

The Racial Desegregation of Dayton, Ohio Public Schools, 1966-2008

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Importance of the topic: Dayton fits the typical image of a Midwestern, formerly industrial center. The story of the efforts to implement racial desegregation in the schools illuminates how such programs rose and fell in the Midwest. Although Dayton enjoyed national attention for having the most successful desegregation plan in the country in 1976, the federal courts offered a way to return to segregated schools about twenty-five years later. In 2002, the school board, the local chapter of the NAACP, and the Ohio Department of Education agreed to end plan.

Relation to other disciplines: According to Gary Orfield, the most racially segregated cities and those the NAACP found most difficult to reform were older, formerly industrial metropolises where smaller independent suburbs hemmed in the central school district. Orfield added that in 1996 these factors appeared in combination with intense housing segregation in Illinois, Michigan, New York, and New Jersey making them the most segregated states.

Dayton, Ohio fits Orfield's description of an older, formerly industrial metropolis where racial segregation persisted despite many efforts for change. In 1988, Douglas Massey had found the housing patterns in Dayton and its suburbs to be the third most racially segregated among the fifty largest metropolitan areas in the United States. According to Massey's findings, the metropolitan areas with higher levels of racial segregation than Dayton were Cleveland, Ohio and Chicago, Illinois. By 1996, Dayton was no longer one of the fifty largest cities, and it no longer appeared in such comparisons.

Organization of the presentation: This paper will have three main parts. The first is a brief explanation of how racial segregation began in the city and how conditions in Dayton related to those in some other parts of the country. The second part discusses the various factions, the roles they played, and the process leading to the successful integration of the schools. The conclusion will offer some descriptions of how those programs unraveled in subsequent years.

Related materials: Gary Orfield, et al., *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: New Press, 1996).

A full account of the racial desegregation of Dayton schools is available in Joseph Watras, *Politics, Race, and Schools: Racial Integration, 1954-1994* (New York: Garland Press, 1997).