

# "This is Michigan, Not Mississippi!" Grand Rapids Public Schools Integration and Busing

## Section 1. Kerner Commission Report, 1967

President Lyndon B. Johnson issued an Executive Order to investigate the causes and potential solutions. President LBJ established the Kerner Commission, or the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, to discover causes of racial unrest and recommend solutions. The committee findings were clear: **The cause of the 1967 uprisings was anti-Black racism.**

While many American leaders ignored the suggestions of the **Kerner Commission**, members of the Grand Rapids School Board sought to put the Commission's suggestions into action.

**Directions:** Education recommendations from the report are included below. Highlight, underline, or circle the key suggestions of the report and be ready to discuss.

### Kerner Report excerpts of education recommendations

"Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal...white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."

**1) Increasing Efforts to eliminate de facto segregation:** Substantially increase aid to school systems seeking to eliminate de facto segregation either within the system or in cooperation with neighboring school systems.

a) Such strategies include school pairing, busing, open enrollment, boundary changes, strategic use of site selection, enlargement of attendance areas, and consolidation of schools to overcome racial imbalance...

**2) Provide quality education to Black Neighborhood Schools...** provide for greater concentration of aid to school districts having the greatest proportion of disadvantaged students (exclude affluent school districts with less than specified minimum numbers of poor students).

### **3) Improving Community-School Relations**

a) Community Participation in the Educational Process Should be Encouraged.

b) Ghetto Schools should serve as community centers.

## Section 2. Grand Rapids Public School Board Simulation

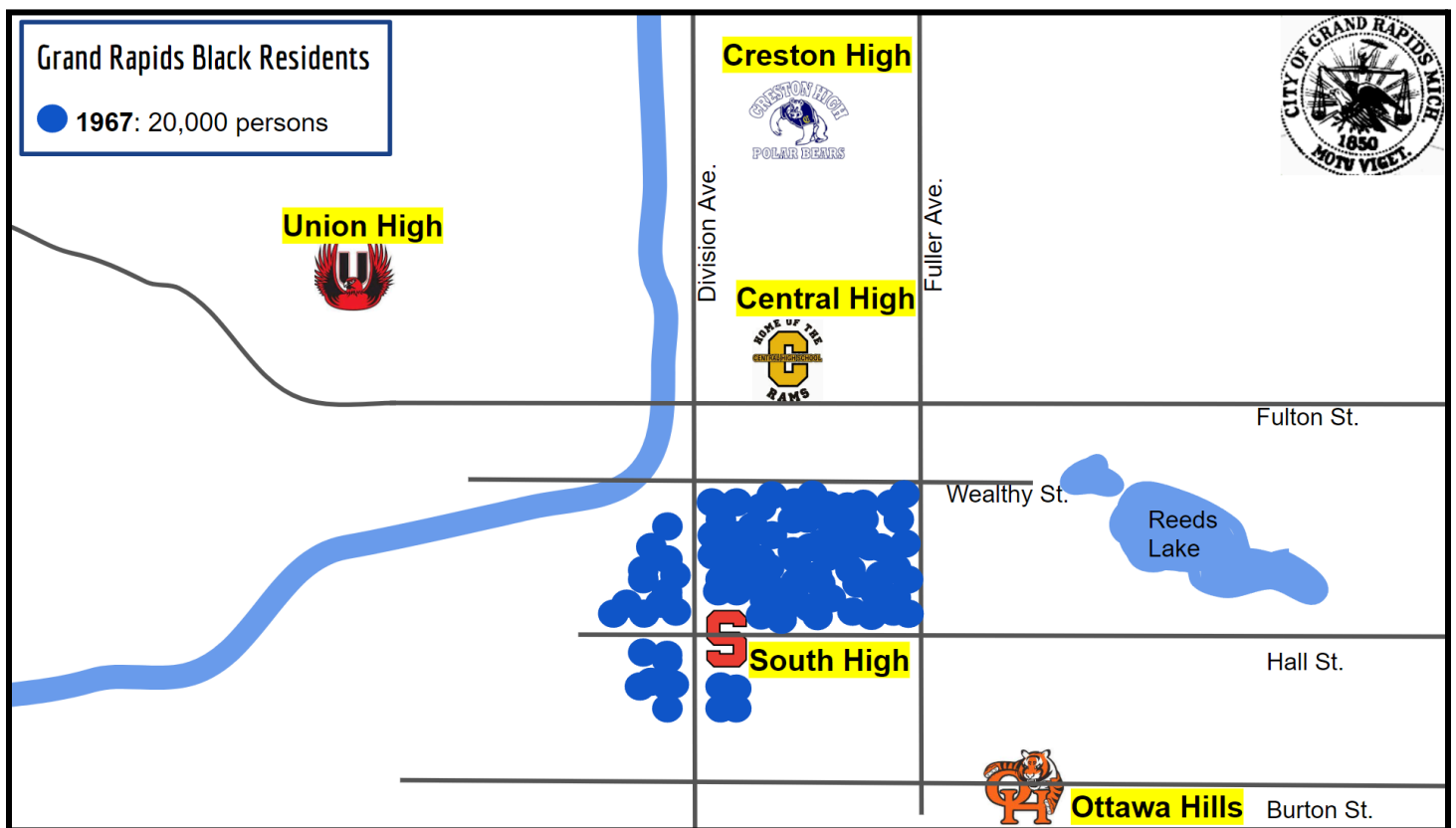
**Directions:** You are about to become a School Board Member, and you will need to come up with a solution to address segregation and inequalities within Grand Rapids Public Schools in 1968. In order to be effective school board members and problem solvers, you need to review these recommendations and take notes about the layout of the school district and the issues you are being asked to solve!

### A statement from the Michigan's State Board of Education, 1961

*"Creative efforts by individual school districts are essential in reducing segregation...local school boards must consider the factor of racial imbalance in making decisions about selection of new school sites, expansion of present facilities, reorganization of school attendance districts, and transfer of pupils from overcrowded facilities since each of these situations present an opportunity for integration."*<sup>1</sup>

In 1967, the **Kerner Commission** signaled that school segregation was a major problem that led to social unrest.

Before you weigh your options and make a decision, take a few notes / annotate the situation in GRPS high schools



<sup>1</sup> Todd Robinson, *A City within a City: The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids, Michigan*, pg 45 (2012).

### Section 3. Primary Source Analysis.

Use this slide deck to explore local primary sources--including images, newspaper articles, and quotes--to understand what happened as a result of the School Board's decision.



**Recall:** The School Board decided to implement (option D), “One-Way Busing” which closed the city’s only majority Black high school, South High, and bused the South High students to majority white schools: Union, Ottawa Hills, and Creston. **After browsing the slide deck, answer the following reflection questions:**

1. Describe the effects of the School Board’s decision to close South High and opt for “one-way busing.”
2. After learning the result, does this change your original decision as a school board member? Why or why not? Which option do you now think would have been best? Defend your position.
3. Some people believe that school segregation in West Michigan is nobody's fault. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

