

The North, Too, Has SEGREGATION PROBLEMS

Earnest and willing effort, rather than regional recrimination, is needed to solve today's most difficult educational problems—one aspect of which is the various forms of segregation of children in their schools.

ONE OF THE southern governors has been quoted as saying that all he had to do to learn how to segregate the schools of his state successfully and legally, was to send his assistants to study New York City to learn how it is done there. He might have used any other of the larger cities of the country above the Mason and Dixon line. The story is the same in the North, East and Far West. There is no legal segregation. The percentage of Negro and white children attending school together, nevertheless, is small.

The difference is that outside the South official arms of government do not legally segregate the races. Desegregation is a southern problem and is being attacked on the legal and political fronts. Integration of the races is a socio-psychological problem, national—if not international—in scope, and the concern of educators in the larger communities without regard to region.

Conditions of Segregation

How does this happen? Presumably there are no laws enforcing segregation

in northern communities. In fact, several states have made very positive efforts in recent years to foster integration. The State Commissioner of Education of New Jersey, while admitting that existing school boundaries could be defended, required that the Englewood Board of Education redraw school zones to bring Negro and white children together. Only in fringe areas where whites and non-whites live in neighborhoods together do children attend mixed schools. In spite of the efforts of educators to bring about a mixing of the races, the amount of *de facto* segregation is today appalling. Why and how does this condition exist?

Because residential living is segregated.

It is difficult for the schools to provide an interracial educational experience if the people live in segregated neighborhoods. Harlem, on Manhattan Island in the heart of New York City, has more than one-half million people living between 110th and 150th Streets, east of the Columbia Univer-

sity section. They are almost solidly "non-white." This condition is different only in degree, and not in kind from that in most of the larger cities of America. With this relegation of Negroes and Puerto Ricans to segregated areas of community life, there is little the school can do about providing an interracial experience in school for children.

Even at the high school level, where children travel greater distances from their homes, the problem is considerable. In New York City a girls high school (Wadleigh) has been abandoned as a high school and converted into a junior high school, because it failed as an integrated school. As the whites withdrew, the better students of the Negroes also withdrew since they did not wish to attend an all-Negro school. The same situation was narrowly averted at Morris High School in the Bronx, by redistricting and by a refurbishing program. Several other high schools are facing the same situation.

Nor is this the major problem which is being faced in the North. Another facet of it is the migration of the middle class whites to suburbs. There is scarcely a large community in America but that has an enormous out-migration to the suburbs since the war. This out-migration has been almost solidly white people. The decline of white children in the Washington, D. C. schools has been under way for years, as the population has moved into Maryland and Virginia. Some individuals have tried to make capital of this during the past year, when desegregation has been under way, by pointing out that the enrollment of white stu-

dents had declined 2 per cent within the past year. This, however, is only a continuation of a trend which has been under way for many years.

Perhaps the most spectacular development of this kind has been in Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island—a metropolitan suburb of New York City. Levittown, alone, represents a development of more than 15,000 houses, occupied by low middle income families. No residents among them would be designated by the census takers as "non-white." The interracial housing developments in these metropolitan suburban rings are inconsequential.

The only possibility of having mixed neighborhoods in the downtown part of cities on a permanent basis is through housing built with public subsidy. This, so far, with minor exceptions, has been only for low income groups. The population of this housing tends, however, to become "all Negro" when the neighborhood in which the public housing is located becomes all Negro. Unless, and until, our residential ghettos are dissolved there is not much the schools can do about integration of pupils, except in changing neighborhoods.

Because some educators zone schools for segregation.

The second method of segregating the races is through school zoning. A person who has had years of experience enforcing non-discrimination laws said recently: "It is next to impossible to

Dan W. Dodson is professor of education, New York University, Washington Square, New York, New York.

prevent an administrator from segregating children, if he so desired."

Many educators do not have the courage of one district superintendent, on Manhattan's West Side. This administrator zoned a new school east and west to provide a heterogeneous school population, when he might have zoned the other way, which would have provided the Riverside Drive group with a nice exclusive school. Zoning was a part of curriculum, for it determined in no small measure the quality of social experience the children were to have.

All school men are not so courageous. Some feel they cannot stand the community pressure. One school administrator expressed it by saying, "There is not a school administration in the world that can stand up against those parents (of an elite neighborhood) who are protesting sending their children into the Negro neighborhood to high school."

We segregate through school program.

Another type of segregation is achieved in high school by school programming. The emphasis upon vocational, academic, general and commercial high schools and programs is a very effectual means of segregation of children. In a suburban community recently a father said rather whimsically, "I wish very much that my boy had been given an opportunity in high school to know the Italian and Negro young people. Had he not gone out for football, he would have missed contact with them entirely. My son was in the academic program and practically all of the Negroes and Italians

were then in the vocational program."

Of course, some Negro boys and girls are assigned to the academic program. Of course, some white children are in the other programs. It is noticeable, however, that all out of proportion, Negro families tend to be in the lower socio-economic group in the community, and all out of proportion the lower social groups get relegated to the vocational and general programs in the schools. Thus, in the name of good education, in the name of meeting individual needs, "Jim Crow" education operates in many American high schools.

A guidance counselor in one of the large cities now wrestling with desegregation said if they would leave it to her she could take care of keeping the children apart through the counseling program alone.

We segregate through grouping.

A fourth factor making for segregated education is that of grouping. In spite of all the efforts to the contrary, many educators persist in homogeneous grouping. Slow learners are put together, for all kinds of educational programs, and fast learners are put to themselves. Other factors being equal, in the average community Negroes have been disadvantaged over a period of time and more Negro children than whites will be slow learners. This has nothing to do with race. It is a social phenomenon. It is well illustrated by a recent incident in a New York City school. A certain amount of anti-Semitism was discovered among Negro and Puerto Rican children in a junior high school. A close analysis revealed that the antipathy was not really

because the children were Jews. They were really resented because they composed, almost in its entirety, the fast learner group. Members of this group were of the upper socio-economic level, and lived in one corner of the neighborhood. They were rather effectively segregated from the Negro and Puerto Rican children who were of low economic status. Thus segregation into homogeneous groups had tended to make for separateness.

Educators cannot dodge the basic issue raised by the Supreme Court on this question. If irreparable damage is done to the personality of the Negro child to have an arm of government (the school) separate him from his fellow citizens into second class citizenship, does not also the same hold true for the child who is segregated because he is a slow learner or who is otherwise atypical?

We segregate by ignoring.

Perhaps the cruelest type of segregation is that of being ignored, both by the teacher and the class. Many children sit in classrooms all day, but are not members of the group. Nothing is expected of them, except that they will not bother others. The teacher is unwilling or unable to accept them and they mark time until they can escape academic custody. The Presiding Justice of the Domestic Relations Court of New York City has just recommended that such children be given working papers at age 14 and allowed to leave school. Thus we would fulfill the Biblical statement "To those who have shall be added. To those who have not shall be taken away even that which they have."

Another facet of the problem was described by some high school youths recently. They said the high school prom was too expensive for most of the Negro children, so they could not come. About six couples who were Negro showed up. They ate at a table to themselves, danced to themselves and were ignored by the remainder of the group—a sort of co-racial dance.

Toward Good Education

It should be noted that except for the residential type of segregation, the conditions which have been described do not represent discrimination *per se*. They apply to Negroes and whites alike. The difference is that more Negroes fall into the categories of social and economic class where they are predominantly segregated from a large portion of other American children. If we are to provide good education, we must solve the challenges presented in such problems as segregation through zoning, program grouping or social isolation within the educative process. Only so can we solve the problem of providing a democratic opportunity for all—including the minority group child. These are problems made more evident by integration, but are problems which were not produced by it. Integration makes more glaring the present weaknesses, and focuses attention upon the unfinished business ahead of us.

Segregation is a northern as well as a southern problem. We must all strive earnestly and without regional recrimination to solve America's most difficult educational problems—one aspect of which is the various forms of segregation of children in their schools.

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