

BOOK REVIEW

By Mary Beth Spillane

On the Bus:

A Novel of Families Trapped by Forced Busing

By Kimberly Scott, Groton, MA

Martin and Lawrence Press, 2004

\$14.95, 368 pages

In June of 1974, Judge W. Arthur Garrity ruled that Boston's schools were unconstitutionally segregated, mandating a program of forced busing that ignited simmering racial tensions and unleashed a torrent of violence that threatened to engulf Boston.

Set in the fall of 1975, Kimberly Scott's novel, "On the Bus: A Novel of Families Trapped by Forced Busing," immerses the reader in Boston's busing crisis. It enters into Boston's relatively insular neighborhoods, weaving an endearing tale of two families separated by color but both struggling to navigate through the turbulent times.

The Flannerys are an old-line Charlestown family infuriated at an intrusive government order that disrupts their familiar patterns and imposes on them changes they neither want nor entirely understand. Instead of the safe neighborhood they are used to, the Flannery children, Katie and Bobby, now must endure bloody street battles

and day-to-day violence in the schools. The Sinclairs are a beleaguered South End black family who see their hopes for the better future that busing could provide disintegrate into a nightmare of danger when young Jack Sinclair struggles to stay

alive. It is where the paths of Katie Flannery and Jack Sinclair innocently cross that Scott's story begins its tragic, downward spiral as both the Flannery and Sinclair children fall deeper into a world of hatred, drugs and violence.

Scott's novel is a must-read for anyone seeking a better understanding not only of Boston's busing crises and the hatred it

unleashed but also of the city itself and its many, diverse neighborhoods. "On the Bus" vividly illustrates how forced busing coupled with the turbulent social and economic times of the 1970s affected poor struggling city dwellers, both black and white, shaping a generation of adults and children and giving Boston a reputation for racism that continues to this day.

