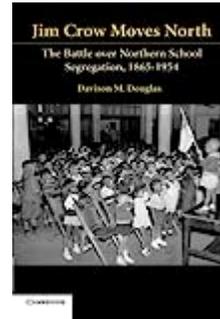




Davison M. Douglas. *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Desegregation, 1865-1954.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. x + 334 pp. \$23.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-60783-4.



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Reassessing Northern Racism

Many northerners live under the false assumption that their region of the country has historically been more enlightened than their southern counterparts. Even when the city of Boston erupted over the bussing issue in the post-civil rights era 1970s, Americans were shocked to witness what many believed anomalous behavior for a state that had bred such good liberals as the Kennedy clan. However, as Davison M. Douglas's new book, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954* illustrates, this perception is wholly inaccurate and needs reevaluation.

Racial segregation in public schools is a hot topic today, as sociologists and political scientists analyze what went wrong in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*—a decision that was supposed to equalize the educational experience for all children. Scholars, policy makers, and state and local officials have discovered that not only is there more racial segregation in education in the United States today than existed in pre-Brown America, but, as Douglas instructs in his last chapter, more segregation exists in the North than in the South. This book is not only timely, but im-

perative if we are to understand how the U.S. educational system arrived at this place.

As part of the Cambridge Historical Studies in American Law and Society, *Jim Crow Moves North* is both a well-written and well-researched legal and historical study of the struggle to achieve educational equality in the North from Reconstruction to *Brown*. Few studies exist on the extent of racism in the North, particularly with regard to segregation in northern schools. Barring Leon Litwack's important study of African Americans in the antebellum North and a handful of dated works that focus on blacks in urban America, studies that deal with the subject of northern racism are limited. Thus, Douglas's book is an important contribution to the historical literature.

Jim Crow Moves North flows chronologically, making it easy for the reader to follow the social and political trends that contributed to changes in racial segregation in northern schools. To be sure, the Civil War did not settle the right of black Americans to an equal education, much as it had not with regards to voting rights, housing, and employment. Whites in the North, much

like whites in the South, were generally not accepting of the purportedly equal status of blacks and responded by using extralegal forms of resistance to integration in all areas of life. Although by 1890 “almost every Northern state” had legally banned segregated education, for the most part, black and white children attended separate and inherently unequal schools (p. 62). According to Douglas, this trend would continue through the early 1950s, and in some parts of the North, until the 1960s and 1970s.

Douglas begins with an overview of the struggle for black education in the North during the antebellum era. Prior to the Civil War, residency, state and local government structures, as well as the ethnic and racial makeup of an area all contributed to where one attended school. Thus, children were not necessarily segregated by race, but more so by residential patterns. While this chapter falls out of the scope of the book’s title, it is important in establishing the status of black educational equality and rights prior to the Civil War. As Douglas argues in his chapter on the post-Civil War era, Reconstruction did little to alter the status of black education in the North. As the Brown decision has taught us, courts cannot legislate the hearts and minds of individuals. Indeed, anti-black sentiment existed in the North much like the South and even though state courts banned segregated education in northern schools (sans Indiana), whites found ways to thwart these laws.

According to Douglas, beginning in the 1890s with the Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that essentially legalized Jim Crow, through World War I and the Depression era, northern school segregation actually increased. As the percentage of blacks migrating out of the South to northern cities for war work grew, so did white hostility and increased intolerance of integration, particularly in education. In addition, Douglas shows that migration patterns also influenced residential segregation patterns as blacks increasingly became relegated to certain areas of many major cities like Detroit and Chicago; indeed, this was the beginning of the urban “ghetto.” The tensions that arose due to the large influx of southern blacks to the North also contributed to a rise in lynchings, race riots, and increased discrimination in otherwise overlooked areas such as interracial marriage and public accommodations.

Responses to these changes, Douglas argues, were varied. While a number of blacks challenged educational segregation in the courts, many others called for separate accommodations, believing their children would re-

ceive better treatment and a better education from the large numbers of black teachers who increasingly found themselves out of work. Subsequently, many blacks argued that the creation of separate black schools would not only provide jobs for black teachers, but also an education on par with that of whites. Douglas’s discussion of W. E. B. DuBois’s change of heart over the integration/separation debate is instructive of the tension that resounded in the black community at mid-century. The alarming examples Douglas provides of the overt racism by white teachers towards black children certainly aids the case for separate schools.

The NAACP, however, in keeping with its long tradition of advocating full integration for African Americans, stepped up its campaign for integrated schools. Douglas contends that the 1940s, and the World War II era in particular, was a “watershed ... in the campaign against Northern school segregation” (p. 219). To be sure, the NAACP used the inherent contradiction of fighting a war for democracy abroad, while not adhering to the same values at home, to highlight the inconsistencies in American schools. The examples Douglas provides of the numerous challenges to northern segregated education contribute to the current trend to expand the traditional timeline of the civil rights movement.

Jim Crow Moves North ends with examples of “recalcitrant” school districts in states such as Ohio and Illinois that refused to integrate their school districts after the *Brown* decision and some even well into the 1960s. To be sure, one of the more interesting points of the book is the politics of memory. As Douglas uncovered, many northern state and local governments still refuse to acknowledge, or perhaps simply cannot recall, the fact that segregation had ever existed in their school district. (He cites the fact that segregation existed in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Ohio through much of the twentieth century [p. 4].) Even Oberlin College, often touted as the foremost racially liberal institution in the country, jumped on the segregation bandwagon (pp. 130-131). This fact alone is an important contribution to the historiographical literature on American racism.

Douglas’s book is an important addition to African American history and the history of the modern civil rights movement for several reasons. First, it highlights the significance of the social and political context when trying to accomplish racial change through law. While Supreme Court cases like *Brown* were imperative to altering the racial status quo in America, as Douglas aptly states, litigation and court decisions must work “in con-

junction with other strategies” (p. 276). Second, Douglas elaborates on a significant and, often overlooked, issue in African American history; integration vs. separation, a question that plagues the black community to this day. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Douglas illustrates that the North was not so much unlike the South when it came to racial attitudes; the North simply used

more subtle ways to enforce the separation of the races. As a southerner once told me, “racism is just tacit in the North. It doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.” *Jim Crow Moves North* should be used in any African American history course, if nothing else to show that racism was not simply the South’s problem, but the nation’s problem.

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