



## Segregation

is the separation of groups of people by custom or by law. It is often based on differences of race, religion, wealth, or culture. Many people consider such differences highly important.

Segregation can occur in almost any area of life. It is particularly evident in housing, education, and employment, and in the use of eating, sleeping, transportation, and other public facilities. Almost all systems of segregation discourage marriage between people of different racial, religious, or social groups. In the United States, for example, many states once outlawed marriage between blacks and whites. But in 1967, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled such laws unconstitutional. Segregation almost always involves some kind of discrimination by one group against another. The term *discrimination* refers to actions or practices by members of a dominant group that limit the opportunities of a less powerful group.

The term *desegregation* refers to the process of ending group separation. It generally is used to describe efforts to abolish racial segregation in the United States. The people most affected by racial segregation in the United States have been African Americans.

During the course of desegregation, two or more separated groups may begin to act toward each other in new, friendlier ways. This new relationship between the groups is called *integration*. A desegregated situation becomes integrated when people from different groups accept and become friendly toward one another.

Segregation is not limited to the United States nor to bias against racial minorities. It has been practiced in various forms in many countries throughout history.

### Causes and effects of segregation

Segregation is usually the result of a long period of group conflict, with one group having more power and influence than another. The *dominant* (more powerful) group sometimes uses force, law, or custom to segregate a *subordinate* (less powerful) group. In time, segregation comes to be considered right, especially by the dominant group. Violations of the accepted code of segregation are considered wrong. People who break the code are believed to deserve stern punishment.

Further support for segregation comes from hostile attitudes and feelings between groups. The dominant group typically believes its members are born with superior intelligence, talents, and moral standards. Social scientists call these false or exaggerated beliefs *stereotypes*. The dominant group uses stereotypes to justify its mistreatment of the subordinate group. Meanwhile, the subordinate group develops fear and dislike toward the dominant group.

Segregation involves favored treatment for the dominant group. Members of the dominant



group are expected to have#and usually do have#the best education, homes, jobs, and public services. As a result, their beliefs of superiority are strengthened. Most do not consider the system unfair but regard it as the proper way for society to distribute its resources. Likewise, the subordinate group may have a sense of inferiority that is reinforced by a system that denies it the social, political, and economic benefits enjoyed by others. Subordinate groups try to make up for their low position. They develop intense group loyalty and make special efforts to resist and overcome the limitations of separation.

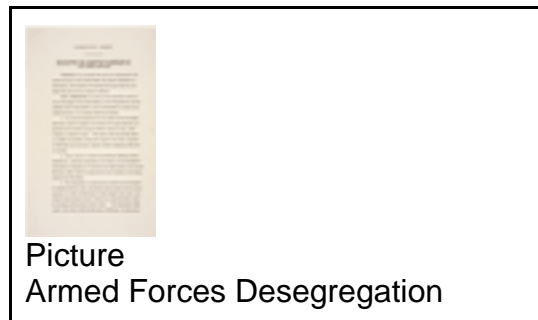
### **Racial segregation in the United States**

Racial segregation in its modern form started in the late 1800's. But slavery existed in the United States for more than 200 years before the American Civil War (1861-1865). After the war, former slaves suffered widespread racial discrimination, especially in the South.

**Jim Crow laws**, first developed in a few Northern states in the early 1800's, were adopted by many Southern states in the late 1800's. These segregation laws required that whites and blacks use separate public facilities. No detail was too small. At one time, for example, Oklahoma required that whites and blacks use separate telephone booths. Arkansas specified separate gambling tables, and many courts provided separate Bibles for swearing in witnesses. Several Southern states adopted *grandfather clauses* and other Jim Crow laws that deprived African Americans of their voting rights. See Jim Crow.

The rapid spread of segregation laws through the South was supported by a series of Supreme Court decisions. The most influential case was *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. In that case, the court supported the constitutionality of a Louisiana law requiring separate but equal facilities for whites and blacks in railroad cars. *De jure* (by law) racial segregation was strengthened by this decision. See *Plessy v. Ferguson*. For more than 50 years, many states used the "separate but equal" rule to segregate African Americans in public schools and in transportation, recreation, sleeping, and eating facilities.

**The beginning of change.** The system of de jure segregation gradually began to crumble in the 1900's. During World War I (1914-1918), orders for military equipment created a great demand for labor. The demand led to mass black migration from the South to the manufacturing centers of the North. In 1910, about a tenth of all black Americans lived outside the South. Today, more than half live outside the South.

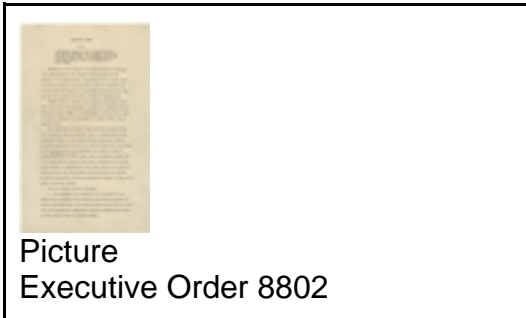


Partly as a result of this migration, African Americans, starting in the 1930's, gained increasing prominence in national politics and a fairer hearing in federal courts. One high point was reached in the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, in which the Supreme Court ruled against de jure segregation in public schools. The court held that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." In 1969, the court ordered public school districts to desegregate "at once." See *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

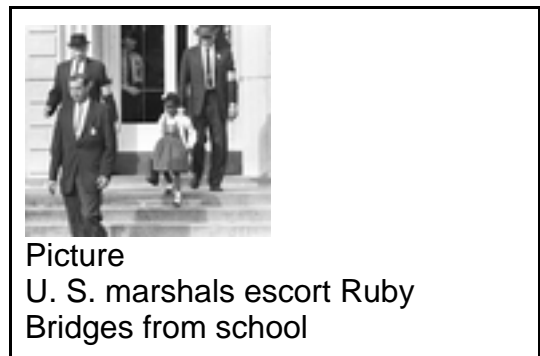


Beginning in 1973, the Supreme Court ordered school desegregation in certain Northern cities, where school boards had drawn school district lines that contributed to segregation. The Supreme Court often ordered the busing of pupils to ensure that most schools in a district would have a similar proportion of minority group students. Many white people throughout the country opposed busing and other desegregation efforts. As a result, judges and policymakers began to issue fewer and fewer orders calling for school desegregation.

By the end of the 1900's, segregation had again increased in public schools. Large numbers of white residents had moved from central cities to suburbs to escape desegregation. This migration, sometimes called *white flight*, and growth in the number of private schools left public schools in many large cities with mostly minority students.



**De facto segregation.** In the 1960's, national attention shifted to *de facto* segregation—that is, segregation in fact. This type of separation has developed more by custom than by law. Although many laws supporting de jure segregation were declared unconstitutional, de facto racial segregation increased during the mid-1900's.



In cities, African Americans were almost as segregated in housing at the end of the 1900's as they were at the beginning of the century. Such segregation remained one of the most serious problems facing people of color. See Ghetto. Many blacks suffered from a practice called *steering*, in which real-estate agents showed them housing only in areas that already had many black residents. Laws prohibit such practices, but many victims find it hard and expensive to get compensation from courts.

Efforts to eliminate segregation have to some degree benefited middle-class African Americans. This group, which accounts for about a fourth of all black Americans, has the education and the skills to take advantage of new opportunities even though they still face discrimination. But the economic and political situation has not basically improved for millions of unskilled, low-income African Americans. In some ways, the poor are worse off than they were in the 1950's.



De facto segregation and racial discrimination have been basic causes of racial riots in American cities since the 1960's. The riots have represented, among other things, a mixture of desperation and defiance.

Antidiscrimination laws are a major tool for breaking down de facto segregation. For example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provides protection against discrimination in employment and education. However, many such laws have inadequate means of enforcement. See Civil Rights Act of 1964. By the end of the 1990's, many African American communities turned their efforts toward creating effective, supportive, separate schools for black children. The curriculum in such schools emphasized African art, music, and culture; the achievements of black African civilizations; and African American history. There were also attempts to create more black-owned businesses and self-help organizations. As a group, these educational and social movements were known as *Afrocentrism*.

### **Other segregation in the United States**

Other minorities besides African Americans have been victims of segregation and discrimination in the United States. In the 1800's, for example, white settlers took much land from American Indians and forced them to move to reservations. Since then, most Indians have suffered political and economic discrimination.

During the late 1800's and early 1900's, Congress passed laws to stop immigration from Asia. During World War II, after Japan attacked a United States naval base in 1941, thousands of loyal Japanese Americans lost many of their constitutional rights and were imprisoned in detention camps. Immigrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and southern and eastern Europe also have suffered discrimination.

Segregation of other minorities has generally been less forceful and less obvious. Many Jewish Americans, for example, have been excluded from certain residential areas. Many have also been discriminated against in educational and job opportunities by quotas that limited Jewish participation in colleges and other institutions. These practices have steadily declined since the 1930's, but Jewish Americans still face subtle forms of discrimination. Such discrimination occurs in some social clubs, in political nominations, in promotions to the top positions in large corporations, and in other areas. See Anti-Semitism.

Sometimes segregation is voluntary rather than forced. For this reason, sociologists distinguish between a segregated ghetto and an ethnic area of choice. A ghetto is, in effect, a prison, because forced segregation gives its people little choice of living elsewhere. An ethnic area of choice is a community where members of a group prefer to live, though they could live elsewhere. For example, many U.S. cities have communities of such groups as Italian Americans and Polish Americans.

### **Segregation in other countries**

Segregation has existed for many centuries. During the Middle Ages, from about the 400's through the 1400's, segregation was especially directed against European Jews. In many countries, Jews had to live in city ghettos. Laws prohibited them from owning land, joining labor guilds, or practicing medicine or law. As a result, many Jews could earn a living only in occupations avoided by Christians, including moneylending and tax collecting.

Segregation also can occur along religious lines, with sacred approval. An example is the complex Hindu system of separation by *castes* (social categories created by ancient religious laws) in India. See Caste. For about 2,000 years, the many castes remained strictly separated in almost all areas of life. In 1948, the Indian government began a campaign against the caste system. Progress has been made, but strong segregation continues to



occur.

In most countries, segregation and discrimination are based on national and racial differences. For example, Koreans living in Japan are typically segregated, discriminated against, and regarded as inferiors by the Japanese. In 1948, the government of South Africa established a policy of rigid racial segregation called *apartheid*. This policy aimed to subordinate black Africans in every walk of life. In 1991, the government repealed the last of the laws that formed the legal basis of apartheid, and in 1994 the country's white leaders handed over power to a new multiracial government. But some de facto racial segregation remains in South Africa. See Apartheid.



Picture  
Signs for white-only beach in  
South Africa

By the end of the 1900's, racial and ethnic segregation had declined in some parts of the world. Several forces led to increased contact across class, cultural, racial, religious, and national lines. These forces included the end of colonialism, the expansion of literacy, the rapid growth of cities, and protest movements by subordinated peoples. Other forces encouraging integration were mass migrations and the growth of transportation systems and of mass communication.

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