



Clintonville Desegregation of Columbus Schools

Historical Context and Overview

While middle-class suburban residents enjoyed the new affluence of the 1950s and 1960s, many minority groups in American cities experienced a declining economy, decaying infrastructure, and racial segregation in housing and schools.

In the 1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) intensified its effort to fight against racial segregation in housing, transportation, and education. The NAACP won a major victory in 1954, when the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall argued that segregated schools were inherently unconstitutional because they denied black children “equal protection under the law” as guaranteed by the 14th amendment. The Supreme Court agreed with the NAACP, and unanimously overruled the “separate but equal” doctrine established in the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case.

Despite the ruling in the *Brown* case, many school districts remained largely segregated as a result of residential patterns and the manipulation of attendance boundaries by local school boards. U.S. Circuit Court Judge Robert Duncan ordered the desegregation of Columbus schools in his ruling in *Penick v. Columbus Board of Education*, on March 8, 1977. Duncan ruled that the Columbus Board of Education had deliberately kept white and African-American students separate by creating school boundaries that sent African-American students to predominantly African-American schools and white students to predominantly white schools.

Following Judge Duncan’s ruling, the Columbus Board of Education developed a plan to desegregate the district. Some white students were bused to traditionally African-American schools, and some African-American students were bused to predominantly white schools. As part of this plan, Columbus North High School was closed.

Standards Alignment

Ohio’s New Learning Standards: Social Studies

High School American History

Content Statement 28: Following World War II, the United States experienced a struggle for racial and gender equality and the extension of civil rights.

High School American Government

Content Statement 1: Opportunities for civic engagement with the structures of government are made possible through political and public policy processes.

Content Statement 17: Historically, the United States has struggled with majority rule and the extension of minority rights. As a result of this struggle, the government has increasingly extended civil rights to marginalized groups and broadened opportunities for participation.

Learning Objectives

- Explain how the *Brown v. Board* decision led to court-ordered desegregation in school districts throughout the country.
- Describe the actions taken by the Columbus Board of Education to comply with court-ordered desegregation.
- Analyze the impact of desegregation on schools and communities.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the Columbus Board of Education make the decision to close North High School in 1979?
2. What was the reaction of North students and community members to the decision to close the school? What actions did they take in an effort to keep the school open?
3. What actions did the Columbus Board of Education take in order to comply with court-ordered desegregation?
4. Why did the closing of North High School and desegregation plan cause divided feelings in Clintonville?
5. How is Columbus North International School working to maintain the spirit of the old North High School?

Extension Activities

- Have students interview someone who remembers desegregation in Columbus. This could be someone who attended as a student, worked as a teacher, had children who attended, or was just an interested member of the community.
- Have students write a journal entry or letter to the editor from the perspective of a student who was required to transfer to a new school as a result of the Columbus desegregation plan.
- Have students examine old yearbooks of their school to determine how the racial make-up of the school has changed over the last few decades, especially since the desegregation order.

Additional Resources

- Teaching With Documents: Documents Related to *Brown v. Board of Education*:
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/brown-v-board/>
- Landmark Cases: *Brown v. Board of Education*:
http://www.streetlaw.org/en/landmark/cases/brown_v_board_of_education
- The Desegregation of Columbus Schools: <http://teachingcolumbus.tumblr.com/>
Includes newspaper articles and recorded interviews on desegregation in Columbus Schools
- *Getting Around Brown: Desegregation, Development, and the Columbus Public Schools* by Gregory S. Jacobs:
<https://ohiostatepress.org/index.htm?/books/book%20pages/jacobs%20getting.htm>