

A Review of Racial Segregation in Central Florida's Past

By: Haleema Hasan

Can you believe up until just a decade ago schools in Orange County, Florida were still following some former segregation practices? As recent as 2010, Orange County was under federal order to demolish segregation practices. Seminole County, a neighboring county was under these same orders until 2006. Segregation and slavery are a crucial part of American history, its roots tracing back to even before the birth of our nation. But how did segregation start and why is it still present in many southern states such as Florida?

In the 18th and 19th century, laws were made by white people who believed that they could not live peacefully with black people. The most famous example of these laws were the 1865 "Black Codes," or "Jim Crow" laws, after a racial slur against black people. These laws demanded that public places like schools, movie theaters, buses, and even streets, had to be segregated.

Many cities in Florida up until today, such as Orlando and its suburb Oviedo, have streets called Division Street or Avenue, which people think nothing of – however, they have a dark history; Black people used to be restricted to the west side of the Avenue as part of systemic segregation practices in the early 1900s. This extreme restriction on where they could go rightfully enraged many, causing protests to erupt. However, many state politicians and business leaders didn't want Florida's image of being the perfect "vacation spot" and "paradise" to clash with racial strife. Black Americans were already the overwhelming minority in Florida – in 1960 they made up only 18% of the state's population, in comparison to their population being as high as 30% in Alabama. Leaders tried to silence Black Americans through practices like Redlining. In the 1920s and 30s, Redlining was a discriminatory practice that controlled where people of color were allowed to buy property, trying to group them into one area. The effects of this can even be seen today; wealthy suburb areas in Florida such as Winter Park and College Park have mainly white residents, while the Black and minority populations are clustered into larger cities and areas of lower socioeconomic status.

In addition to housing restrictions, educational opportunities were also restricted. Up until 1953, Jones High School was the only high school where Black people from Orlando and its surrounding suburbs were allowed to get an education due to White people protesting the mixing of schools in other predominantly white cities.

"We didn't go across the tracks, basically we just survived. There was specific part of the Orlando area you lived in if you were Black," Ernest "Pete" Boyd, a former Jones High School graduate from that time period explained. The now elderly man went on to explain that at the time, "if you [lived] in Orlando and you Black, they'll tell you in a minute, Jones High, that's the only school [for you]."

In 1954, things began to change – the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation of schools was unconstitutional. Up until then, the Board of Education was trying to uphold the motto "separate but equal" education. However, the schools designated for Black Americans were severely underfunded and went only until 10th grade.

In Florida, it took years to see the results of this Supreme Court decision - nearly 10 years to integrate just one school. Boyd went on to explain, "the way they integrated the schools in Orlando, they integrated the teachers first. All of the black teachers were put in a fishbowl, black teachers and our

names were pulled on Saturday evening". But Boyd went on to say that he and the other Black students weren't interested in moving to white high schools because Jones High was all that they knew – they "had good teachers [who] were very concerned about us and they made sure you worked hard to finish high school". Yet graduating from Jones High would severely limit African Americans college choices to Florida A&M or Bethune Cookman University. For decades, these two historically Black universities have been a refuge for Black students seeking equal chance at education and a brighter future.

In conclusion, African Americans have had a long history of segregation and exclusion from equal housing and educational opportunities. Even when segregation was outlawed, it took years for these practices to end, and the effects of these practices are still visible today. By acknowledging this fact now, in the future we can strive for equal education and better quality of life for all.

Works Cited

- "A Look Back At Segregation In The United States". *HISTORY*, 2021, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/segregation-united-states>.
- Jones, Daralene. "Florida Was Slow To Comply After Segregation In Public Schools Deemed Unconstitutional". *WFTV*, 2021, <https://www.wftv.com/news/black-history-month/black-history-month-florida-was-slow-comply-after-segregation-public-schools-deemed-unconstitutional/2HCYSCRGV5EQ3BGYE2UJXOB4UE/>.
- Gargotta, Julie. "Division Avenue: What's In A Name?". *Mynews13.Com*, 2021, <https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/street-level/2020/11/17/division-avenue--what-s-in-a-name->.
- Wolf, Colin. "New Map Reminds Us That Orlando Remains Incredibly Segregated". *Orlando Weekly*, 2021, <https://www.orlandoweekly.com/Blogs/archives/2018/05/18/new-map-reminds-us-that-orlando-remains-incredibly-segregated>.
- Porter, David. 2021, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2003-08-10-0308090014-story.html>.
- Bailey, Jazmin. "Systemic Racism Exists In Central Florida And Across The United States". *Wesh*, 2021, <https://www.wesh.com/article/systemic-racism-exists-central-florida/33405454#>.
- Mosier, Tana. "Orlando'S Division Street: The History Behind What Became A Symbol Of Segregation". *Orange County Regional History Center*, 2021, <https://www.thehistorycenter.org/division-street/>.