm. The Veil, derived as it is from the painful constraints of slavery and Jim Crow and their aftermath, can be cruel. But behind the Veil, Walter H. Dyett, a man whose life could have been seen as ordinary, was honored as a hero.

## “CHOICE” AND CHANGE

In 2000, Dyett Middle School faced a major upheaval. CPS introduced plans to convert Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. High School, a little more than a mile away, into a college preparatory school, with a selective admissions system based on test scores and grades

rather than open enrollment. King would receive a multimillion dollar renovation, and students from all over the city would be able to attend—if they could meet the stringent admissions requirements. The move was part of CPS’s creation of a suite of “selective enrollment” schools designed to attract the top academic (and top socioeconomic) tier of the city’s high school students through a rigorous curriculum and high-end facilities. The transition also meant that if their test scores did not make them eligible to attend the new, selective King, students in the area would need a new place to go—so Dyett would be changed from a middle school to a high school. Neighborhood residents were not happy with this plan. One parent of a King student expressed frustration that the \$20 million to be invested in the school’s renovation was nowhere to be found when the school’s enrollment was based on neighborhood attendance boundaries. Another community member lamented that young people in the area would be “shipped out of their neighborhood in order to turn King into a magnet school,” suggesting that this ostensibly public school would no longer be public at all:

If something is public, then ain’t I the public? Aren’t these kids who are being put out of King High School and going over there to Dyett [High School], [which is like] a factory, aren’t they part of the public? How can you have a public school and then say everybody in the public can’t go to it? That’s what I think. It’s a bunch of hogwash. . . . You don’t make no magnet school with my money. I did not tell you to do that, and I don’t want King to be a private school in my neighborhood. If it’s public, I want you to do the best that the public can get right over there for the people in this community.<sup>6</sup>

The development of selective enrollment schools was just one piece of what would, over the following decade, become an ex-

pansion of “choice” within CPS. No longer would students necessarily attend the schools in their immediate areas, as they had done for generations. Instead, new schools appeared or were converted across the South Side, with varying purposes and admissions policies: several charter schools, a military academy, a technology school, an international school, and others now dotted the landscape. This evolution of the district into a “portfolio” of options parents are expected to choose among was part of a nationwide trend that deemphasized local or community-based schools in favor of thinking of each city as a marketplace of options. While choosing the best option from a menu of possibilities is appealing in theory, researchers have documented that in practice the “choice” model often leaves black families at a disadvantage. Black parents’ ability to truly choose may be hindered by limited access to transportation, information, and time, leaving them on the losing end of a supposedly fair marketplace.<sup>8</sup> Further, this shift in Chicago occurred in tandem with a broader conversation about a city in flux—a city that, in order to claim a place as a “world class” urban center, was dead set on transforming its neighborhoods to make them more attractive to white residents at the expense of a displaced black populace.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile the school “right over there” languished. While enrollment at Dyett varied over the decade, its student numbers eventually began to decline. By 2011 only 19 percent of the students within Dyett’s attendance area were enrolled in the school.<sup>10</sup> Most families in the neighborhood were no longer choosing Dyett, opting to send their children elsewhere (fig. 2).

On November 30, 2011, parents of Dyett students received a letter from CPS CEO Jean-Claude Brizard. It began,

*Dear Parent or Guardian:*

As Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), nothing is more important to me than making sure your child



FIGURE 2 Dyett enrollment, 1999–2011. Source: Chicago Public Schools, School data, 2016.

is getting access to a high quality education. My team is dedicated to ensuring that every child in every community can be successful in the classroom and graduate ready for college and career—which is why I am writing to you today.

There are too many schools in Chicago failing our children. Across the District, only 7.9% of 11th graders last year tested ready for college, while achievement gaps for African American and Latino students remain in the high double-digits. As adults, we all have a responsibility to make sure that we are putting the academic needs of our children before all else. To do so requires some very difficult but necessary choices to boost the academic achievement of our kids.

For too long, Dyett High School (Dyett) has been one of the schools not meeting the needs of its students. Over the last few years, Dyett has been a chronically underperforming school with a graduation rate that is far below that of other schools in its area and is among the lowest academic scoring schools in the district. This is why we are proposing today, after a very lengthy and thoughtful process, to phase-out Dyett. This means

that current ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students would continue to attend Dyett, but the school would not enroll new students next school year.

The letter went on to say that Dyett would continue phasing out one grade each year, with the closure completed by the 2014–15 school year (when only seniors would remain).<sup>11</sup>

Brizard told the local news media he would prefer to send new teachers and resources to Dyett and other schools proposed for phaseout rather than shutting them down. But he felt that Dyett was beyond such measures and that sending more resources would be pointless. “There are some schools that are so far gone that you cannot save them. There’s got to be some hope left in the building for you to be able to turn a school around.”<sup>12</sup>

*So far gone.* With these matter-of-fact words, Brizard painted Dyett as a failing school, an institution beyond redemption. We see this language, the archetype of the “failing school,” frequently in our society. The notion that the school is a failure creates a supposedly urgent space for the public to support policymakers in whatever drastic methods may be needed to address the failure. In this sense the rhetoric of the “failing school” serves as a bogeyman or as political theater, a mythology intended primarily to frighten us not into action, but into unflinching agreement with whatever action those in power opt to take.<sup>13</sup> Why should anyone bother to defend a failure?

As it turned out, there was at least one group who were not satisfied with Brizard’s characterizing Dyett as an unsalvageable failure. And they were ready to take him on, using a variety of tactics. The phaseout nature of the plan meant there was a window of a few years for teachers, students, parents, and community members to organize in hopes of reversing the board’s decision. In 2012 they staged sit-ins and several were arrested for peaceably

refusing to leave city hall.<sup>14</sup> Thirty-six students filed a federal civil rights complaint with the US Department of Education alleging that closing Dyett reflected racially discriminatory practices:

Throughout Dyett's entire history, the Board has demonstrated a disregard for the student body. The Board has deprived our school of resources, and undermined numerous promising attempts by our community to improve the school. What was the Board's response when, as late as 2008, we had the largest increase in students going to college in all of Chicago Public Schools? What about in 2009, when we had the largest decrease in student arrests and suspensions? Disregard and disinvestment. We are now a school with only 1 counselor, no assistant principal and have lost several quality teachers. We are a school where one our most successful programs, AVID, which prepared many of us for college was cut last year. As explained below, this may very well have been because the Board knew long ago that it would close Dyett, and felt that investing resources in us was unwise. This history of neglect impacts us—it sends us the message that the Board does not think we are worthy of investment and that our education is somehow less important than the education of our peers around the city.<sup>15</sup>

In 2013 several groups came together and formed the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett, a partnership between community organizers, representatives from the Chicago Teachers Union and Teachers for Social Justice, professors from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and organizational partners such as the Du Sable Museum of African American History and the Chicago Botanic Gardens. The Coalition developed a plan to keep Dyett open, which it submitted unsolicited to new CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett (Brizard was gone by then, after only seventeen months

in the position). They proposed that Dyett be a high school focused on “global leadership and green technology,” with a focus on environmental sustainability, social justice, and twenty-first-century careers, to be known as Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School.<sup>16</sup> This proposal was an extension of a project already in the works before news of Dyett's phaseout was announced: a plan for a “Bronzeville Global Achievers Village” that would align Dyett with local elementary schools. The “village” plan was based on community outreach to local parents over the course of eighteen months and was intended to create a sense of stability and solidarity in a part of the city rocked by years of school closures.<sup>17</sup>

For Dyett's supporters, the official assessment of the school as a failure was unacceptable, the latest manifestation of a long-running pattern of abandonment and disregard. “The Board's policy of closing one school after another in this hot real estate market has disrupted the lives of countless African American children and set back their educational opportunities. Some of us at Dyett and Price have been moved two or more times,” wrote the students in their Title VI civil rights complaint.

No school with disproportionately white enrollment would face this. As they are being pushed across gang boundaries, our friends and relatives will once more be placed at risk—their physical safety is being jeopardized. The closings are traumatic. Dyett has served as a stable institution in our lives, something that means a lot to all of us, but especially to the 30% of Dyett students who are homeless. It is inexcusable to send our community through yet another disorienting experience—and the only possible reason for this repeated forced removal into new and strange schools is that, being poor and African American, we are viewed as expendable.<sup>18</sup>

For this reason the word *revitalize* in the group's name was significant, since it countered the failing school label. By its very nature, "revitalize" signals something that was once lively and has the potential to be lively again, something that has fallen on hard times but can thrive if you fill it with energy—with vitality. Revitalize suggests that something is not perfect but can be better.

It was a Tuesday in August 2014—a year before Dyett was scheduled to be closed for good—when I heard that members of the Coalition would be holding a sit-in in front of the office of Alderman Will Burns.<sup>19</sup> They were demanding that Burns meet with them to discuss their proposal to keep Dyett open. I knew where the alderman's office was—35th and King Drive, four blocks from where I used to teach, right across from the King Branch of the Chicago Public Library where I led occasional study sessions for my students. I jumped in the car, stopping at the grocery store in Lake Meadows to pick up some fruit and bottles of water to take to the sit-in. I spent the afternoon in a folding chair, shifting periodically as the sun moved, drinking water and chatting with an older woman who told me stories of her grandfather's store in Mississippi, her move to Chicago when she was twelve, and her traveling back to the South every summer of her childhood. The alderman never emerged.

Two months later I saw a headline that made my eyes widen. "CPS reverses course, says Dyett to reopen in 2016 as neighborhood high school." The first three words were stunning enough. CPS reverses course? About a school closure? I'd never heard of such a thing. I kept reading:

CPS officials made the surprise announcement Friday that they want proposals for a new, open enrollment neighborhood high school to be located at Dyett High, the Washington Park school

that is in the last year of being phased out. . . . CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett said in a press release that she looks forward to working with the community. CPS spokesman Bill McCaffrey said the Dyett request-for-proposals to run the school will be separate from a request for new charter schools, which also will be issued in December.<sup>20</sup>

Everything about this news awed me. I had seen Byrd-Bennett and other CPS officials remain steadfast in their decisions even in the face of tremendous protest from thousands of teachers and students, apparently without a second thought regardless of the scale of the criticism. Bronzeville had lost school after school in the past decade, even before the citywide mass closures of 2013. Charters had expanded, and schools had been subjected to the "turnaround" process, but never had I heard of a school having its fate sealed only for the decision to be undone. Furthermore, the district was seeking community input and soliciting open proposals not for a charter or contract school, but for a neighborhood school? I was astounded, and tremendously impressed at the impact of the community members I had met that day in August. Through their resolve, they had opened the way for this seemingly impossible opportunity; the article described the rallies, sit-ins, and civil disobedience leading to arrests that had taken place since the phaseout of Dyett was first announced. Could Dyett, I wondered, become a model for the future of Chicago's closed schools? Could it be a demonstration proof illustrating that it was possible for a community to undo a top-down decision and remake a school to reflect the desires of its residents? Could this proposal process serve as the pattern for a new form of engagement between the district and members of the community? I was excited, hopeful, and curious. When I learned the date of the public meeting where community-created proposals for a



new Dyett would be presented and discussed, I eagerly cleared my schedule in anticipation.

### **“WE ARE SPEAKING. WE HAVE SPOKEN.”**

It is a weighty irony that the meeting to consider the proposals for a new Dyett was held at King College Prep. Next to it, the windows of Florence B. Price Elementary School are dark. That school’s closure was announced in the same year as Dyett’s but completed at the end of that school year. Piles of chairs and books are visible through the windows, and through the cloudy glass of one classroom one can just make out an American flag. Florence B. Price, like Walter H. Dyett, was a groundbreaking musician: a classical composer who became the first African American woman to have a composition played by a major orchestra when the Chicago Symphony Orchestra debuted her *Symphony in E Minor* in 1933. Indeed, this is a very musical block: Price Elementary sits at the corner of Drexel Boulevard and the honorary Muddy Waters Drive, named for the legendary icon of Chicago blues. The grass along Drexel looks especially green after the recent rain. I cross a wide concrete expanse to reach the doors of King, above which a mosaic reads “THROUGH THESE PORTALS AWAITS YOUR FUTURE.” My future has to wait a few minutes, since the doors are locked.

Eventually I was admitted and found a seat near the front of the auditorium. The meeting format was straightforward. There were three proposals for consideration, and representatives for each proposing group would have twenty minutes to present their ideas for how the new Dyett should operate. Those presentations would be followed by an open comment period; participants were permitted to speak only if they had signed up as they entered the meeting and would have two minutes to com-

ment after being called to the microphone. A court reporter and a note taker would record comments. “There will not be a question and answer period, because that’s not the goal for this meeting,” said the district representative overseeing the proceedings. Contact information for CPS and for each of the presenters was on the back of a handout, and attendees were directed to ask any questions later, using that information to “engage with them directly.” The proposals were also available to view or download on a CPS website, along with a rubric for evaluation.

What was less clear was what was supposed to happen after the meeting and how the decision would be made. How would the community feedback from this meeting be integrated? This community meeting was to be followed by an official hearing, after which the board would make a decision. Would their decision incorporate input from other sources such as the alderman or the mayor? This was unclear, and no location was yet set for the hearing. Further complicating matters, CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who issued the request for proposals in the first place, was no longer in her position. She went on leave in April amid a federal investigation into a no-bid contract and had finally resigned just two weeks before this proposal meeting (Byrd-Bennett has since been found guilty of federal charges related to bribery). What role would the interim CEO, or Byrd-Bennett’s replacement, play in the future of Dyett?

During the meeting, the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett offered its proposal. It began with short videos of community members’ and students’ testimonials in support of the Coalition’s plan. Speakers went on to explain the two prongs of the curriculum described in the proposed school’s name: global leadership and green technology. In this school, students would learn urban agriculture techniques that would allow them (in partnership with the Chicago Botanic Gardens) to sell fresh produce in the

community, and they could take the courses needed to become certified as building planners by LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). Solutions for issues like global climate change and environmental racism, the team argued, “depend in part on students learning to connect their academic studies in school to the realities outside. That’s why the new Dyett has roots in the community and branches out to the world beyond.” This community responsiveness was explained further in the proposal:

The Design Team believes that this proposal speaks directly to the needs as expressed by the Bronzeville community that we describe above in Section 3.1c. Every component of this proposal is an extension of the four-year effort to have a village of sustainable community schools. . . . The collaborative nature of both the development of this proposal and the vision of our school culture, as well as how we frame Dyett’s relationship to the community, also respond to these concerns. That Bronzeville parents want their children to assume their place as actors on local, national, and international stages and contribute to bettering their society and planet is specifically addressed in the Dyett mission. And the voiced need by parents and community members that young people know who they are, love their community and themselves, and are deeply rooted in their histories and cultures is also reflected in the mission and vision.<sup>21</sup>

Representatives also described how Dyett would have a restorative justice program, a full-time nurse, and a small student-to-counselor ratio to provide student support, beginning with a social-emotional assessment in the students’ first year.<sup>22</sup>

After the presentations, the CPS representative thanked the three presenting groups for the “time, and the thoughtfulness,

and the creativity and the ideas” behind each option to reopen Dyett before transitioning into the public comment period. “We’re really excited to hear feedback from the community . . . that I will then share with the Board members.” She went on to note that decorum was expected during the comment period: “I’m gonna ask the audience to remember that this is a fun and engaging event. Let’s engage each other with dignity and respect.” Last, she made another reference to opportunities to participate and share opinions beyond the meeting itself. “If you don’t get to speak tonight, you have a phone number and email,” she said, as well as exit slips that would be collected by meeting organizers. “There are many different ways in which your feedback can be shared with the board of education.” This was a bizarre way to end the presentations. What was “fun and engaging” about the event, which was serious and even contentious? What would happen to the exit slips and any other feedback that was offered? How would it be used to make a decision?

As she finished speaking, audience members were already lining up behind the microphones on each side of the auditorium.

Attendees took the microphone for the next ninety minutes. Many, particularly those supporting the Coalition plan, read prepared statements. Supporters of the Coalition focused on the community’s involvement with the development of their plan over many years, showing that the current proposal represented feedback and input from all the stakeholders. One woman quoted former mayor Harold Washington to make this point, saying that the Coalition had brought together “parents, students, teachers, community groups and partners, and university experts. The perfect formula for how to reimagine a school,” much the same way Washington’s campaign famously brought together Chicagoans from diverse backgrounds. Another commended the “thoughtful, diligent process” through which the plan was created. “This

process was driven by parents and young people in partnership with scholars and academic experts to deliver a plan that has a solid academic focus.”<sup>23</sup>

Several people supporting the Coalition’s plan spoke about the role that history and the legacy of Bronzeville should play in the decision and argued that racism was the reason there was an RFP (request for proposals) procedure rather than an immediate response to a community-developed plan. “Walter H. Dyett is a historic institution that was founded as an open-enrollment Chicago Public School,” said one speaker. “We want Captain Walter Henri Dyett honored by keeping it a Chicago Public School. We want you to respect our history and Bronzeville and the legacy of Walter H. Dyett.” Seen this way, the “failing” school label itself failed by not encompassing a crucial detail about Dyett High School: that its very existence was a testimony to the history of black education in Bronzeville, to a hero and the geniuses under his care, to an institution that successfully educated black children to be great in an era when the expectations for their lives were meager. With this understanding, an attack on the legendary Dyett name was an attack on history and identity.

Another parent said forcefully, “At the end of the day, what we’ve got to stop doing is playing black and brown children. ‘Cause that’s what this is, a game. Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology has to happen for our kids. ‘Cause first of all, what we’re *not* talking about is, CPS never would have reversed the decision if it wasn’t for the community.” This, of course, was a key fact that seemed lost and unacknowledged in the structure of the event. It’s not as though CPS had come up with this proposals process of its own accord; it was the Coalition that had pushed the city to pull back from Brizard’s depiction of a hollow, hopeless building marked by irredeemable failure. Dyett supporters

had sacrificed time, safety, and energy to make this moment of reconsideration possible. Rather than considering their proposal on its own, CPS had established the RFP procedure and asked for these presentations, a move constituting a small but significant historical erasure. By contending that the RFP and the three proposals under consideration were operating in a market-based vacuum where they would compete and the best option would win, district officials were acting as though the city hall sit-ins, the demands on the alderman, and the civil rights complaint had never happened.<sup>24</sup>

“This is a sham,” said one woman. “And this is disrespectful. This whole process has been disrespectful.” When the meeting was nearly over, facilitators called Jitu Brown of the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) up to speak but then, realizing he was one of the presenters, told him he was not eligible to make additional comments. This caused a massive uproar from the audience, leading the CPS facilitator to seize the microphone and try to explain. “So, we did not allow any of the presenters to sign up . . .” When people began to yell that Brown had indeed signed in to speak, she hurriedly apologized and abruptly concluded the meeting (without, as listed on the agenda, providing dates for the hearing or next steps) as people continued to shout in protest.

“I’m sorry. Then that was my fault. I’m so sorry. Out of respect for the evening, we’re concluding today’s community meeting. You have a phone number, you have an email address. Please complete your exit slips on the way out. Thank you.” Frustration continued to echo across the auditorium as she rushed away.

For the next several weeks I found myself frequently checking the CPS website and the news for some hint of what was next for Dyett. The most glaring question was where the public hearing

would be held, and at what time. Whether it was on the South Side or downtown at the CPS central offices would make a big difference to any community residents or members of the proposal teams who wanted to attend, especially those with inflexible work schedules, child care needs, or lack of reliable transportation.

A few weeks later, representatives from the Coalition called for a rally back at Alderman Burns's office, in search of more details about the Dyett hearing. A date had been announced, but no location. Everyone crowded into the foyer of the alderman's office. He seemed not to be present, but the director of constituent services came out to talk to the group. One organizer spoke up first. "The alderman needs to make sure the community knows where that's gonna be taking place, and what time that's going to be taking place. For such a critical decision, this should not be a mystery. Nobody at CPS seems to know anything about this, and it's unacceptable. This is a phantom process."

"Well, I'll make sure I give him that message about the transparency you're requesting," the director replied politely. He said he'd check to see what the chief of staff knew about the hearing, and he told people to call back at the end of the day. "But this has been weeks now," another community member piped up. "This has been weeks now. And they're still saying the scheduler, the chief of staff—you guys have been here [in the office] every day."

"Understood," said the director.

"We also need to know who makes the decision about Dyett. Is it the alderman? Because CPS says it's the alderman, and the alderman says it's CPS. We need clarity on who makes the decision about what takes place at Dyett High School. Everyone's pointing the finger. This is not a clear and transparent process." The director nodded solemnly and repeated the promise to let everyone know by the end of the day.

Chicago's schools are governed not by the Chicago City Council, but by a school board appointed by the mayor. But while aldermen do not have direct decision-making powers over CPS, they have a great deal of political power and can influence school happenings in indirect ways. And Burns was exceptionally influential in this regard: the preceding May, the mayor had appointed him chair of the city council's education committee, which the local newspaper called a "big political plum" and a "reward" for supporting the mayor's education agenda and helping him win black voters.<sup>25</sup> He would go on to wield this power in significant ways, such as single-handedly blocking discussion of a charter school moratorium supported by forty-two of the fifty aldermen.<sup>26</sup> Back in 2014, before any RFP procedure was launched, the mayor and the chair of the board of education both said they were interested in the Coalition's plan but would move forward on it only if Burns was supportive.<sup>27</sup> Burns's official-unofficial role in Dyett's future was confusing, and this confusion made the situation even more frustrating. When you can't get basic answers about how a supposedly democratic process is going to take place, it feels like a restriction of your ability to act as a citizen. As constituents in a system that seems constantly poised to wriggle out of our grasp, how much power can we ever really have?



The Coalition is hosting a big public barbecue to maintain momentum, morale, and support for its proposal. The event is also meant to celebrate the graduation of the school's last senior class. When the closure of Dyett was first announced and classes were phased out year by year, many of the school's resources and budgetary allocations dissolved as well. The students who remained in the shrinking school faced so many cuts that they were left

to take courses in art, Spanish, social studies, and even physical education online.<sup>28</sup> Community members rallied to restore some rites of passage for the final thirteen seniors, such as luncheon and prom, and at this barbecue they will be honored for the achievement of completing high school. These efforts represent a “revitalization” that isn’t contingent on the district or the decisions of faraway people; faced with the language of failure, it’s a way of bringing resources and an eye toward the future to those students who have remained, rather than abandoning them.

When I get to the Dyett barbecue in Washington Park, I see a huge black and neon pink sign that says “SAVE DYETT” stuck in the ground. It’s cloudy, but the intermittent raindrops go unnoticed by the folks lounging in chairs and bobbing their heads to the music as Dyett looms in the background, windows dark. Kids chase each other, toss a football back and forth, and play with hula hoops. The DJ is attending to the multiple generations of Chicago music fans present, playing mostly house music and occasional hip-hop.

After everyone has been eating and chatting for a while, the DJ turns down the music so the graduating Dyett seniors can be presented with gift baskets—literal laundry baskets filled with supplies and dormitory essentials. One of them takes the microphone to say thank you on behalf of the group. “I just wanna thank the community for being in this fight with us, so we can get our school,” he says. Notably, even though he has already graduated from the old Dyett, when he says “our school” he’s referring to the potential school of the future, the Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School. Jitu Brown then takes the microphone. “We’re in the fourth quarter of this fight,” he says, praising and thanking everyone present who contributed to the Coalition’s proposal. “We’re giving the mayor a gift by showing

a model for community engagement with schools.” Brown then turns to address the seniors in a call-and-response.

“In your last year at Dyett, how did you take art class?”

“Online!”

He turns to the crowd. “Is that bad teachers?”

“No!” the group roars back.

“Is that bad parents?”

“No!”

“Is that bad students?”

“No!”

Another community member stands up to speak. “They don’t think low-income African American families will be here in five years,” she proclaims. “That’s what this is about. . . . If Burns wants to get to Congress, he’ll treat us with justice and respect,” she adds, suggesting that Alderman Burns has long-run political aspirations beyond his aldermanic office that will require community support. Someone else suggests Burns has his eye on the mayor’s office.

“No, he wants to be congressman!”

“Well, he shouldn’t be dogcatcher,” comes the response, spurring laughter. Conversation turns to next steps, and to the continued wait for information about the hearing. There’s still no location or time, even though CPS has announced a date two weeks away. The *Hyde Park Herald*, a local neighborhood paper, has reported that the meeting will be downtown at CPS, but it didn’t give a time, and it’s unclear whether even the location is confirmed. While these details may seem minor since the hearing date is final, time and location have a big effect on who can attend and share their opinions. The meeting is scheduled for a Monday, making it difficult for people who work on weekdays to attend except in the evening. Chicago is also much more spread out

geographically than many other cities, public transit is costly, and traveling from some parts of Bronzeville can be time consuming. The organizations behind each of the proposals could potentially rally resources for a bus to take people to CPS, but this would require coordination that becomes harder with each day that elapses without a clear time or location.

As days pass, it's like being caught in a time warp, where the days move more slowly than they should. There's no word from CPS about the next meeting, about a decision on Dyett, or about anything that would illuminate what happens next. The Coalition, undaunted, still engages the public to rally support for the school. I continue to wait for a time and location to be announced, staring at my calendar as though details might appear through sheer willpower. Everyone continues to wait. Over lunch at Peach's Restaurant, one of the former Dyett seniors tells me he doesn't think the hearing will happen at all. "Why haven't they told us where it is yet?" he asks pointedly, stirring a bowl of cheese grits. I'm beginning to wonder the same thing. Three days after the barbecue, several members of KOCO stage another sit-in at city hall, holding up signs, chanting, and blocking the elevators. When Will Burns appears to report to the city council chambers, he has to step over people to get to his office, and he's followed by jeers as he hurries away, speaking to no one. I wonder in that moment what he's thinking. What's it like to have the people you're supposed to represent shouting derisively at you? Didn't he become an elected official to serve the community? Now that the community is on his doorstep, making demands in righteous anger, does it give him pause or make him wonder if he's doing the right thing? How can he just keep walking? A teenage boy next to me, in city hall for some other business, watches incredulously as the police approach protesters. "They gonna go to jail for this?" he asks aloud of no one in particular.

Another day, Coalition members stand on the corner of 53rd and Lake Park hoisting the SAVE DYETT banner, and passing drivers honk in support: a Vienna Beef truck, a white moving van, a limousine. This last driver waves out the window, asking for an informational flyer. After a while I walk a couple of blocks down 53rd and get some cold bottled water from the dollar store. Everyone's melting in the sun, especially the older folks. *Too damn hot outside*, I write in my notebook. I wonder how much longer this is going to last, how many more arrests and hot days spent standing in the sun there will be. It's August 5. The hearing is supposed to happen on August 10, a Monday, and still no one has heard any details.

Sometime on Friday, August 7, this press release appears on the CPS website:

Chicago Public Schools today announced the request for proposal process to identify a new open enrollment, neighborhood high school at the current site of Dyett High School is being extended to provide adequate time to review community feedback and proposals.

CPS is also moving the public hearing on the proposals to 6 p.m. on September 15, 2015 inside the Board of Education Chambers at 42 West Madison.

"Chicago Public Schools is committed to a community driven process that will identify a high-quality education option for the former Dyett site," said Forrest Claypool, CEO of CPS. "We continue to review the applications by the 2014 RFP, but with the budget and financial crisis dominating the focus of the new CPS administration, more time is necessary to make an informed recommendation to the Board of Education. We look forward to receiving further feedback at the upcoming community hearing."<sup>29</sup>

Another CEO. Claypool replaced Byrd-Bennett after the federal investigation involving her was announced. Another CEO, another procedural delay, another set of mysteries. Why was more time needed to review just three proposals? And given that a decision at the August 10 hearing was never promised, why postpone the meeting a month? Was there a commitment that the board would make a decision at the September 15 hearing, or would a final decision be postponed again? Further, Claypool's words about a "community-driven process" were strange given that community efforts seemed to be consistently met with district resistance or delay. Sure, the community was driving the process, but it seemed that only CPS could determine the destination.



You have to more than want to do it—you have to will yourself to do it.

—Walter H. Dyett<sup>30</sup>

The last straw was when CPS violated its own rules. Two proposals were submitted on time, but then CPS accepted a late proposal. . . . When CPS cancelled the August 10 public hearing—the last planned hearing on the proposals before a scheduled August 26 School Board vote [subsequently moved to September]—with no notice, we drew the line in the sand and said no more. . . . I never wanted to be in front of a camera. All I wanted was to be part of my kids' education and be part of the solution. I just wanted to drop my children off and know that they would be educated the way I was. But I found every day that that was far from the reality. I now want children in this city and country to know that there are people out there fighting, willing to go hungry—for them.

—Jeanette Taylor-Ramann<sup>31</sup>

The Coalition formally announced the hunger strike while standing in the broad green space in front of Dyett. News cameras and reporters gathered around as Jitu Brown began to speak. Today several members of the Coalition, along with activists and community allies, were beginning a monumental undertaking. They vowed not to eat until the mayor agreed to move forward with the Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School.<sup>32</sup>

We're gonna need your spirit and your energy, because we don't know how long we're gonna need to be out here. . . . This is a referendum on where we live. It's a referendum on the people in power. But one thing we've learned as organizers is, it's not about how eloquent we are. It's not who the people are that you know on the inside. What it's about is, do you have the will to win? . . . We don't care that it's a new board. We don't care that it's a new CEO. That's their problem. What CPS has earned is our mistrust. We know that they will lie. We know that they will play the shell game. They've done it. How many meetings have we been in with temporary people in CPS who talk like they're with us and then they stab the community in the back? We're done with that. We were supposed to have a hearing on August 10, and a board vote on August 26, and we want this school. And we want this school as the hub of a sustainable community school village. We want [local elementary schools like] Mollison. We want Till. We want Fiske. We want Fuller. We want them all. And that's what time it is. We don't trust them with our children. We don't trust them. This is not rhetoric. . . . They killed this school. And so we have no more patience for this.

Brown also referred specifically to one justification in the press release for why the hearing was delayed—that new board

members had just been appointed. Chicago does not have an elected school board like every other district and municipality in the state of Illinois; instead, the mayor appoints the school board. Emanuel had just appointed four new board members. He also appointed his chief of staff, Forrest Claypool, to replace Byrd-Bennett as CEO. The argument from the district was that these new decision makers needed more time to review the proposals.

There was reason to believe the hunger strike could be effective: direct historical precedent. In 2001, fourteen parents and community members in Little Village, a Mexican American neighborhood north and west of Dyett, held a nineteen-day hunger strike after CPS promised a new building to relieve overcrowding in the neighborhood school, then delayed the project. The strikers camped out in tents on the land sited for the school, which they called Camp Cesar Chavez. Paul Vallas, CEO at the time, refused to meet with them or negotiate or respond to what he called blackmail. "I'm not going to locate it on a site because people are threatening not to eat. You could have one of these [protests] a week," he said. When Vallas left Chicago and was replaced as CEO by Arne Duncan, Duncan declared that he had "a hell of a lot of respect for [the protesters]" and agreed to move forward with the new school.

Could the same story unfold in Bronzeville? *This is a referendum on where we live.* Conceding to the board, stepping back and letting them renege on their word or reroute the process they had already established, or create a whole new process, would be like conceding that their version of the world—their vision from beyond the Veil—had merit. In their world Dyett was a failure. Nothing worth saving. A disposable school serving disposable people, to be moved around in whatever ways were convenient at the moment. This moment was a referendum on the history, legacy, and future of Bronzeville and on the right to black educational self-determination.

## "ALL OF US WANTED DYETT"

Like many other aspects of CPS's bureaucratic functioning, attending a board of education meeting is theoretically very easy and practically not easy at all. Meetings are open to the public, but they always take place at 10:30 on Wednesday morning—an awkward time for working parents or teachers. You have to sign up in advance, and the online registration notoriously fills up and closes within minutes of opening. Many days before the August 26 meeting, I had set my alarm early so I could get my name on the register the second it opened. I thought back to several weeks before, when this meeting was supposed to be the day the board would make a final determination on Dyett. Now things seemed no closer to a resolution. When I arrived at the meeting the chambers were already full, and I had to sit in an overflow room watching the proceedings on closed-circuit television. When it was time for public comment, Bronzeville resident and hunger striker Jeanette Taylor-Ramann took the podium and spoke, despite appearing tired and physically weak. She was wrapped in a blanket. "The only mistake I ever made was being born black," she said to the board.

Others took the podium, talking about other issues unrelated to Dyett, and each speaker shed light on another way the city was struggling. The board proceedings mandate extremely strict time limits, with a large red digital countdown clock, and as people stepped to the microphone asking for care and attention toward things extremely important to them, each was met by dispassionate stares from the people on the dais. It was a depressing display, like some feudal society, with subjects asking for mercy from a panel of powerful lords. A mother told the board how her homeless children were denied the transportation benefits they were supposed to receive from the district and she had to spend food money to get them to school on public transit. The treasurer of the Chicago Teachers Union spoke of how proposed special education



cuts would hurt students with disabilities; when she began to cry, she was removed by security. A teenage girl said that her college and career counselor was being laid off and she didn't know how she would get to college; she was also removed by security.

Suddenly a member of the Coalition burst into the overflow room. "Is anyone here a doctor? Jeanette just fainted." Everyone looked up at him wide-eyed, and he whirled away. I got up and went to the exit, where a security guard stood. "Yes? There's no room in the chambers," the guard said, moving between me and the door. I peered around him, craning my neck to see Jeanette Taylor-Ramann being carried out on a stretcher. The meeting continued uninterrupted.

Eight days later, CPS announced that Dyett would be reopened.

At the press conference, Will Burns stood on the podium, raising a finger to emphasize his points as he spoke. "We *all* fought for Dyett. Together," he said, with CEO Claypool standing behind him. "All of us wanted Dyett to be an open enrollment public high school."<sup>33</sup> I thought about how this would look to the broader public—this black elected official proclaiming his unflinching support. I thought back to the day I watched Burns step over the bodies of protestors across the floor of city hall, and I wondered which *we* he was referring to.

Dyett was to become an open-enrollment arts high school, featuring an "innovation technology lab." Despite the talk about "innovation," the Coalition's plan would not be used and was not acknowledged or referred to in any way in the press release. In fact, none of the proposals or any aspect of the RFP was mentioned in the press release.<sup>34</sup> It was as if it had never happened.

"They have won," said Congressman Bobby Rush, speaking of the hunger strikers. No Coalition members were in the room to hear him, however. They were not admitted to the chambers where the press conference took place. They sat outside.

The next day Jitu Brown told Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* that the hunger strike would continue:

We do not see this as a victory. This is not a victory for the children in Bronzeville. . . . I got a call from CPS CEO Forrest Claypool 15 minutes before the press conference, that we were locked out of by CPS, and he told me—I asked him, "Well, where is the room for negotiation?" And he said, "Well, we're moving forward." So my message to him today is: So are we. We're moving forward. . . . This is not something that we take lightly. These are our children. These are our communities. We have to live with CPS reforms after the people that implement them get promoted to some other job. So we will determine the type of education that our children receive in Bronzeville."<sup>35</sup>

Why do people fight for schools like Dyett? Why did the Coalition continue to fight even after those in power assured them of their own victory? Because it was never just about Dyett. A fight for a school is never just about a school. A school means the potential for stability in an unstable world, the potential for agency in the face of powerlessness, the enactment of one's own dreams and visions for one's own children. Because whether you're in Detroit or Austin or Louisiana or Chicago, you want to feel that your school is *your* school. That you have some say in the matter, that your voice can make a difference. You want to feel that the rules are fair, not that you're playing a shell game. You want to feel like a citizen. So you fight.

Two weeks later the hunger strike is still on. I ride the bus to attend a candlelight vigil in support. We meet at Operation PUSH, then together we begin a silent march. It's a short walk—south on Drexel to 51st Street. If we took a right we would hit Washington

Park, and it's a short walk to Dyett. But we take a left. To the president's house.

I've always thought it fascinating that President Barack Obama's house is so close to Dyett. It's a little over a half mile away, less than fifteen minutes on foot. In the summer I'd pass it on the way from my apartment to the school. As we stand outside now, the house obscured by the trees, I wonder what kind of community organizer the president was in his time. I wonder if, since becoming secretary of education, Arne Duncan has ever told him the story of the Little Village hunger strike, and whether he would, like Duncan, have a "hell of a lot of respect" for his neighbors, who have now gone twenty-five days without food in order to see their vision enacted for a school his own daughters could attend if they wanted. I think about how each of these men had the freedom to choose his own children's education, and how each chose the private University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, where Rahm Emanuel's children are also enrolled. I wonder why it always feels as if some Chicagoans have to fight for everything and others don't.

Nine days later, the hunger strike was over.

## WHAT A SCHOOL MEANS

I hated to end the strike, because I didn't want the mayor or the aldermen to feel like we were giving up. But we had to end it because we knew that the mayor would leave us out there to die.

—Anna Jones, hunger striker<sup>36</sup>

The Dyett hunger strike ended on September 20, 2015, after thirty-four days and two hospitalizations. At a press conference, hunger striker Monique Redeaux-Smith addressed the crowd:

While we cannot yet claim complete victory, we do understand that our efforts so far have been victorious in a number of ways. . . . Through community resistance, [Dyett] was slated to be reopened in 2016–17. And even though there was a request for proposals, we know that the plan for that space *was* to become another privatized school within Bronzeville. But again, with community resistance and this hunger strike, we pushed CPS and the Mayor to commit to reopening Dyett as a public, open-enrollment neighborhood school. And that is a victory.<sup>37</sup>

The members of the Coalition did not see their plan for Dyett come to fruition. But they garnered national attention for a struggle that, years earlier, had implicitly been declared dead. "There are some schools so far gone that you cannot save them," Brizard had said, declaring that the building was devoid of hope. Those who fought for Dyett understood that what was on paper a question of numbers actually reflected the belief that their lives, their children's lives, and their hopes did not matter. The end came only when it became apparent how deep that disregard really was, and the fight became a matter of life or death in a terrifyingly immediate way.

Derrick Bell, a renowned legal scholar whose work is considered seminal in the construction of critical race theory, wrote about the concept of *interest convergence*: the idea that black people will be permitted to achieve a measure of racial equality only in moments and through methods that happen to serve the interests of white people—that is, when the interests of black people and those of white people converge.<sup>38</sup> In a sense the final Dyett decision is an example of interest convergence. The school was able to reopen, but only at a time and in a fashion that served the mayor's political interests and did not set a precedent for the

meaningful inclusion of community voices in deciding school policy—a precedent that would not have converged with white interests in the schools or in the city writ large.

Today the lights are back on at the huge black building in Washington Park. Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts boasts almost \$15 million in new investments, including facilities for dance, textile design, and music.<sup>39</sup> And starting in sophomore year all students are required to take music. When the school opened for its first (new) day in 2016, the building greeted a new freshman class of 150 students, above the target of 125. And 85 percent of them were from the area immediately surrounding the school. When asked what she thought of the new Dyett, one of the new students said, “We value our education more because of what people sacrificed.”<sup>40</sup>

I have looked through a lot of old photographs of Walter Henri Dyett. Dyett served in the military, and I have seen his portraits in uniform. I have seen photos of him in childhood. I have seen photographs of him leading distinguished musicians arrayed in perfect rows, in pristine black-and-white formal wear. I have seen him at the front of his classroom, orchestrating music from the students known as “the Captain’s kids,” some of whom lied about their addresses to study under him.<sup>41</sup> But my favorite photograph shows Dyett standing in Washington Park (fig. 3). It’s spring, and several young women are gathered for a baton-twirling training camp, learning to be majorettes. My own grandmother, who was born in Mississippi and migrated north in 1943, was a baton twirler, and I always envied the skill. In the photo, Dyett stands amid the trees and seems unaware of the camera. He’s demonstrating how to twirl the baton as the girls watch intently. The girls wear shorts, and Dyett’s sleeves are rolled up. When I look at the photo I think of these regular days as an educator, the mo-



FIGURE 3 Dyett leading Du Sable High School spring baton-twirling camp (likely in Washington Park), June 1940. Source: Walter Henri Dyett Papers, box 7, folder 70, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

ments that don’t make headlines but that make all the hard work feel worth it. The moments of intense focus and commitment where trying to help someone understand seems like the most important thing in the world, deserving all your energy. In this photo I see Dyett not as a historical luminary, the person whose name ends up over the door of a building, but as an ordinary person trying to do what he can for the young people of Bronzeville. I see a warm day in Washington Park, with people convened to be together but also to pursue something they think is vital for their lives.

And this, in the end, is what the fight for Dyett was about. It was about honoring the everyday moments that make a school a place of care, a home, a site of history. It was about saying *this is*

*not a failed school, and we are not failed people. We know our history.  
We will prevail. You will not kill us.*

The city of Chicago still has black people, and it still has black schools. But, as we will see in the next chapter, it's certainly not for lack of trying.