



# Worthington Civil Rights

## Historical Context and Overview

Worthington was an open and welcoming community from its early origins and settlements. Free African Americans and escaped slaves were among Worthington's early 19<sup>th</sup> century residents. Many Worthington residents were active in the local antislavery society, and some used their homes as stations on the Underground Railroad.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, African Americans organized the St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church in Worthington. Although African Americans were welcomed in other Worthington churches, the AME church served as a cultural and community center for Worthington's African-American residents. The AME was the first African-American denomination incorporated in the United States. The AME Church of Ohio sponsored Wilberforce University, the second independent historically black college. Ohio Governor Salmon P. Chase, nephew of Worthington's Episcopal Bishop Philander Chase, was one of the founders of Wilberforce.

Following World War II, suburban development challenged Worthington's long tradition of openness. As in many cities and suburbs, developers refused to sell to homes to African Americans in Worthington's predominately white neighborhoods. African-Americans were also denied federally-backed mortgage insurance in these neighborhoods.

Initially, some African Americans sought homes outside of the new developments and city limits. Others, however, embraced the spirit of the civil rights movement to keep Worthington an open community where everyone was welcome. The Worthington Human Relations Council, founded by Rev. Harold B. Jones in the 1960s to encourage the recognition of equality of all persons, circulated petitions asking white residents of Worthington to indicate that they were agreeable to African Americans living in the neighborhood.

## 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 suburban development negatively impacted race relations in communities.
- Describe the policies and practices of housing discrimination in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Analyze the impact of civic action in combatting racial discrimination.

## Discussion Questions

1. What role did St. John’s AME (African-Methodist-Episcopal) Church play in the African-American community in Worthington? How were the church and its members received in the broader Worthington community?
2. How and why did policies towards African Americans change in Worthington in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century?
3. How did developers and insurance companies practice housing discrimination against African Americans in Worthington? How was this similar to other national trends in this era?
4. What was the initial reaction of African Americans to housing discrimination in Worthington? How did the civil rights movement inspire a change in their reactions to discrimination?
5. What actions were taken by Worthington residents to fight residential segregation and housing discrimination? What role did the Human Relations Council play in ensuring that Worthington remained an open community?

## Extension Activities

- Have students research the practice of “red-lining” and housing discrimination in the United States in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. What role did the federal government (especially the FHA) play in promoting these practices?
- Have students write a letter to the editor of the Worthington newspaper from the perspective of an African American trying to purchase a home in Worthington in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing on Worthington’s history and heritage, what arguments could be made for why the city should remain an open community?

## Additional Resources

- Worthington Memory: <http://www.worthingtonmemory.org/Search.cfm>.  
Enter the keywords: Human Relations Council for original documents—bylaws, newsletters, newspaper ads
- Federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) Maps (“Redlining” Maps) for Ohio Cities  
<http://library.osu.edu/find/collections/maps/redlining-maps-ohio/>