
A STUDY ON THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPACT OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

by
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Twenty-three years ago the Supreme Court decreed that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place" (*Brown I*, May 1954). In its implementation decision (*Brown II*, May 1955) the unanimous Court remanded the cases "to the district courts to take such proceedings and enter such orders and decrees . . . as are necessary and proper to admit to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed the parties to these cases."

Desegregation in the Sixties and Seventies

The deliberateness of the ensuing implementation has been noted often, but in the late 1960s and early 1970s considerable desegregation did occur in hundreds of school districts. In reaction to a decade of massive resistance, federal courts declared the constitutional mandate to be the immediate elimination of racial discrimination root and branch. Legislation, especially the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, provided the carrot of federal funds (for general programs and desegregation assistance) as well as the stick of fund-withholding. A willing administration found in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office for Civil Rights and the Department of Justice sufficient clout to undertake a reconstruction of education in the nonmetropolitan South, and to begin action on the big cities of the North and the South.

Beginning in 1969, the new and unwilling Nixon administration slowed down the pace of desegregation, but did not reverse what had already been accomplished; nor could it stop the city-by-city flow of court cases launched by private plaintiffs. Successive district court decisions in the 1970s have kept big-city school desegregation in the forefront of national attention even though executive, legislative, and judicial views of what is required have become more divided than ever before.

Tactics for Resistance

In 1955 the Supreme Court declared that "the vitality of these constitutional principles cannot be allowed to yield simply because of disagreement with them." The Court no doubt meant by "disagreement" the types of outright resistance symbolized by the overt opposition of some

Southern political figures in the late 1950s, the Boston School Committee's intransigence in the early 1970s, and the outright violence in Little Rock, Pontiac, Boston, and other cities. Despite such hostility, court desegregation orders have generally been enforced.

According to some social scientists, a nonlegislative and nonviolent form of dissent has been succeeding in subverting big-city desegregation efforts where other strategies have failed. The objection of white parents to pupil reassignment desegregation programs is thought to have led to the withdrawal of white children from city public schools. The white "flight" to private and suburban schools is yielding a pattern of central city schools that serve minority pupils and are surrounded by suburban schools serving white Anglo pupils. As Thurgood Marshall has noted bitterly, the new pattern is a throwback to the old pattern of racially separate but unequal.

A Research Study at the Institute

While massive public turmoil has focused on busing, there has been little reliable information about the effects of desegregation actions taken by individual school districts on the racial composition of their schools and of schools in surrounding districts. A number of investigators have conducted simplistic analyses of insufficient data and rushed their findings and opinions directly into courts and public forums, without subjecting their research to scholarly peer review. In an effort to obtain a better set of basic data and a more careful analysis, the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) of DHEW designed a series of studies to be carried out under contract. The Institute for Research on Poverty has contracted to conduct "A Study to Determine the Impact of School Desegregation Policy on the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Nation's Schools and Residential Communities."

This research program has three broad objectives:

- To determine trends over time in levels of racial isolation in the nation's elementary and secondary schools, and to determine the extent to which deliberate desegregation actions of various types undertaken at the insistence of each kind of agency are related to changes in these levels.
- To determine the extent to which deliberate desegregation actions of various forms implemented by various agencies affect relationships between the racial composition and distribution of students in public schools, students in private schools, and the

SELECTED PAPERS

Karl Taeuber, "Demographic Perspectives on Housing and School Segregation." *Wayne Law Review* 21 (March 1975): 833-50. Institute for Research on Poverty Reprint no. 162.

Barbara Zoloth, "Alternative Measures of School Segregation." *Land Economics* 52 (August 1976): 278-98. Institute for Research on Poverty Reprint no. 208.

population in the residential areas defined by school boundaries.

- To determine the extent to which patterns of socioeconomic isolation exist in the nation's public schools and the extent to which they are correlated with the patterns of racial isolation, and to determine the relation between trends in socioeconomic isolation and desegregation actions.

Each of the three objectives arises from a specific concern of ASPE with assessing the effects of an assorted set of governmental policies that were designed to alter the racial structure of American education. All the objectives require identification of the magnitude of the various self-defeating or deleterious side effects that can be summarized under the notion of "resegregation." A particular concern linked to the third objective is the potential conflict in methods and aims between (1) desegregation actions that seek to disperse pupils, (2) educational assistance programs aimed at schools with concentrations of disadvantaged children, and (3) programs designed to meet the special needs of non-English-speaking children and others of minority ethnic identification.

The scope of the school desegregation study has been enlarged by a separate research grant to the Institute from the National Institute of Mental Health Center for Studies of Metropolitan Problems. In addition to sharing a concern with the methodological and substantive topics investigated simultaneously under the DHEW contract, the NIMH research program is seeking to specify community characteristics that affect (1) whether the community has taken any action toward desegregating its schools; (2) what agent compelled or spurred action (court order, Office for Civil Rights, state agency, etc.); and (3) the

extent of the desegregation action and the amount and character of change in school racial composition.

Research Strategy and Data Sources

The Institute's study is distinguished from other research on these topics by the breadth of its conceptualization and by the richness of the data to be utilized. The research design begins with recognition of the vast demographic changes occurring in our nation. The metropolitan racial division between central city and suburbs, for example, has been developing for decades—its origins predate any concern with school desegregation, and the underlying trends continue in areas both with and without major desegregation plans. Study of these trends requires specification of white and black in- and out-migration to central cities, suburbs, and nonmetropolitan areas. Remarkably rapid and pervasive shifts have recently occurred in patterns of regional and metropolitan migration, and the recent sharp drop in fertility must also be noted for its effect on elementary school enrollments. The research task, then, is to specify the general processes and then ascertain any particular impact of school desegregation actions.

The data sources utilized by previous investigators have been confined in many instances to school enrollment data. Under separate contracts, ASPE has commissioned preparation of a standardized school enrollment data file that will permit identification of trends for individual schools as well as for total districts, and preparation of a file describing the specific desegregation actions that have been undertaken by each district. The Institute will also utilize special tabulations from various data files of the Bureau of the Census; the National Center for Educational Statistics; and data from selected state educational agencies, local districts, and special sources on annual enrollment trends and socioeconomic composition of public and private schools. Extant attitudinal and opinion surveys will be reanalyzed to provide insight into the behavioral dynamics underlying the migration and enrollment-shift models.

The school desegregation contract is under the joint direction of Professors Karl Taeuber and Franklin D. Wilson; Taeuber is principal investigator under the NIMH grant. Other participating Institute researchers are Katharine Bradbury, Bill Frey, Stanley Masters, Alma Taeuber, and Garth Taylor. Both research programs will continue through the summer of 1978.

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