

Racial Segregation

Legal Segregation

Segregation was a common practice in the United States from the end of the Civil War to the mid 1960s. In some cases, “coloreds” were not permitted to drink from the same water fountain, use the same restroom, or even attend the same schools as whites. When the first Civil Rights Act was passed in 1866, it did not protect blacks from segregation laws and the Jim Crow Laws of the South. Blacks and whites would never be seen living in the same neighborhood. Middle- to upper-class whites lived on one side of town that did not permit blacks to set foot in that area of town. The area of town set aside for the blacks were usually the rundown, crime-infested area of town.

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White Flight

Following the end of World War II, the United States was going through an increase in the birthrate, known as the “Baby Boom” and an economic boom. A variety of factors during this period allowed for the explosive growth of suburbs and demographic change in cities, including the creation of high-speed highways and suburban parkways, which greatly reduced the travel time between suburbs and downtowns and bypassed some city neighborhoods. With the increase of income and creation of suburban areas, white Americans, who generally enjoyed higher incomes than blacks and other minorities, were leaving the city life for the suburbs, a less-congested quieter area. Blacks and other minorities became more concentrated in the major metropolitan areas, and over time these metropolitan areas experienced a physical and economic decline, leading to poverty and violence.

Similarities

Legal segregation and white flight were two forms of racial oppression that were common occurrences during the past century. White flight was not as blatant, or as intentional or visible as legal segregation, but still served the same purpose. White Americans wanted to separate themselves from the “colored” population. With legal segregation, laws had been able to force the separation between races through fear of persecution, mental, or bodily harm. Even though, segregation had been outlawed, white flight was a way for whites with the economic means to separate from the minorities, by leaving the urban areas and starting the suburbs. Though whites could not legally keep blacks and other minorities from moving to their areas, higher real estate prices in the suburbs and other subtle signs of non-acceptance did prevent many minorities from moving out of the inner cities. This reinforced an unofficial form of segregation that was almost as powerful as the legal segregation in force in the South until the 1960s.

