

Desegregation Is More Than Skin Deep

Segregation, with its resultant ills, is not confined to a single geographical area; neither do the ill effects always manifest themselves in the same manner. This article shows, for example, the wide prevalence of residential segregation. It also indicates the wholesome results of cumulative change.

SEGREGATION in the public schools in the United States is dead in principle. That is, it is dead *de jure*, but it is not dead *de facto*. *De facto* it assumes many forms and will require many kinds of action to put an end to it.

While it is true that the Supreme Court's decision of May 17, 1954 declared unconstitutional the segregation of pupils according to race only in the five communities in which suit had been brought, the moral effect of its action on the whole nation is clear. A new legal bench mark has been set.

But law, *per se*, does not bring about the complex social changes which must take place if segregation of pupils is to end *de facto*. The law is not the final solvent for social ills, however much it provides the basis in whose absence only custom and usage would determine what was right conduct.

Thus it is that desegregation, North and South, poses a problem for social action. The rate at which it may be accomplished will be paced by consideration of *when* and *how*. The place and speed of *when* and *how* will differ as the history and practice of segrega-

tion, both *de jure* and *de facto*, differ in local communities, North and South. Despite the important role which both federal and state agencies play in education, provision for education and the kind of education it is, perhaps more characteristically than any other phase of our social life, is a local community matter.

The status of segregation in the schools in those states in which it was not required by law (*ante* May 17, 1954) varies. In twelve states there was no explicit legal provision against it; in four states it was permitted in varying degrees; and in sixteen states it was explicitly forbidden. The total Negro population in these thirty-two states was, in 1950, in excess of 4½ million.

The New Wandering

It is not unlikely that *de facto* segregation of Negro children exists in the schools of some communities in many of these states—or at least in those in which there is a sizable residential concentration of Negroes. It is with such communities in non-Southern states that this discussion is concerned.

The residential segregation of Ne-

goes in the urban centers of the non-South is due to the natural growth process of those communities. This, in turn, has produced segregation of Negro children in the public schools. The process is *natural* in the sense that it is due to the play of economic and social factors whose force and operation transcend the will and desire of individuals. These factors trace to two important processes in the culture of modern communities: (a) the right and opportunity for people to migrate from community to community, and (b) the growth process of urban communities (somewhat unique to non-Southern cities) by reason of the successive waves of immigrants or emigrants in the case of native-born which have settled in them.

The movement of Negro people into and within urban communities of the non-South is the most recent (save that of Mexican and Puerto Rican people) in a long series of enactments of the truth of the classic axiom that "the city air makes for freedom." It may also be seen as a manifestation of the equally classic axiom, stated by the eminent German economic historian, Karl Bücher, that "every great advance in civilization begins with a new wandering."

But this "new wandering" which has greatly increased the Negro population of the urban communities of the non-South has encountered barriers. These have been chiefly economic and cultural in nature. Economically these Negro migrants have been unable to compete on equal terms with most non-Negroes in the housing market. Hence they, like most of their white immigrant predecessors, settled in or

near the center of the cities to which they turned in the search for greater freedom. Consequently a residential pattern of Negro people, not unlike that of earlier city-ward migrants of low income and social status and meagerly equipped with industrial skills, has developed in the cities of the non-South. The residential pattern of all but a few non-Southern cities with populations of 25,000 or more tends to confirm this fact.

As the in-migrant groups to non-Southern cities prospered they tended to resettle in neighborhoods successively farther away from the area of original settlement, the center of the city. This movement was both accompanied and hastened by the pressure for space by new waves of immigrants. These, in due time, also tended to move toward the rim of the community, leaving their worn-out houses for the next wave of in-migrants to occupy.

It is in this setting and successive process that Negro in-migrants belong. Similarly, as they have prospered, they, like their non-Negro fellows, have tended to extend the area of their residence outward. The history of their movement to non-Southern cities, their

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settlement within them and their gradual trek toward the rim of such communities differs from that of their non-Negro predecessors chiefly and *most significantly* in the fact that against them far deeper and more lasting prejudices have been exhibited. Consequently their trek has been slower, fraught with greater threat and often with outright violence, and has, in the main, resulted in a concentrated rather than a dispersed pattern of residential settlement. Thus while Negroes have enjoyed some mobility within non-Southern urban communities they have not enjoyed the right of competition on equal economic and social terms with their non-Negro fellow citizens in the choice of place of residence, or for that matter, in the choice of employment.

Residential Segregation

The *de facto* segregation of Negro children in the public schools of non-Southern urban centers is a direct consequence of the *de facto* residential segregation of their parents. The breaking of the housing blockade which confronts the Negro population in these cities is thus the most considerable factor standing in the way of the reduction or elimination of the segregation of Negro children in the public schools of those communities.

Thus it is that the rugged economic, political and cultural factors which operate in the "educative society" *outside* the school, must be brought to serve the letter and spirit of the law against segregation. Hence what can and will happen *in* the school will be conditioned by what can and will happen in the Great Society, economical-

ly, politically and culturally as well as *legally*.

This is the picture of the underlying facts. If we are daunted by it we must remind ourselves that it is *facts* which daunt us. To permit that to happen would be pathetic.

Most non-Southern cities with sizeable concentrations of Negro people reveal a pattern of Negro settlement whose elementary school districts show such characteristics as the following: a disproportionately large number of pupils per room and per teacher; the highest percentage of rooms in short supply; the lowest percentage of surplus and/or special-use rooms; a disproportionately large number of old, inadequate and deteriorated buildings with consequent more intense use, greater repair and maintenance costs and greater strain on teachers because of large classes, overcrowding, inadequate facilities and, significantly, a greater proportion of children with learning difficulties. It is such real and stubborn facts as these which must be changed if *equal*, not to speak of *desegregated*, educational opportunities are to be afforded Negro children. The untruth of the myth of "separate but equal" educational opportunities is thus affirmed in non-Southern as well as Southern urban communities.

Cumulative Change

The principle on which equal and nonsegregated education will come about in those communities in the United States—both North and South—in which it is not now a fact is a *cumulative* one. This is not equivalent to a principle of gradualism, at least not the kind of gradualism born of half-

heartedness if not cowardice. It is a principle which requires that a start toward desegregation be made *whenever* and *whenever* it can be made. It is a principle which denies the oft-held notion that cause and effect are related as links in a chain. That view has never been, nor is it now, a real one. Cause and effect are *a net of circumstances*. Hence the net must be widely cast so as to take advantage of every factor which, directly or indirectly, will bear helpfully on improving the status of the Negro population.

The principle of *cumulative change* upon which we must depend reveals the following potential: a favorable change in any one of the distinctive contributory conditions (housing, education, employment, recreation, etc.) will, if it can be held constant long enough, tend to raise the other conditions and bring about a readjustment of the whole system in conformity with favorable social change. Thus the receipt of equal wages for equal work, opportunities for equal competition in the housing market and whatever other "better" can be brought about for Negroes (and all disadvantaged minorities in our society) must last long enough to be translated into a higher standard of living and evoke the attitudes and expectations which tend to go along with it. In any given community there are many potential when-and-how points. They must be availed of at one and the same time, since each variable in the complex supports and is supported by all the others.

The task is a political one in the broadest and most genuine sense of the meaning of *politics*. Important among the factors which will be re-

quired are such as these: an enlightened and vigorous community conscience respecting the inequity and iniquity of segregation because of race; rigorous enforcement of the law respecting the right of Negroes to live in those communities in which they choose to live; the delimitation of school districts on the logic of equality of access to school facilities regardless of race; the rigorous enforcement of racially fair regulations governing transfers; alert and active voluntary organizations which have the courage to protest every violation of civil liberty; positive programs for the desegregation of Negro teachers as well as Negro pupils in the public schools; the formation and vigorous operation of human relations commissions—both official and informal in nature; the enforcement of fair employment practices—in short, the organization of the community through many channels and agencies to the end that verbal dedication to the democratic credo will find expression in social action.

In all these plans and efforts we must be guided by a sense of realism. This requires that we bear in mind that desegregation of the public schools involves, as does all major social change, an adjustment of fundamental moral values. What we want is better schools and desegregation is one of the major yardsticks by which they may be achieved and measured. If, however, we should argue that there is no good reason for drawing school district lines just to create the conditions for desegregation any more than to create the conditions for segregation, we would be arguing badly. That would be an "all or none" way of stating the

issue. Many factors enter into the drawing of school district lines, an important one being the democratic ideal that segregation is to be avoided whenever and wherever possible.

Despite dedicated and wise efforts to influence educational policy so that desegregation may be achieved wherever and whenever possible, we shall continue to have schools in which there will be a high concentration of white and Negro pupils, respectively. The facts of urban life make this certain for many years. In that event what we need to do is to seek to modify the relations which now often exist between such schools.

We might devoutly anticipate the day when it would be a thoroughly workable policy with unquestionable democratic results for pupils to attend the school of their choice, or the choice of their parents—regardless of their race or the racial group which might make up the bulk of the population of a school. The dreams of a Walt Whitman would then come to reality, and with it genuine democracy.

For the changes which must come if desegregation is to come *de facto* as well as *de jure* there must be marked changes in local community opinion. But even deeper than opinion is the sentiment which predetermines it. What we must come to know is not only what the peculiar opinions of the community are but also the complex elements of moral feeling and character in which those opinions are nurtured. It is right changes at that level of community life which must come about if the schools, as John Dewey expressed it, are to become "outposts of a more humane civilization."

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