

# *Boston* *Breakthroughs*

**400** YEARS OF  
SOCIAL AND NONPROFIT  
**INNOVATIONS**



**BOSTON HISTORY COLLABORATIVE**

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# Table of Contents



4

*Letter from Mayor Thomas M. Menino* 2



6

*Why Boston?* 3



8

*Establishing Basic American Rights* 4



10

*The Foundation of American Education* 6

*Community Health and Well-Being* 8



12

*Arts and Culture for the People of Boston* 10



14

*A National Model for Community Safety* 12

*Innovation on Behalf of Young People* 14



16

*A Unique Commitment to Parks and Open Spaces* 16



18

*Rebuilding Community from the Inside Out* 18

*A Working List of Social and Nonprofit Innovations* 20



CITY OF BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
THOMAS M. MENINO

Dear Friends:

Boston is known as an historic city where the nation's seeds were planted, and its roots run deep.

Boston is also the center of dynamic innovations that over the centuries have kept the nation in the vanguard of medicine, science, technology and commerce. This booklet adds to our understanding of the technical breakthroughs, by explaining a number of Boston born social innovations that have improved how we Americans live our lives. From free public schools, to urban neighborhood health centers, to Boston's central role in developing the movement to abolish slavery and women getting the vote, this city has been at the forefront of making a better society.

If you are visiting Boston, we welcome you to our city—cradle for a better society. We are pleased that you could be with us. If you are from Boston, we welcome you to take a new look at our old city through some of the innovations that began here.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Menino  
Mayor of Boston

# Why Boston?

**F**or nearly four hundred years, ideas born in Greater Boston have helped our society work more progressively and more inclusively. Though initiated locally, these breakthroughs have had a national—and sometimes even international—impact. Few other regions in the world can claim the legacy of this region’s record of achievement.

Why here? Why has Greater Boston historically been a hotbed for wave upon wave of creative change in social values, city building, cultural expansion, and educational reform, to name but a few?

Boston has a certain knack, even genius, for taking on existing ways and changing them for the better. It was no surprise that Boston became the cradle of liberty and the birthplace of the American Revolution. And perhaps no surprise either that it spawned changes that helped to spread liberty, end slavery, promote universal education, involve disenfranchised communities, and broaden healthcare.

Some of Boston’s indigenous innovativeness—and indeed, its rebelliousness—has been stimulated by the juxtaposition of a variety of financial, educational, and industrial institutions that have evolved here over the centuries. In our 2003 book, *Innovation Odyssey: Four Hundred Years of Boston Breakthroughs*, we outlined sixty major breakthroughs, primarily in the technical and healthcare areas. This present booklet seeks to expand that original *Innovation Odyssey* book to include social and nonprofit breakthroughs which changed society as well. Soon, we hope this study will include even more examples from the dozens of additional social and nonprofit innovations listed in the last chapter of this book.

It’s only logical that the same pull which brought innovators like Alec Bell, Thomas Edison, and Ellen Swallow Richards to the technical and healthcare areas, also drew Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, David Walker, and Alan Khazei to Boston, then helped them

initiate the social movements which continue to change the region to this day. Once planted or transplanted here, these social innovators have drawn from the veritable army of students and teachers found at the region’s nearly seventy institutions of higher learning. Moreover, there is constant interchange and inspiration between fields of endeavor: technological and healthcare innovators are often at the forefront of social movements, law firms that specialize in intellectual property include lawyers at the forefront of social and legal activism, and neighborhood activists often work at hospitals and biotech firms in the region’s innovative economy. Taken together they have become a vital force in a region known to thrive on innovation, for generation after generation.

One final footnote: the innovations in society that we have begun to chronicle here were initiated in many different eras, and with many different Boston accents. Collectively, Bostonians—and their institutions and organizations—have contributed to the phenomenal depth and variety of thought and action that makes Boston a region which thrives both on conceiving and applying new ideas.

Why Boston? We invite you to think about this as you explore the stories presented in this booklet.

— Dr. Bob Krim, Boston History Collaborative,  
co-editor, *Innovation Odyssey:  
Four Hundred Years of Boston Breakthroughs*



The 1897 reunion of the 54th Regiment at the dedication of the memorial designed by Augustus St. Gaudens

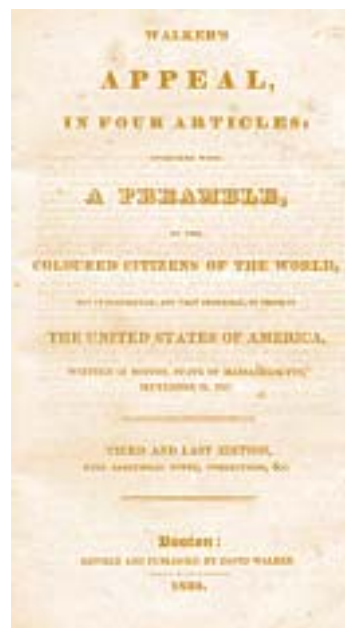
## Establishing Basic American Rights

The very cornerstone of democracy—the American Town Meeting—was invented in Boston on October 8th of 1633 when an order was passed calling on all inhabitants of Dorchester to assemble in front of the local courthouse. This first Town Meeting was the earliest instance of a regularized system of gatherings in America. Some 150 years later, in 1780, it was at a Town Meeting that the Massachusetts Constitution was ratified. Today the Massachusetts Constitution—a model for the Federal Constitution with its Bill of Rights—is widely recognized as the oldest functioning constitution in the world. It is not surprising, then, that Boston would become the setting for two of the most important human rights movements in American history.

### THE FOUNDING OF THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

In 1829, the abolitionist movement was founded and nurtured in Boston, when David Walker’s antislavery pamphlet, the *Walker’s Appeal* was printed. His historic words were the first successful public articulation of abolitionism—and, as such, became the voice of a national movement.

The son of a slave father and a free black mother, David Walker was born in the south, but then traveled throughout the country, eventually settling in Boston and associating with prominent black activists. By 1828, he had



become Boston’s leading anti-slavery spokesperson. *Walker’s Appeal* was arguably the most radical of all antislavery documents, since it called for slaves to revolt. The pamphlet further defied convention by opposing the Colonization movement—then the leading strain of white abolitionism—that sought black repatriation to Africa. Instead, it argued for blacks to identify the United States as a land to which they had

a significant right as contributors. The *Appeal* ran for three editions, ending with Walker’s death in 1830. One year later, also in Boston, white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison began publishing what became the nation’s most influential abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*.

## THE FIRST FREE BLACK REGIMENT IN THE UNION ARMY

**B**oston also became the point of origin for the first free black regiment in the Union Army, another important step in the struggle for racial equality. The 54th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was founded in 1863 and led by the young white colonel, Robert Gould Shaw. Among its recruits were dozens of men from Boston's free African-American population, and hundreds from as far afield as Canada and the Caribbean.

The regiment earned its greatest fame on July 18, 1863, when Colonel Shaw led the bold, brave charge on the Confederate stronghold at Battery Wagner, South Carolina. In this desperate attack on an impenetrable seaside fortress, Shaw was killed and hundreds of his men were slaughtered, wounded, or lost in action. That heroic charge brought the regiment accolades and boosted black recruiting. The 54th remains the most famous black regiment of the war, due in part to the popularity of the movie "Glory" and the bronze bas-relief located opposite the Massachusetts State House on Beacon Hill.

## WOMEN SHALL VOTE: LUCY STONE AND HER PIONEERING WOMAN'S JOURNAL

**L**ike *Walker's Appeal*, the *Woman's Journal*, run by the noted suffragist Lucy Stone, was a singularly influential document in another seminal human rights movement. Born in West Brookfield, Massachusetts, in 1818, Lucy Stone was one of the first Massachusetts women to earn a college degree. After college, she moved to Boston and became a lecturer for the Anti-Slavery Society, but when she was not speaking out against the evils of slavery, she was actively advocating

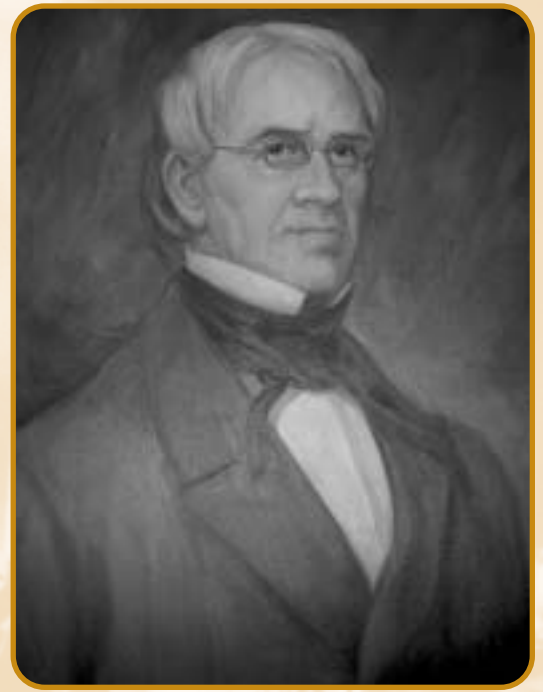
for women's suffrage and recruiting women like Susan B. Anthony and Julia Ward Howe to the movement.

In 1869, Stone, Julia Ward Howe, and Josephine Ruffin formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) in Boston and the next year began publishing the *Woman's Journal*, a women's rights weekly which Stone edited and contributed articles to for the next twenty years. Despite scarce finances, the journal became the leading publication of the suffrage movement. Though Lucy Stone did not live to see women win the right to vote (1920), her daughter, suffragist Alice Stone Blackwell, did.



*A bronze statue on the Commonwealth Avenue mall, by artist Meredith Bergmann, honors Lucy Stone*

*Horace Mann  
changed the  
face of  
American  
education*



## *The Foundations of American Education*

*A series of decisions made from the 17th through the 21st centuries has placed Massachusetts at the forefront of one the greatest struggles of modern times—the never ending quest for a free, universal system of education for all Americans.*

### MAKING EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO ALL

**I**n 1635, only five years after the founding of the town of Boston, the first school was established in the British colonies—and by 1647, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony decreed that every town of fifty families should have an elementary school, and every town of one hundred families required a Latin school. By 1817, local merchants, businessmen, and wealthy artisans guided a petition through a Boston Town Meeting to establish a system of free public primary schools. Soon after, Boston opened the first public high school in the United States. By 1827, Massachusetts legislated that public schools be open to all pupils, free of charge. A decade later, Horace Mann took the helm of the newly formed Massachusetts State Board of Education and began to change the face of American education forever.

An unprecedented influx of immigrants from foreign nations in the mid-19th century prompted yet another change in the Massachusetts public school system: the institution of compulsory education, in 1852. A primary goal of this legislation was to ensure that the children of poor immigrants become “civilized,” by requiring schooling to “foreign children who might otherwise fall into truancy, vagrancy, and social upheaval,” and instead would be molded into responsible American workers. The 1852 law was also the first social reform law in the nation that attempted to control working conditions for children in factories.

### ESTABLISHING BOSTON LATIN

**E**stablished in 1635, Boston Latin was the first public school in North America and the first formally organized institution providing free education irrespective of the socio-economic background of its students. Equally important, the formation of Boston Latin came from a collective decision of the residents of the Boston settlement, who took upon themselves the responsibility of financing the school.

The establishment of the school was due largely to the influence of the Reverend John Cotton, who sought to create in Boston a school like the Free Grammar



School of Boston, England, in which Latin and Greek were taught. The student body was originally restricted to boys; among its alumni were several of America's

Revolutionary heroes, including Samuel Adams and John Hancock. Among its dropouts was a young, headstrong fellow named Benjamin Franklin.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the school continued its fine traditions, educating and producing prominent Americans. Perhaps no other secondary school in America has seen more of its students shape this nation's history. Though a Girl's Latin School with a proud tradition of its own was created in 1877, Boston Latin itself became co-educational in 1972. To this day, the school's curriculum maintains a focus on the humanities, and strives to develop a belief in 'dissent with responsibility' among its students. Many believe that it is, indeed, the core of the Boston formula for innovation.

## OPENING THE FIRST FREE PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

Some 150 years after the founding of Boston Latin, the first free public school for African Americans in Boston—the Abiel Smith School—was established on Boston's Beacon Hill. It was also the first building in the United States constructed solely to house a black public school. In 1787, the famous black activist Prince Hall petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for black access to the public school system but was denied. Eleven years later, after petitions by black parents for separate schools were also denied, black parents took matters into their own hands and organized a community school in the home of Prince Hall on the corner of West Cedar and Revere Streets on Beacon Hill. The Abiel Smith School was named for a white businessman who left an endowment of \$2,000 to the city of Boston for the education of black children in

Boston. Though initially run from the basement of the African Meeting House, the school was given its own building in 1835.

## MODERN EDUCATION REFORM

National innovation in education continues. Through the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, the state enacted groundbreaking educational reform that required accountability by students, teachers, and school systems. It also required that by 2003, all high school students pass a state examination before graduating. The Act was based on an agreement that the state and its corporate partners would increase funding in return for standardized testing and other performance indicators. In addition, charter schools were permitted, complementing the increased funding and accounting.



*Thomas Payzant, Superintendent of Boston Public Schools reading with a student*

# Community Health and Well-Being

*Responding to the suburbanization of health care that was drawing medical professionals from urban areas to the suburbs in the 1960s, Boston was the first city in the United States to develop a series of community-based health care centers and, eventually, an entire health care network designed to meet the specific needs of the populations of the neighborhoods they served. Some of these centers have grown to be anchors of entire communities, providing not only high quality health care, but meeting places and economic engines. In the process, they have provided models that have been replicated across the country.*



## THE FIRST COMMUNITY-CENTERED NEIGHBORHOOD HEALTH CENTER

**T**he year was 1967, and the place was the Columbia Point Housing Development in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. At the time, Columbia Point was one of the most unstable housing developments in Boston—its residents some of the poorest and most disenfranchised. That year, Dr. H. Jack Geiger (Western Reserve University School of Medicine) and Dr. Count D. Gibson (Emory University) opened a health center that was designed differently than all existing health center models in the United States. The focus of their new program was to combine community-oriented public health interventions with civil rights and community empowerment.

Columbia Point went far beyond existing health centers by aiming for active—rather than passive—health care, involving the participation of all community members who entered the door. The Center’s ultimate goal was to bring about a full range of social development in marginalized communities. The Columbia Point Health Center became the first urban health care center of what today is a broad network of community health care centers spread across the United States.

## THE FIRST NETWORK OF HEALTH CENTERS

**T**oday, Boston’s 26 neighborhood health centers make up a vast network of nonprofit community-based organizations, serving more than one million patients throughout the city. They not only provide health care, but function as engines of local economic growth, generating over 6,400 jobs and stimulating more than \$345 million in economic output every year.

This innovative network provides culturally-sensitive, comprehensive primary and preventive health care—including medical, dental, social, and mental health services—to anyone in need, regardless of medical status or ability to pay. The network has achieved high standards of performance—a fact acknowledged and applauded by the medical community. National studies indicate that every dollar invested in community health centers provides an average savings of three dollars to the overall health care system. Comprehensive case management, 340b (“best price”) pharmacy programs, and aggressive chronic disease management are examples of preventive care models which





*Codman Square Health Center is part of the country's first network of health centers*

have helped to minimize emergency room visits and preventable hospitalizations among low-income patients.

In fact, based on a recent study by the Neighborhood Health Plan, patients served by community health centers have fewer hospital admissions, hospital days, and emergency room visits than patients who received their health care from hospital-based primary care sites. In addition, community health centers have provided a source of stable employment for local residents, generating direct economic output, revitalizing businesses, and providing employment for neighborhood residents.

One of the most effective health centers in Boston, Codman Square Health Center, is a case in point. Evidence

of progress in the entire neighborhood is visible, quantifiable, even breathtaking: increased commerce, more jobs, rehabbed buildings, cleaner streets, reduced crime, a welcoming atmosphere, social uplift, and growing pride.

Codman Square Health Center, like dozens of others across Boston, is providing excellence in healthcare while also serving as community-building organization.





Arthur Fiedler became conductor of the Pops in 1929

## Arts and Culture for the People of Boston

*Arts and cultural activities are integral to the social fabric of the lives of the people of this country—and few places have made a deeper commitment to bringing arts and culture to the public than Boston. In fact, in a 2003 survey commissioned by the Boston Foundation, it was revealed that on a per capita basis, Boston has a higher number of arts and cultural nonprofits than numerous other large cities, including New York. In addition, Boston’s 640 arts and cultural nonprofits contribute more than \$800 million to the local economy. A number of Boston’s arts and cultural organizations and initiatives have provided national models—and one of the city’s cultural innovations has even changed the way people around the world bring in the new year.*

### THE BOSTON POPS

**O**n Saturday, July 11, 1885, a large crowd showed up at the Boston Music Hall for the first ever ‘promenade’ concert. The Boston Symphony Orchestra had promised them that the program for these concerts would be made up largely of light music of the best class.

Henry Lee Higginson, the founder of Boston Symphony Orchestra, had proposed the new series in the hope of recreating the ambience of summer evenings in the concert gardens of Vienna, where he had been a music student. He also wanted to provide summer employment for the members of the Boston Symphony. It was the start of one of America’s most-loved musical institutions.

The modern Boston Pops era began when Arthur Fiedler became its conductor in 1929—a position he held for the next 50 years. During his first summer as conductor, on July 4th, he inaugurated the famous Esplanade Concerts held on the east bank of the Charles River. From the very beginning, Fiedler made his breadth of taste known by programming the kind of music that was then described as “symphonic jazz.” The national public television program “Evening at the Pops” was launched in 1969, as a joint production of WGBH-TV in Boston and the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Today, through a live experience on the Esplanade and a national broadcast, millions of Americans enjoy the July 4th concerts. One hundred years after the Boston Pops was founded, the critic Richard Dyer wrote, “Within its first century [the Pops] has become one of the things that define our American experience.”

## THE FIRST “FIRST NIGHT” IN THE WORLD

In 1976, a local artist and community activist named Clara Wainwright invited other artists and friends to her home to discuss the various ways that each of them had celebrated New Year’s Eve. The challenge she put to them was to create a new tradition to replace Guy Lombardo, the Time’s Square ball and party hats. The conversation was wild and unfocused, but eventually a very clear picture of an event emerged. Those gathered bemoaned how small a role Boston’s rich and varied cultural life played in marking the end of the year—and they expressed the idea of turning New Years Eve festivities into a safe, community-centered family event that would blur the line between performers and audience members. They had the idea of staging performances in Boston’s churches, so that churches once again could serve as the social centers which they had been in the city’s early days. People would be encouraged to come in costumes and masks, so that there would be little



difference between the observer and the observed. It was decided that artists would be encouraged to act as catalysts in helping people understand the complex notion of saying good-bye to their old lives and hello to their new ones. One of the participants suggested that it be called the “Boston Common Garden Variety Show.” Later, the group decided to call their new celebration “First Night.”

Since the inaugural “First Night” in 1976, the celebration has grown from a small arts event to a sophisticated, permanent arts organization that annually showcases work by Boston’s multicultural arts community in venues as diverse as churches, storefronts, subway stops, streets, plazas, theaters, and, of course, the venerable Boston Common.

Over the course of some three decades, First Night has also grown from attracting 25,000 people to drawing crowds of a million or more. A unique concept that originated in Boston, First Night now serves as a model for more than 200 similar celebrations worldwide.

*(Top center) Artist Clara Wainwright and friends created the first “First Night,” which has served as a model for more than 200 similar celebrations worldwide*





*Partnerships between police and community-based organizations sprucing up neighborhoods have been key to community safety*

## *A National Model for Community Safety*

*In 1990, violence—especially violence related to gang warfare and drugs—was tearing at the fabric of Boston’s neighborhoods. There were more than 152 homicides and 1,000 aggravated assaults that year, and no end was in sight. The Boston Police Department was ineffective in the face of such horrifying statistics and community agony—and community members despaired. Faced with a poor economy in the early 1990s, declining revenue for city government, and the collapse of conventional approaches to crime prevention, police officials and community-based groups searched for new answers. They found those answers in an unprecedented series of partnerships*

*and cooperative work on the part of the entire city—an effort that eventually would be dubbed “the Boston Miracle.”*

### THE BOSTON MIRACLE

**I**n the spring of 1997, President Bill Clinton traveled to Boston to announce a national community safety and anti-crime initiative based on Boston’s incredibly successful model. Following years of soaring crime statistics and violent murders, more than one and a

half years had passed since Boston had lost a young person to violence on its streets—and President Clinton came to praise Boston and to learn. Although he emphasized law enforcement in his speech, which was delivered on the Boston campus of the University of Massachusetts, he was acutely aware that the key to the “Boston Miracle” was partnership: among city government, under Mayor Thomas M. Menino; the Boston Police Department, headed first by William Bratton and then by Commissioner Paul Evans; law enforcement through the office of Ralph Martin, then the District Attorney of Suffolk County; and a myriad of powerful and deeply-committed community based groups, especially the leadership and commitment of one group called the Ten Point Coalition.

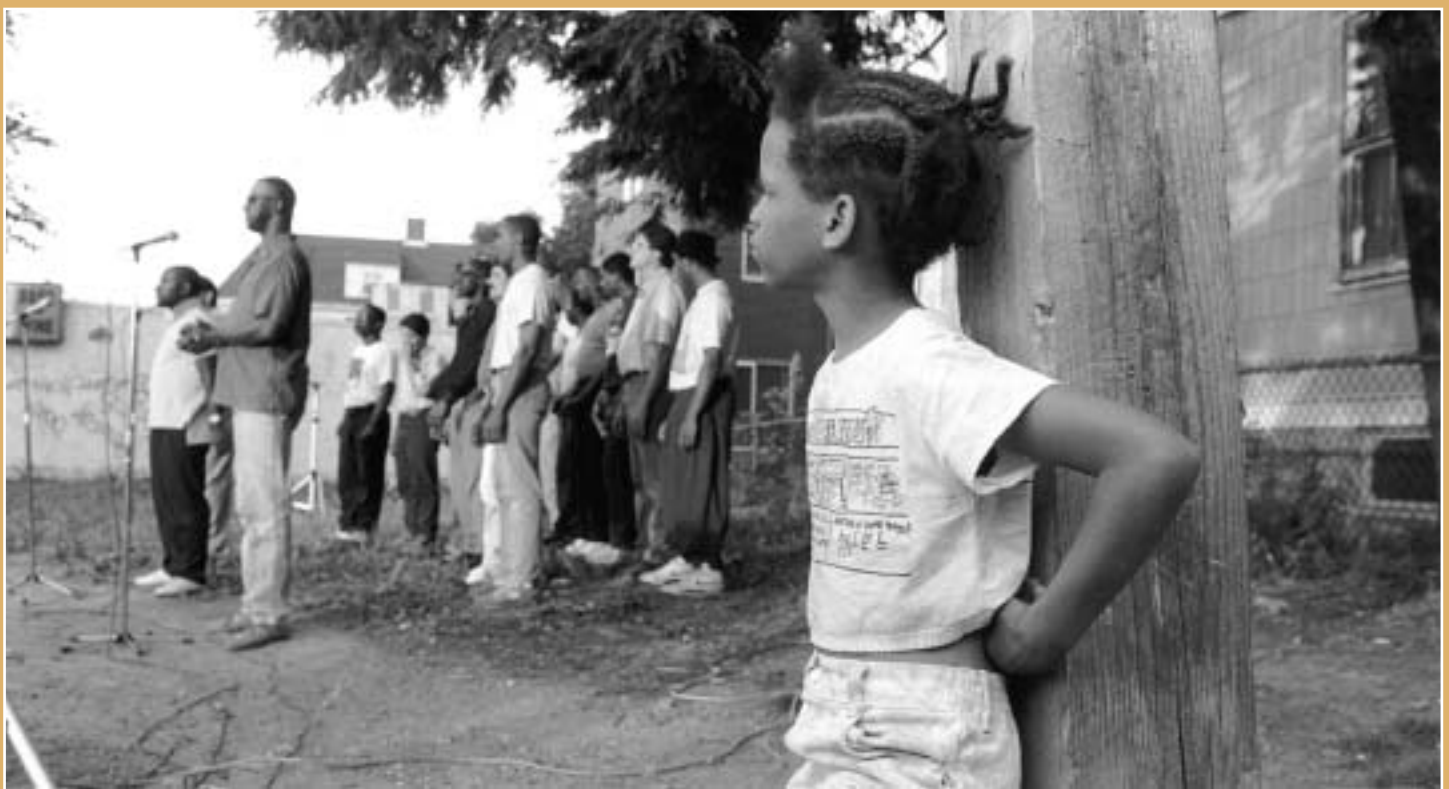
## THE BOSTON TEN POINT COALITION

**T**he Ten Point Coalition was created in 1992 after gang members violently disrupted a funeral service in a local church, causing a number of urban pastors to take on the responsibility of redirecting the lives of an entire generation of young people trapped in a cycle of violence and self-destructive behavior. These pastors talked with, listened—and learned—from young people themselves. In the process, the Ten Point Plan and Coalition was born—an alliance of inner-city ministers whose mission it is to mobilize the Christian community on behalf of black and

Latino youth, especially those at risk for violence, drug abuse, and other destructive behaviors. The Boston Ten Point Coalition grew to become an ecumenical group of 67 churches, whose clergy and lay leaders work to organize the Greater Boston community, one neighborhood at a time, one young person at a time.

## COMMUNITY POLICING

**B**eginning in 1992, the Boston Police Department became deeply committed to its own Boston brand of community policing, which combines crime prevention and law enforcement with close daily work by the police and a broad segment of community-based groups and residents. This included a major retraining of the police force, with a focus on how to understand—and work with—diverse cultures and groups. The latest in problem-solving techniques and approaches from Boston’s rich vein of management consulting firms became core to new-recruit training. In a series of unprecedented problem-solving retreats, police, elected leaders, community groups, church leaders, and even gang members brainstormed a new approach to community safety. They took the new “community policing” model initiated in Houston and several other cities, and developed something much more powerful. Eventually, it would be dubbed the “Boston Miracle.”





## *Innovation on Behalf of Young People*

*Two remarkably innovative events in Boston's recent history have both benefited the young people of the city and created dynamic models for other cities—and in one case the entire nation. One was path-breaking because it brought together groups that had rarely worked in unison in the past and became a model for an entire generation of Boston-founded public-private partnerships. The other began as a small Boston-based idea and grew into the favorite program of a President of the United States, resulting in a far-reaching government funded initiative. Both strengthened ties between Boston's adults and the young people that, to them, represent the future.*

### THE BOSTON COMPACT

**T**he *Boston Compact* is Boston's historic, flagship agreement that laid the foundation for public school improvement and guaranteed the commitment of the business and higher education communities to Boston Public School graduates. The Compact's scale and longevity made it stand apart, and helped to spawn

other similar efforts in other cities—and other public-private partnerships throughout Boston.

Through the first Compact, signed in 1982, the business community—represented by the Private Industry Council—committed summer jobs and priority hiring policies for students. Higher education institutions—represented by the Boston Higher Education Partnership—pledged scholarships and priority admissions for Boston graduates. The Boston Public Schools committed to improving the schools in concrete ways that would be measured by test scores, increased attendance, and reduced drop-out rates.

The development of the Compact would have been an important innovation in any city. But, coming eight years after Boston had been torn apart by racial violence associated with the integration of the Boston Public Schools through busing, it was nothing short of astounding. The Compact's mutual accountability arrangement—the contributions of each stakeholder being contingent upon the contributions of others—was unique at the time. City leaders who generally did not work together did so through the Compact and, while there had been individual partnerships of a similar kind



*City Year is now a program of Americorps, which was inspired by its innovative model*

in other cities, a multilateral agreement of this sort had never been developed before.

The Compact has lasted for more than 20 years. In fact, it became the first of many public-private partnerships in Boston in the late 1980s and 1990s—and paved the way for the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools, the first private endowment to fund public education in the country.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CITY YEAR

The home page of City Year’s website opens with the engaging challenge, “Young enough to want to change the world—Old enough to do it!” This visionary program, founded in 1988, provides high school and college-age students with the opportunity to devote a year of their lives to rigorous community service and civic engagement. City Year began as privately-funded, non-governmental, non-religious movement. Today, it is a program of Americorps, which was inspired by its innovative model. Every day, it continues to change

the world and the way we live in it in significant ways.

City Year members volunteer in a myriad of social settings, including public schools where they mentor students and organize character development and leadership building programs. City Year volunteers assemble for an annual “Convention of Idealism,” where they share ideas and goals with corporate and civic leaders. They lead moving celebrations of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. each year on the national holiday. In exchange for these activities and much more, volunteers receive an educational stipend—and a world of experience.

Based on an idea developed by two Harvard Law Students, Alan Khazei and Michael Brown, City Year began with a pilot project in Boston involving 50 members. Its subsequent local success helped the organization grow to its current size: some 8,000 members and alumni, aged 17 to 24 years, spanning 15 cities and 11 million cumulative hours of service. Most recently, groundwork has been laid to expand the program globally to include Johannesburg, South Africa.

Boston

Public

Open



## A Unique Commitment to Parks and Open Spaces

*Boston Common holds a unique place in United States history—as a green space in the very midst of an urban setting—developed through a democratic process. Since 1634, the Common has provided a platform for free speech and public assembly and, since the mid-nineteenth century, the Common and the adjacent Public Garden have been at the forefront of the public parks and the landscape preservation movements in this country. The commitment to the importance of green spaces in Boston received a boost in the late 1980s and continues today.*

public punishment site, Boston’s Common evolved over the centuries into a modern public parkland and a setting for a broad range of civic and recreational activities ranging from military ceremonies to opera performances attended by hundreds of thousands of people. As such, the Common has been revered as an almost sacred land parcel and an essential part of both the community landscape and the democratic urban environment.

### THE BOSTON COMMON AND THE PUBLIC GARDEN

Soon after the founding of Boston in 1630, the voters of the town agreed to tax themselves to purchase a centrally-located parcel of land for use as a town common. Though town greens, or “commonages,” were standard fare in England at the time of the “Commonwealth,” this was the first such area in the American colonies. Originally conceived as a cow pasture, military training ground, and



The innovation begun with the establishment of Boston Common in 1634 and continued with the creation of the America's first public botanical garden, Boston's Public Garden, in 1837. While the former was primarily a stage for practical and playful pursuits, the latter was more a floral masterpiece, featuring decorative botanical displays and the famed Swan Boats. These two innovative parklands—and the subsequent design and development of Boston's Emerald Necklace of parks by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted—played a critical role in the evolution of the Public Parks Movement and the theory and practice of land conservation (including the development of a National Park System) that blossomed in the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century.



## THE GREENING OF BOSTON

**B**oston continued its deep commitment to its green spaces when its people—including environmental experts, government officials, and neighborhood activists—came together in the late 1980s through a special series called The Carol R. Goldberg Seminars, funded by the Boston Foundation and directed in association with Tufts University's College of Citizenship and Public Service. The goal was to prompt a green space renaissance in the city, and that is exactly what was achieved. The action agenda created by the seminar participants, called *The Greening of Boston*, not only played a significant role in revitalizing Boston's parks, but was used across the country as a blueprint for green space planning years after it was published.

*Boston Common holds a unique place in United States history—as a green space in the very midst of an urban setting—developed through a democratic process.*



# Building Community from the Inside Out

*Developing affordable housing and building safe neighborhoods has been nothing less than a major movement in Boston—but it hasn't been a movement spurred by politicians or outside developers—rather, it has been created from the inside out, by the people who actually live and work in the city's neighborhoods. Two organizations that began as grassroots movements to fight for the rights of residents have turned into national models of community organizing and development.*

## DUDLEY STREET NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

**T**he Dudley Street neighborhood is an area of Boston which covers about one and a half square miles—where Roxbury runs into Dorchester, and Dudley Street crosses Blue Hill Avenue. To some, it might be considered one of the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Massachusetts. To anyone who knows about the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), however, such a



designation would be a perversion of the truth because of a citizen-led movement that has galvanized the power and the energy of the people who live there in a massive effort to build the neighborhood from

the inside out. The initiative began when the directors of a local foundation called the Riley Foundation presented residents with their plan to develop and rebuild the neighborhood. Residents were upset that they had not been consulted during the develop phase and, much to the Riley Foundation's credit, its directors threw their plan out and started over, involving residents in every phase of the rebuilding plan. Eventually the residents simply took over the entire process of building their own community.

Today, DSNI is the only community-based nonprofit organization in the country to be granted eminent domain authority over abandoned land within its boundaries. To date, more than 300 of the 1,300 inherited



*(Top) Dudley Street organizers Gertrudes Fidalgo and Ros Everdell in 1992; (Above) Boy runs past a Dudley Street mural*

abandoned parcels have been transformed into high quality affordable housing, gardens and public spaces. Even more important than the transformation of properties, however, is the human transformation reflected in the residents of the Dudley Street Neighborhood—who stand as an example for the rest of the country and the world—of what can be accomplished when people take control of their own lives and community.

## INQUILINOS BORICUAS EN ACCION

**I**n the 1950s and '60s, many residents of Boston's South End were driven from the area by the city's urban renewal plan. Joining other activists to save the neighborhood, in 1968 the Puerto Rican community established Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion (IBA). IBA fought to control the future of a piece of land called Parcel 19. Rallying to the cry, "We shall not be moved from Parcel 19," residents conducted a multi-year campaign that won the right to redevelop the site.

The result was a large, tenant-owned housing development called Villa Victoria, a community achievement that combines 884 units of low- and moderate-income housing, and today provides homes for more than 3,000 residents as well as commercial space and services—which is a national model

of community empowerment and neighborhood preservation. In addition to housing, IBA has infused Villa Victoria with state-of-the-art technology, wiring all of the units with high-speed Internet access, and creating a center for Latino art and culture.

*The Jorge Hernandez Cultural Center at Villa Victoria*



# *A Working List of Social and Nonprofit Innovations*

**T**he Boston History Collaborative, in a 2004 focus group with nonprofit leaders hosted by the Boston Foundation, developed a list of 50 social and nonprofit innovations, including those described in the narrative of this publication (highlighted in gold). Since then, we have solicited additional “Boston Breakthroughs” from a number of other community members and organizations. We are researching the list below, and will develop more detailed summaries of each of these. This list includes some innovations that are in the early stages of verification. Inevitably, a few of them will be challenged by historians in other regions—others that are left out will be added. With these caveats, please view this as a list-in-progress. We invite you to help us develop a comprehensive list by sending information to The Boston History Collaborative [info@bostonhistorycollaborative.org](mailto:info@bostonhistorycollaborative.org). For a web-version of this please go to [www.bostondiscoveries.com](http://www.bostondiscoveries.com)

## BREAKTHROUGHS IN BASIC AMERICAN RIGHTS

1. **First Town Meeting (1633):** The earliest instance of a regularized system of gatherings in America
2. **Massachusetts Constitution (1780):** Written by John Adams, and widely recognized as being the oldest functioning written constitution in the world, this document informed the Federal Constitution with its Bill of Rights and separation of the three branches of government
3. **Massachusetts is the First State to Abolish Slavery (1783)**
4. **Founding of the Abolitionist Movement (1828):** In Boston’s North End with David Walker’s antislavery pamphlet *Walker’s Appeal*
5. **First Free Black Regiment in Union Army (1863):** The 54th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry is created—led by the young white Colonel Robert Gould Shaw
6. **The First Journal of the Suffrage Movement (1869):** A women’s rights weekly called the *Woman’s Journal* is launched by Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe, and Josephine Ruffin and their American Woman Suffrage Association, becoming the leading voice for women’s suffrage
7. **The Refugee Movement (1914):** The first aid program for refugees in the United States is organized in Boston to help the starving Armenian survivors of a Turkish (Ottoman) ethnic cleansing campaign

## BREAKTHROUGHS IN EDUCATION

8. **First School in the British Colonies (1635):** Boston Latin becomes the first school in the British Colonies and is followed in 1647 by the decree that every town of 50 families should have an elementary school and every town of 100 families should have a Latin school
9. **First Sunday School (1818):** Park Street Church on the Boston Common
10. **First Free Public School for African Americans (1835):** The Abiel Smith School is constructed on Beacon Hill in 1834 becoming the first schoolhouse in America built to educate Black school children

- 11. First Free Public Library in a Major City (1848):** The Boston Public Library is established by the city
- 12. Compulsory Education Instituted (1852):** A law is passed to ensure that the children of poor immigrants are educated and that working conditions for children are improved
- 13. The First Legally Integrated School (1835):** The Abiel Smith School closes and the Phillips School becomes the first formally integrated public school as the result of a Black parent legal suit brought against segregation in the public schools
- 14. First English Speaking Kindergarten (1860):** Elizabeth Peabody introduces this new approach to educating young children in a program in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood
- 15. North Bennet Street Industrial School (1881):** America's first trade school is founded by Pauline Agassiz Shaw to train newly arrived immigrants in skilled trades
- 16. Facing History and Ourselves (1976):** This organization is founded in Brookline by a group of teachers committed to helping students find meaning and guidance through studying the past
- 17. The Boston Compact (1982):** A pact to improve public education is established among private industry, the Boston Public Schools, and several nonprofits, becoming a national model for urban school improvement
- 18. Boston Plan for Excellence in Public Schools (1983):** Bank of Boston and other major businesses establish one of the first private endowments for public education in the country, which now stands at close to \$30 million
- 19. Modern Education Reform (1993):** Through the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, state funding for schools is tied to accountability on the part of the school system, teachers, and students
- 20. Pilot Schools (1994):** In response to the popularity of charter schools, this unique agreement between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union sets the framework for some Boston public schools to operate under special contract provisions that encourage educational innovation
- 21. Boston Schoolyard Initiative (1995):** With the support of Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, a public/private partnership to reclaim the city's schoolyards is established as a way to stimulate community ownership
- 22. Citizen Schools (1995):** A creative national learning model developed by a Boston nonprofit that pairs adults with students for hands-on experiential learning activities is founded
- 23. Jump Start (2002):** A nonprofit is founded by Boston University using mentoring relationships to help young adults with psychiatric disabilities transition from school to work.

## BREAKTHROUGHS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING

- 24. Iquillos Boricuas en Accion (1968):** Boston's Puerto Rican community successfully fights to control the future of a piece of land in the South End called Parcel 19, winning the right to develop the land themselves, forming IBA, and building a national model for housing ownership and community development

- 25. Stopping the Urban Highway (1970):** Opposition from neighborhood groups stops the “Inner Belt” from destroying inner-city neighborhoods in a dramatic movement unparalleled in the United States
- 26. Rosie’s Place (1974):** The first shelter for homeless women in the United States is launched by Boston activist Kip Tiernan
- 27. Local Initiatives Support Corporation’s Approach (1980):** LISC, today the largest community building organization in the country, creates its national/local matching of funds approach in 1980 when it opens its first local branch in Boston
- 28. Linkage Concept (1983):** Boston is the first in the nation to require developers of certain downtown properties to give a percentage of the cost of development to projects in inner-city neighborhoods that benefit low-income groups
- 29. Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (1985):** This initiative in Roxbury becomes the first community-based nonprofit in the country to be granted eminent domain over abandoned land within its boundaries
- 30. The Big Dig (1976-2004):** Using the new techniques in civil engineering as well as consensus building, the largest urban infrastructure project in U.S. history results in re-knitting a number of Boston’s neighborhoods

#### A BREAKTHROUGH IN COMMUNITY SAFETY

- 31. The Boston Miracle (1992):** Through “community policing” by the Boston Police Department—and a partnership among the City of Boston, the Suffolk County District Attorney’s office, a group of urban pastors called the Ten Point Coalition, and other community-based groups—a groundbreaking model for curbing youth violence and creating safe neighborhoods is born

#### BREAKTHROUGHS IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

- 32. First YMCA (1851):** In an era of heavy immigration, Boston founds the first YMCA in the United States
- 33. First YWCA (1866):** The first YWCA in the United States opens in Boston as an organization governed by women and offering a program of services and activities for women
- 34. Denison House, Dorchester (1892):** A small group of college-educated women under the direction of Emily Greene Balch (who would later win a Nobel Prize for her work), sets up this organization to improve the conditions of poor immigrants
- 35. City Year (1988):** This privately-funded, non-governmental youth service organization is launched by Alan Khazei and Michael Brown—and is destined to become a model for the national Americorps program

#### BREAKTHROUGHS IN PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

- 36. First Town Common in the American Colonies (1630):** The voters of the town of Boston agree to tax themselves to purchase a centrally-located parcel of land for use as a town common
- 37. First Botanical Garden (1837):** Boston’s Public Garden is established for beauty and recreation

- 38. Appalachian Mountain Club (1876):** The first conservation and recreation organization in the country is launched by MIT Professor Edward Pickering
- 39. First Public Playground (1892):** Frederick Law Olmsted designs Charlesbank Park along the Charles River in the Back Bay section of Boston
- 40. First Metropolitan Park System (1892):** Charles Eliot, a member of the Frederick Law Olmsted Landscape Architectural Firm, successfully proposes the creation of the first Metropolitan Park System to give people in an urban area access to nature
- 41. First Designated Historic District (1955):** Beacon Hill becomes the country's first urban neighborhood to be designated an historic district
- 42. Greening of Boston (1987):** The Carol R. Goldberg Seminar releases a plan for a green space renaissance that becomes a national blueprint
- 43. Boston Harbor Islands National Park (1996):** A unique national park is created, including 34 islands within Boston Harbor managed not by the Park Service but by a 13 member public/private partnership

#### BREAKTHROUGHS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

- 44. First Public Health Commission (1799):** An outbreak of cholera prompts authorities to appoint Paul Revere as Boston's first public health officer
- 45. First Nutrition Clinic (1918):** What is now the New England Medical Center, sets up the first nutrition clinic at the end of World War I
- 46. First Community-Centered Neighborhood Health Center (1967):** Doctors Geiger and Gibson open the Columbia Point Health Center in Dorchester to combine health interventions with civil rights and community empowerment—followed by the establishment of the first network of Community Health Centers
- 47. Walk for Hunger (1969):** Launching an innovative approach to tackling hunger, this program chooses an interactive approach to building awareness and involvement
- 48. Violence and Public Health (1987):** Boston City Hospital's Deborah Prothrow-Stith suggests that street violence should be considered a public health issue, contributing to Boston's community policing model

#### BREAKTHROUGHS IN PUBLIC ART AND CULTURE

- 49. First Pops (1885):** The Boston Pops series of concerts featuring light music is developed by the founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Henry Lee Higginson
- 50. The First "First Night" (1976):** Founded by Boston artist Clara Wainwright and other artists and friends, spawns 200 other First Nights around the world

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