



South Side: Civil Rights Era

Historical Context and Overview

In the early 20th century, many African Americans tried to escape Southern racism by moving north. Between 1910 and 1930, African-American migration to Ohio swelled the state's cities. Columbus saw an increase from 12,379 to 32,774 in those years. Another wave of African Americans moved north during World War II for industrial jobs. There were increased economic and political opportunities for African Americans in the North. However, there were also signs of Jim Crow policies and forms of *de facto* segregation.

Most African Americans in Ohio's major cities lived in largely segregated neighborhoods. By 1930, for example, 65 percent of African Americans in Columbus lived in just four of the 19 census districts in the city. Sometimes African Americans were restricted to particular areas of the city by restrictive covenants, informal agreements among white neighborhoods and real estate agents, and pressure from white business associations.

In spite of the Ohio Civil Rights Law of 1884, discrimination persisted in Ohio's theaters, hotels, and restaurants. Some businesses openly disregarded laws, posting "Whites Only" signs. Even by the middle of the twentieth century, the Ohio Civil Rights Commission found wanton disregard of the laws against discrimination. Their report detailed discrimination in dance halls, skating rinks, swimming pools, bowling alleys and cemeteries.

The South Side of Columbus was a racially and ethnically diverse community, where all children attended the same schools. However, there were signs of discrimination as well, including the Whites only policy at the Crystal Swim and Recreation Club.

Following World War II, movements began to secure the same freedoms and opportunities for African Americans and other minority groups that other Americans enjoyed. While the civil rights movement was aimed primarily at overturning Jim Crow's policies in the South, it also raised consciousness about discrimination in the North as well.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's New Learning Standards: Social Studies

Grade 8

Content Statement 16. Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole.

HS American History

Content Statement 13. Following Reconstruction, old political and social structures reemerged and racial discrimination was institutionalized.

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

Learning Objectives

- Describe the racial and ethnic diversity of the South Side of Columbus.
- Describe practices of racial discrimination that were common in northern cities and communities.
- Explain how the Civil Rights Movement raised awareness about discrimination and prejudice.
- Identify ways that people challenged racial discrimination during the Civil Rights Era.

Discussion Questions

1. How integrated were the various racial and ethnic groups on the South Side? Did they appear to get along?
2. What forms of discrimination were practiced on the South Side? Did the Crystal Swim and Recreation Club welcome all South Side residents?
3. What national events helped some white residents of the South Side become aware of the discrimination practiced in their community?
4. How did the Barack Recreation Center challenge racial segregation norms and teach life lessons to young people?
5. How did the Donato's delivery area demonstrate the racial and ethnic diversity of the South Side?

Extension Activities

- Have students examine racial discrimination in the North by researching “sundown towns.” Thousands of communities kept out African Americans (or sometimes Chinese Americans, Jewish Americans, etc.) by force, law, or custom. These communities are sometimes called "sundown towns" because some of them posted signs at their city limits telling African-Americans "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On You In ____." Students can use James Loewen's Sundown Towns website below to map possible Sundown Towns and evaluate the evidence presented for each claim.
- Television and other media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement showed the reality of Jim Crow in homes all across America. Have students create a multimedia presentation using images, audio, and video excerpts from the Civil Rights Era.

Additional Resources

- *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*: <http://origins.osu.edu/review/movement-north>
- Sundown Towns: <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/sundowntowns.php>
- The Civil Rights Movement and Television: <http://www.paleycenter.org/the-civil-rights-movement-and-television>