



Inside Ocean Hill-Brownsville: A Teacher's Education, 1968-69 (Excelsior Editions)

Charles S. Isaacs

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The story of an Ocean Hill–Brownsville teacher who crossed picket lines during the racially charged New York City teachers’ strike of 1968.

In 1968 the conflict that erupted over community control of the New York City public schools was centered in the black and Puerto Rican community of Ocean Hill–Brownsville. It triggered what remains the longest teachers’ strike in US history. That clash, between the city’s communities of color and the white, predominantly Jewish teachers’ union, paralyzed the nation’s largest school system, undermined the city’s economy, and heightened racial tensions, ultimately transforming the national conversation about race relations.

At age twenty-two, when the strike was imminent, Charles S. Isaacs abandoned his full scholarship to a prestigious law school to teach mathematics in Ocean Hill–Brownsville. Despite his Jewish background and pro-union leanings, Isaacs crossed picket lines manned by teachers who looked like him, and took the side of parents and children who did not. He now tells the story of this conflict, not only from inside the experimental, community-controlled Ocean Hill–Brownsville district, its focal point, but from within ground zero itself: Junior High School 271, which became the nation’s most famous, or infamous, public school. Isaacs brings to life the innovative teaching practices that community control made possible, and the relationships that developed in the district among its white teachers and its black and Puerto Rican parents, teachers, and community activists.

Charles S. Isaacs is a former schoolteacher, college professor, social activist, community organizer, financial analyst, and occasional journalist. He is currently an independent real estate advisor to New York City’s nonprofit community. He resides in Newburgh, New York.

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