

Suburbanizing Jim Crow: The Impact of School Policy on Residential Segregation in Raleigh

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Abstract

During the 1920s, elites in southern cities capitalized on rapid population growth to heighten residential segregation through vast school building programs. In Raleigh, North Carolina, the board of education ignored popular protests when it relocated the district's premier schools to new racially restricted suburbs on the city's northwest side, knowing development would follow. Simultaneously, the board refused to build even a single school for the black middle-class suburbs located outside the heavily segregated southeastern section of town, despite numerous requests. The legacy of these school board actions shifted the city center northwest of Capitol Square and left black communities on the southeast side economically and politically isolated from the rest of the city. When Raleigh faced court-ordered busing in 1971, black and white students lived on opposite sides of downtown. As a result, meaningful integration had become an impossible task without extensive busing, as was true in metropolitan areas across the nation.

Keywords

1920s, African Americans, education, Jim Crow, race, Raleigh, North Carolina, segregation, school policy, southern progressivism, suburbanization, urban development

In 1933, Jonathan Daniels became the editor of his family's influential newspaper, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, while his father served as ambassador to Mexico during Franklin Roosevelt's administration. Jonathan was the son of Josephus Daniels, Raleigh's "first citizen," who also served as secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson and as the editorial mouthpiece of the state's white supremacy campaign, which effectively disfranchised the vast majority of black North Carolinians for more than half of the twentieth century.¹ Unlike his famous father, Jonathan embraced a more liberal view of race relations, one he credited to his interracial experiences as a boy living across the street from Shaw University, one of the city's two black colleges. While many southern white children still had black playmates during the earliest decades of the twentieth century, Daniels grew up among the faculty and students at Shaw, absorbing a more complex view of black America than most whites.²

As editor, Jonathan softened the racist rhetoric of the *News and Observer*, but the type of interracial childhood experiences that shaped him had grown increasingly rare in the urban South

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in the decade before he took the helm. In 1920, after returning home from Washington, Josephus Daniels moved his family out of downtown Raleigh and into Hayes Barton, an elite suburb in northwest Raleigh, where they were “protected” by restrictive covenants that forbade purchase by potential black homeowners. Josephus Daniels’s grandfather had built the family’s ancestral home near the old governor’s mansion just south of the city’s center, in what was once a fashionable part of town. In the early twentieth century “Negroes and questionable white people came more and more to live in the neighborhood,” according to Jonathan.³ The main idea behind restrictive covenants, which became popular in many white neighborhoods in both cities and suburbs across the nation during the early twentieth century, was to prevent the same pattern of economic and racial transition from occurring again.⁴ Residents could feel secure that their new community would remain unchanged for generations, especially since local courts willingly enforced racial covenants under the doctrine of private property rights. It was not until 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, that the Supreme Court finally banned government enforcement of racial restrictions. As a result, a system of government-sanctioned residential segregation had developed in most American cities, making Jonathan’s interracial boyhood experiences rare not only in Raleigh but in all of metropolitan America.⁵

During the first half of the twentieth century, school boards across the country made suburbs that had developed under racially protected covenants even more attractive by giving them newer and better schools than those in older, more integrated urban areas. In addition to favoring newer developments, school boards in the urban North gerrymandered districts so that black children in the emerging ghettos would not attend school with white children. At the turn of the twentieth century, northern cities still had very small black populations. During World War I, black southerners increasingly sought economic and educational opportunity by migrating to the industrial centers of the North and West. They were met by real estate boards, banks, and neighborhood improvement associations, which channeled them into concentrated areas of all-black neighborhoods. School boards then gerrymandered attendance zones to ensure that children living in all-black neighborhoods would attend segregated schools as well.⁶

During the early twentieth century, the South’s urban landscape still looked quite different. Southern cities had much larger black communities, and residential spaces were much more integrated. These conditions stymied southern efforts at residential segregation. According to historian Arnold Hirsch, “The private sector in the North . . . accomplished what the southern public sector, facing long-established, substantial black communities, could not.”⁷ Some city councils passed ordinances mandating residential segregation, but in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), the Supreme Court declared these ordinances unconstitutional. After this decision, restrictive covenants became the principal means for promoting segregated housing. To be successful, however, this approach relied on the willingness of long-standing white residents to move from their established communities to new suburbs. School boards facilitated this process by placing the newest and best schools—especially high schools—in newly developing suburbs with racially restricted covenants rather than in central locations as in the past. At the same time, they built black high schools in older neighborhoods, rather than near the new suburban developments popular with the black middle class.⁸ The result was to encourage white residents to move to racially restricted areas near the “best” white high schools and to cement black residents in the poorest, most segregated neighborhoods near the only black high school available. The location of these new schools continued to shape city development for decades to come.

In Raleigh, school policies helped shift the city’s residential development from a relatively integrated urban core to a sprawling metropolis of highly segregated suburbs. During the 1920s, school board members sought to relocate the city’s “central” high school in the newly developing and most affluent suburbs on the city’s restricted northwest side, hoping that white population growth and residential development would follow. At the same time, they refused to build even a small black elementary school for black suburbanites in the northeast, hoping to concentrate

black residents on the city's southeast side. Their plan worked, and the consequences were dire for Raleigh's urban core. During the earliest decades of the twentieth century, a more residentially integrated city had led to a thriving black business district just blocks from the state capitol; after World War I, increased housing segregation led to an isolated and impoverished ghetto, as black neighborhoods suffered from decreased political representation, fewer services, and diminished economic opportunity. By the time that Raleigh faced court-ordered desegregation in 1971, black and white students lived on opposite sides of downtown, and meaningful integration had become an almost impossible task without extensive busing, as was true in metropolitan areas across the nation. The boundaries between the races had become geographic rather than social, and that legacy of physical separation remains a fixture of urban and suburban America. Actions in Raleigh, as elsewhere, clearly demonstrate that school policy and housing markets shaped each other so extensively that a line cannot be drawn between them.⁹

Early Suburbanization in Raleigh

At the turn of the twentieth century, black and white residents still lived in close proximity to one another in Raleigh and other cities across the South. After World War I, suburban development rapidly increased residential segregation. As a result, when the city faced school desegregation a half century later, Raleigh's racial and economic map had changed dramatically from the time when young Jonathan Daniels played on Shaw University's campus.¹⁰ According to city developers, Raleigh's growth merely reflected topography: to the northwest of the city were the higher elevations of the Piedmont, and to the southeast were the flood-prone lowlands of the Coastal Plains. Naturally, the most desirable land attracted the most desirable suburbs. In addition, growth was blocked to the southwest because the state owned large tracts of land, including property for the state mental hospital, penitentiary, school for the blind, and university. Yet topography alone does not tell the whole story. Raleigh's growth pattern was not inevitable, and the location of new schools facilitated the shift of the city's white population to the north and west. Moreover, policies that located black schools only in the city's southeast served as an impediment to black suburban expansion to the north.

Before the interwar period, black and white communities remained intertwined throughout the city, as evidenced by the way that black and white schools were interspersed across the school district. The best addresses were still to the south and east of the capitol. Josephus Daniels's ancestral home was in a prestigious antebellum neighborhood south of town, where the old governor's mansion was built in 1816. Fifty years later, in 1876, Raleigh's first public school, named Centennial School in honor of the nation's hundredth birthday, took over the mansion. Centennial's white students attended school right next door to Shaw University, which had opened its doors at that location four years earlier.¹¹ Apparently, the school board did not feel it was inappropriate for white and black schools to sit virtually side by side, offering white and black children many opportunities to interact with each other. In fact, Jonathan Daniels said he spent so much time playing on Shaw's campus that he considered himself "practically an alumnus of its juvenile department."¹²

If the south side represented prestige during the antebellum period, the northeast became fashionable during the late nineteenth century. In the decades following the Civil War, Raleigh's prosperous politicians and businessmen built grand Victorian homes in the Oakwood neighborhood on Raleigh's northeast side. Soon, construction began on a new governor's mansion, reflecting the neighborhood's rising status. The city's second white public school, Murphey School, opened in 1887 as a sign of further development. Although Raleigh's new elite was shifting the city's growth to the northeast, racial segregation was apparently not yet an issue.¹³ Raleigh's second black college, St. Augustine's, had opened in 1867, just two years after Shaw's founding, at a location only five blocks east of Oakwood. The whites-only Oakwood Cemetery

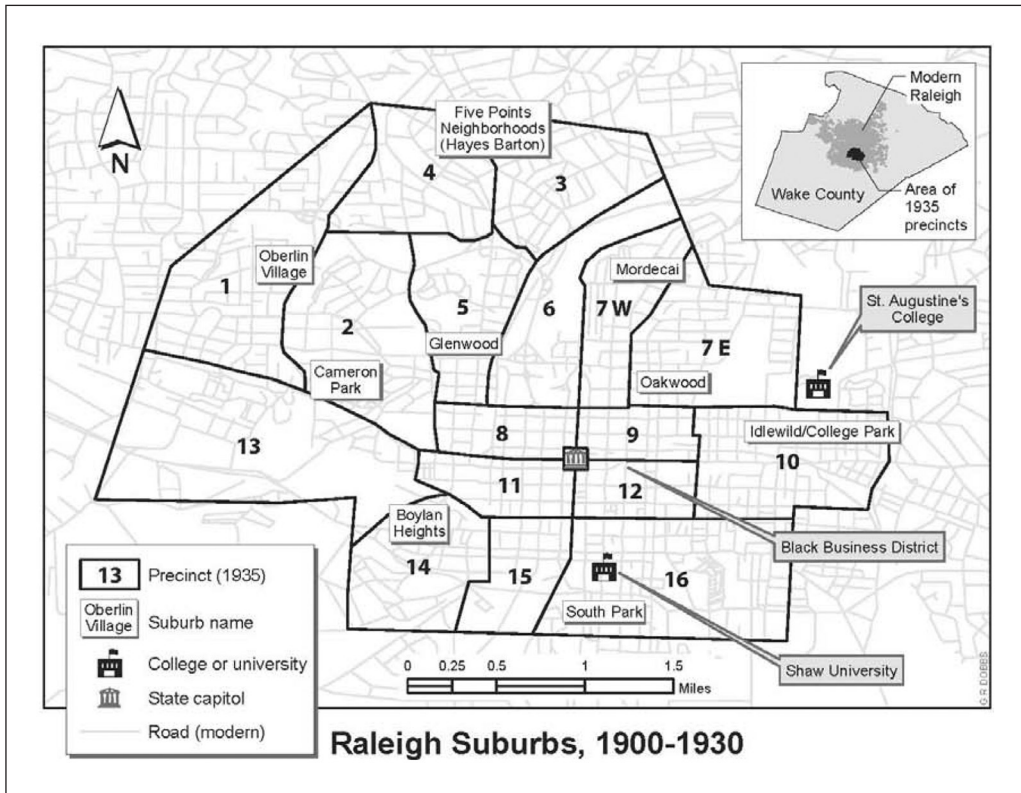


Figure 1. Raleigh suburbs built between 1900 and 1930

Map by Rebecca Dobbs. Base map courtesy of North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill.

filled the shrinking divide between the neighborhood's graceful homes and St. Augustine's growing institution. In 1896, the college expanded by opening St. Agnes Hospital and School of Nursing, the sole institution providing medical care to Raleigh's black citizens during the Jim Crow era.

As with the neighborhoods around Shaw, the community surrounding St. Augustine's quickly attracted Raleigh's growing black middle class, including the black professionals who worked at the school and hospital. Black middle-class residents wanted to move where they could purchase a home, not rent an overpriced flat. While many of Raleigh's black residents labored as domestics in the city's many affluent white households, Raleigh's black middle class flourished during the early twentieth century, as was true in cities across the nation. The black business district was on East Hargett Street, just a block or two from the capitol. In the late nineteenth century, black-owned businesses dotted the downtown area and catered to both black and white customers. As segregation became more entrenched in the 1920s, Hargett Street evolved into the prime location for black commercialism. At its peak, the street had over fifty black-owned businesses including the Royal Theater and Mechanics & Farmers Bank. Nevertheless, the colleges remained the pride of the community.¹⁴ Beginning around 1910, many of Raleigh's black professionals moved into the suburbs surrounding the city's two black colleges: Idlewild and College Park just south of St. Augustine's and South Park just south of Shaw (Figure 1).¹⁵

The same pressures that created Idlewild, College Park, and South Park also led to the first developments on Raleigh's west side. As the population grew, housing shortages pushed

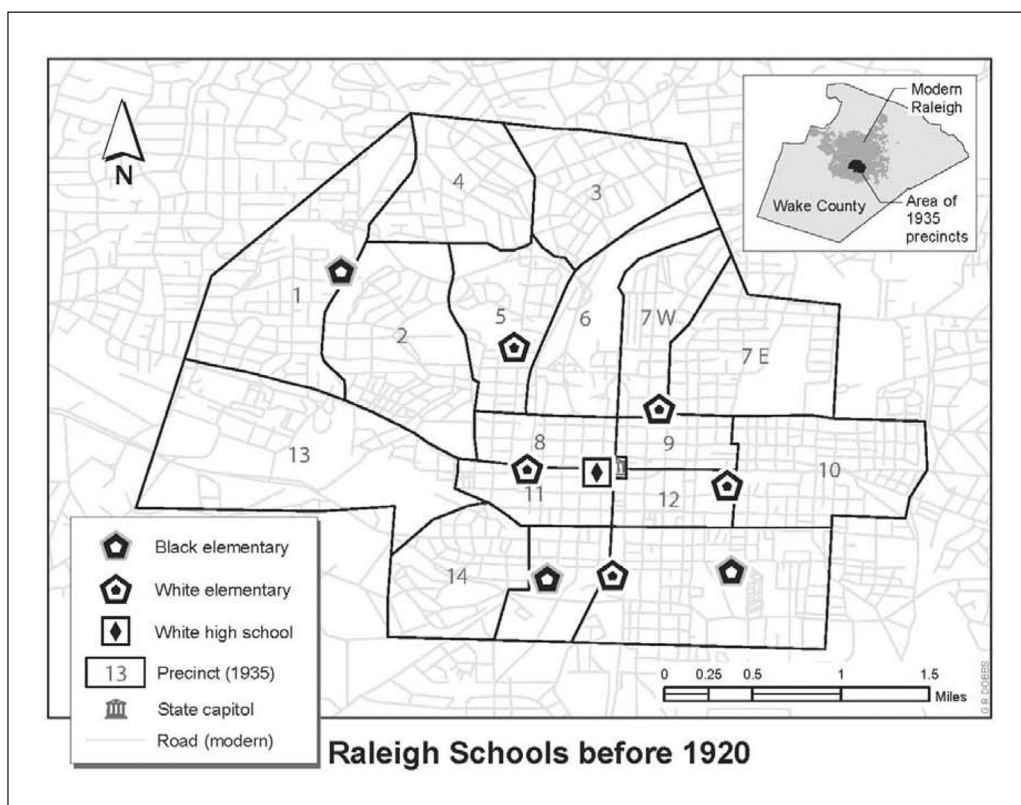


Figure 2. Raleigh annexations, 1920 and 1929

Map by Rebecca Dobbs. Base map courtesy of North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill.

newcomers into the suburbs, which offered better housing than the overcrowded neighborhoods of the central city.¹⁶ Raleigh's earliest planned suburbs were developed on large tracts of land purchased from the vast plantations that had bordered the city for centuries. Local developers platted Glenwood to the northwest of the capitol in 1906, Boylan Heights to the southwest in 1907, and Cameron Park to the west in 1910. Restrictive covenants forbade black property ownership in all three developments, although a few black residents remained in Glenwood at least during the earliest decades of the twentieth century. Most of Glenwood's residents were white working-class mechanics or railroad men, except for the doctors and lawyers residing in the posh homes up and down Glenwood Avenue, one of the city's key streetcar lines.¹⁷ Cameron Park, the most exclusive of the three developments, was located along the Hillsborough streetcar line, which ran westward out to the state university (Figure 1).

To accommodate this expansion, in 1907 Raleigh's town council increased the city limits for the first time since before the Civil War. The annexation extended Raleigh's border one mile in all four directions, bringing Glenwood and Boylan Heights into the city limits shortly after platting was completed. The move brought much needed tax revenue into the city coffers, but it also allowed for the extension of city services such as water, sewage, and electricity, which helped sell lots for home development. Only Cameron Park, which was not platted until 1910, remained partly outside the city limits (Figure 2).¹⁸

After World War I, local developers began planning elite suburbs that stretched far outward from the northwest section of the city. The best suburbs were the "Five Points" neighborhoods,

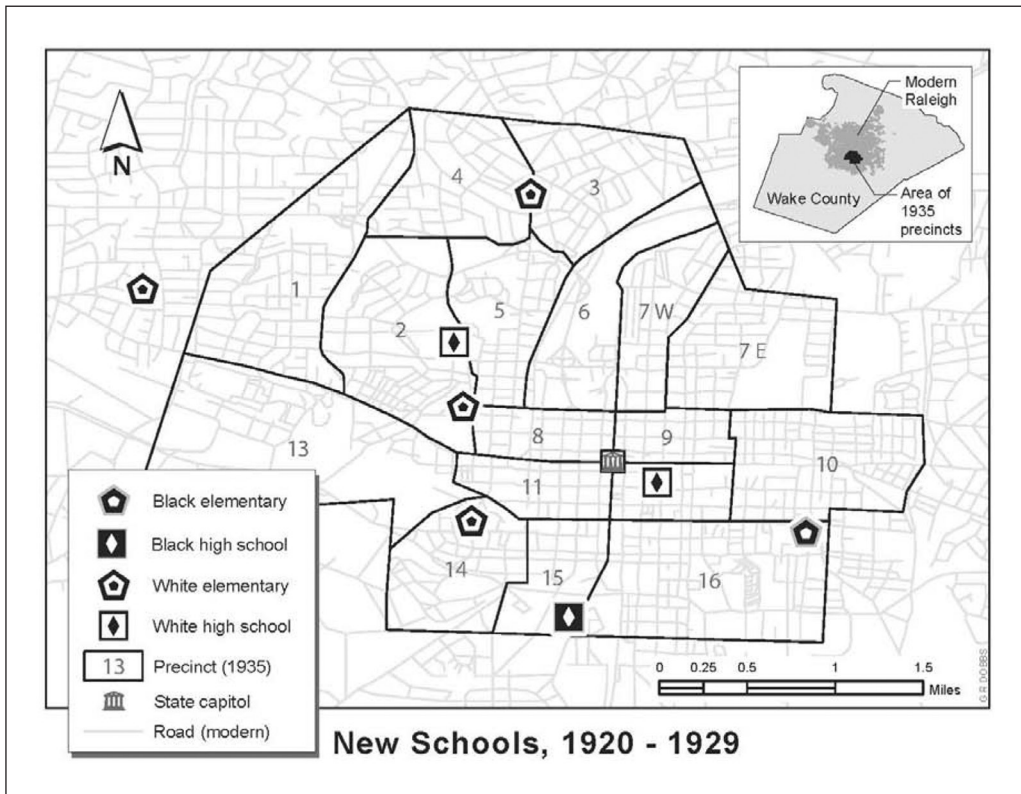


Figure 3. Raleigh Public Schools before 1920

Map by Rebecca Dobbs. Base map courtesy of North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill.

which local developers platted in 1920. That year, Josephus Daniels built his \$100,000, three-acre estate in Hayes Barton, the most prestigious of the Five Points developments. Although Daniels's home was one of the earliest estates built in the northwest suburbs, in 1920 the town council extended the city limits again, this time almost doubling Raleigh's size. Prior to 1920, annexation policies maintained the city's original square shape by increasing the size of the city equally in all four directions. This time, annexation extended the city limits only to the north and west, shifting the city center from Capitol Square for the first time. The city's annexation policies did not extend to black suburbanization, though. The town council would not annex the black subdivisions of Idlewild and College Park until 1929, even though most of the homes were built well before World War I (Figure 2).¹⁹

Annexation in southern cities also allowed schools to follow—or in some cases precede—white suburban growth and infill development. For the most part, suburban developers accurately predicted the increased demand for better housing, but the South's underfunded school districts struggled to keep up with urban growth. In 1900, Raleigh had fewer than 14,000 residents. By 1920, the population had risen to over 24,000, one-third of whom were black.²⁰ To accommodate growing enrollments, the school district slowly added new schools to the few that existed in the late nineteenth century. But despite the extensive annexation of property to the north and west, the location of black and white schools in 1920 revealed that most residents still viewed Capitol Square as the town center (Figure 3).

Raleigh's oldest black schools stood in areas with relatively integrated populations, with black communities intermingled among white communities, along an arc stretching from far

west Raleigh southward to northeast Raleigh. The city's first two black public schools were located *west* of Centennial School, the district's first white school. The Oberlin School in western Raleigh served a thriving former freedman's community, in which residents owned their own homes and supported their own businesses. The Washington School was located in southwest Raleigh, just a few blocks west of Centennial School and Josephus Daniels's old home site. In addition to these two westside schools, the district operated two black schools on the eastside, Crosby School and Garfield School. The school board relocated the two eastside schools to the same site in 1910 before consolidating them as the Crosby–Garfield School in 1920 (Figure 3).²¹

Like its black schools, the district's white schools surrounded Capitol Square. In 1900, Wiley School opened as the first white public school west of the capitol. A few years later, the district opened a school in northwest Raleigh that evolved into the Lewis School on Glenwood Avenue. The original high school operated out of the Centennial School for two years before the completion of a new brick building just off Capitol Square. In 1907, Raleigh gained a second white school on the east side of town, south of Oakwood's Murphey School. This school, named Thompson School, was located in the heart of the black business district, just down the street from the original Garfield School (Figure 3).²² For almost twenty years, black students from Idlewild and College Park were forced to walk by Thompson School on their way to the nearest black school, Crosby–Garfield.²³

Thus in 1920, when the city annexed the Five Points suburbs, the layout of the Raleigh schools still reflected a town that viewed Capitol Square as its center. Although residential segregation had increased during the early decades of the twentieth century, black neighborhoods and black schools were not geographically isolated from either white neighborhoods or white schools. Raleigh's three black schools were Crosby–Garfield in the southeast, Washington in the southwest, and Oberlin in the west. All of them served the elementary grades, since Raleigh had no black public high school. Raleigh's five white schools were Murphey in the northeast, Thompson in the east, Centennial in the south, Wiley in the west, Lewis in the northwest, and Raleigh High School in the center, just off Capitol Square. By the end of the 1920s, however, Raleigh's geographic distribution of schools would more clearly predict the racial residential segregation that marked the post-1945 period. Black schools were increasingly isolated in the southeastern section of the city, and the district's white schools helped lead the way to the suburbs in the northwest.

The 1920s: Increasing the Racial Divide

The 1920s was a pivotal decade for the South. For centuries, the region's economy had remained dependent on mono-crop agriculture, and powerful elites undermined public education in an effort to suppress labor costs.²⁴ During World War I, southern farmers enjoyed the cotton economy's final hurrah before a lasting depression descended in the 1920s. The postwar collapse of cotton fueled unprecedented urbanization throughout the region; during the decade, cities grew at a faster rate in the South than in the nation as a whole.²⁵ While the South claimed only seven of the nation's fifty largest cities during the first world war, the number had doubled by the second, when the percentage of southerners living in urban areas finally reached that of the United States as a whole in 1890.²⁶ Ultimately, the process of southern urbanization would bring the South into the national economy and end a long period of southern distinctiveness.

Urban school reform developed within the context of the interwar crisis in cotton as rapid urbanization triggered unprecedented school building programs in cities across the South. Engaged in an impassioned regional rivalry for economic expansion and population growth, most urban elites found an "unprogressive" school system in an upwardly mobile city to be an embarrassing impediment to future growth. James R. Young, a prominent businessman in Raleigh, wrote a letter to the *Raleigh Times* warning his fellow citizens: "The school buildings as

they are now are a reflection upon the city and her people. . . . The progress of the city is at stake, for I verily believe that people who come to look around and locate here would seriously consider some other place if they were to examine all of our school buildings."²⁷ During the 1920s, local elites backed a \$2.3 million school building program to modernize the schools and keep up with population growth.²⁸

At the start of the decade, Raleigh's future residential pattern, with white neighborhoods in the north and west and black neighborhoods in the southeast, had not yet developed, as demonstrated by the location of its schools. By the decade's end, the physical layout of the school district marked a change in the city's racial geography. The school building program helped to make this rapid shift possible. In addition to Wiley School's new location on a site farther north and west than its original location downtown, the district constructed nine new schools. Two small elementary schools, each with an enrollment of about one hundred students, served the area's two mill communities, which remained segregated from the rest of the general population.²⁹ The building program also included four other new elementary schools, one of which was black, and three new high schools, including a black high school to mollify the growing agitation for the district to provide public education for black secondary students (Figure 3).³⁰

For the most part, Raleigh's residential development drove school-site location during the next few decades, as it did in most American cities. And yet a school building program of this magnitude also acted as a catalyst for white suburbanization and a drag on black suburbanization. Urban developers had enough clout to get their property annexed to the city, extend utilities and streetcar lines into the area, and successfully petition for new schools out of the multimillion-dollar bond issue. In 1926, the Raleigh school district opened the elite Hayes Barton School before most of the lots in Hayes Barton had been sold. Thus, residents moving to the racially restricted northwest suburbs received new schools that were conveniently located in or near their neighborhoods. At the same time, residents in the older parts of Raleigh found their needs increasingly overlooked by school board members and their allies in the Chamber of Commerce.

During the 1920s, Raleigh's Chamber of Commerce played a role in school site selection that was almost as large as the school board's. In an effort to maintain control over the building program, the chamber chose three members to attend all board meetings and "pass on every part of the program."³¹ Not all residents agreed with their decisions, though, and grievances poured into the school board. Yet despite protests from both black and white patrons, the building program largely preceded as planned, moving white schools into the affluent suburbs of the north and west and concentrating black schools in some of the poorest areas of Raleigh. Perhaps most damaging, local elites chose to locate the city's premier high school in an area of emerging suburbs that excluded black homeownership through restrictive covenants. As a result, they greatly increased the spatial distance between black and white residents and made future school integration exponentially harder.

In most southern cities, local elites played a dominant role in shaping almost all aspects of urban development because they had historically maintained a disproportionate influence over local reform efforts.³² In Raleigh, the town council had recently adopted a commission-style government that further increased the economic and political power of elites, many of whom lived in the annexed northwest suburbs. As in the many cities across the nation that embraced this common Progressive Era reform, Raleigh's local officials were elected at large rather than as representatives of individual wards, sharply limiting the influence of the white working class and African Americans. Moreover, because the city commissioners appointed school board members, the board maintained an elite status far above that of many cities, North or South, where members had to stand for election.³³

Local heavyweights such as Josephus Daniels were related to or close associates of school board members, who shared their social status and served with them on the governing board of

the Chamber of Commerce. One of the most prominent members was J. M. Broughton, the future governor of North Carolina. In 1926, Wake County voters sent him to the state senate, though he continued to serve on the local school board. Powerful attorney Josiah W. Bailey, an ally in the disfranchisement campaign at the turn of the century and elected to the U.S. Senate in 1930, also had close ties to the board. His nephew, William Bailey Jones, joined the board in 1923, and his brother-in-law, James H. Pou, Jr., became a member in 1932.³⁴ James H. Pou, Sr., Josiah Bailey's father-in-law and law partner, was the principal developer of Glenwood, Bloomsbury, and Georgetown on Raleigh's northwest side.³⁵ In addition, Jonathan Daniels's wife sat on the board during the 1930s, when Jonathan temporarily served as editor of the *News and Observer*. Mrs. John Park, whose husband owned and edited the *Raleigh Times*—a daily newspaper with close ties to Raleigh's local business interests—served in the early 1920s during the city's protracted dispute over the location of the new white high school.³⁶

Perhaps the most famous board member during the decade was Clarence Poe, publisher of the influential newspaper *The Progressive Farmer*, whose circulation peaked at over one million before the periodical evolved into *Southern Living* magazine. Poe's wife was Alice Aycock, the daughter of the state's legendary governor, Charles B. Aycock, who played a leading role in the state's white supremacy campaign at the turn of the century. In his newspaper, Poe advocated an unsuccessful scheme to segregate the South's countryside so that white farmers could create a "great rural civilization" without the hindrance of the "inferior race." In the long run, Poe's fondness for increased segregation had a much greater impact on Raleigh than on agricultural communities in the rural hinterlands.³⁷ In fact, a key reason why white suburbanization did not develop in eastern Raleigh during the 1920s was because Poe was buying up large tracts of land as they became available. In 1925, Poe built a grand house on his 800-acre estate, located a few miles east of Capitol Square.³⁸

The 1920s school building program afforded Raleigh elites plenty of opportunity to increase residential segregation, but local citizens also attempted to influence the outcome and achieve a different result. When the district announced its plans for the initial \$1 million bond election in 1922, representatives from the College Park and Idlewild communities renewed their efforts to obtain a black public school near St. Augustine's College.³⁹ Black citizens had been petitioning for a school in the area since the early stages of the suburbs' development in 1910, and Raleigh's school superintendent had assured them that, this time, they would receive a school.⁴⁰ Yet after the bond election achieved overwhelming success, the school board announced its plan to build a black high school in the far southern part of town in what was becoming the most heavily segregated section of the city for black residents. It had no plans to build a black school in the northeast. Clarence Poe provided the board's official response to the outrage expressed by black residents in Idlewild and College Park: "We give the most generous support possible to the building program plans for the negro schools," but it is "out of the question" to build a second black school out of the limited resources from the bond issue.⁴¹ The following spring, black parents from Idlewild once again petitioned the board for a school. On Poe's motion, the board instructed the superintendent "to inform these people" that no funds were available.⁴²

While middle-class African Americans supported the board's proposed plan for a black public high school, they were disappointed with the selected school site. Rather than find a central location accessible to black residential developments in the northeast as well as the southwest, the school board decided to expand the old Washington School, turning it into a combined elementary and high school. The board chose a new site for the school on Fayetteville, one of the city's main arteries in and out of downtown, just a block from Raleigh's southern city limits. In the days before publicly funded school bus transportation, the location showed blatant disregard for the middle-class residents near Saint Augustine's, who believed their children would compose the greatest number of students in the new school. During the 1920s, high schools were still

largely middle-class institutions; completing high school had not yet become the norm for black or white students. Despite further complaints about the site's unsuitable location, the board moved forward with its original plans.⁴³ Even after Washington High School opened its doors in 1924, black citizens continued to protest the location of the school. In 1948, a black citizens' committee provided the board with statistics claiming that only 110 out of 650 black high school students lived within a convenient distance of the school.⁴⁴ Black students finally received a more suitable high school in 1953, not coincidentally during the Supreme Court's deliberations over the constitutionality of separate schooling.

Black residents were not the only ones who questioned the rationale of the board in choosing school sites; the location of the new white high school created even greater controversy. When originally seeking a site for the new school, the board asked the Chamber of Commerce for help. The chamber's recommendation was a site close to the affluent suburbs being platted on Raleigh's north and west side.⁴⁵ John Park, editor of the *Raleigh Times*, was a member of the Chamber of Commerce committee that made the recommendation, and his wife was on the school board.⁴⁶ In a front-page article, the *Times* praised the site and claimed that the "development of additional sections of Hayes Barton will bring this section of the city into prominence and enhance the value of the property." The Parks lived on Glenwood Avenue, not far from the proposed site. Further development of the area would "enhance the value" of their property as well.

Although many elites hoped to encourage Raleigh's future development by relocating the city's sole white high school in the northwest corner of the city, many parents expressed serious opposition to the plan.⁴⁷ As the news spread that the board was considering a site along St. Mary's Street in northwestern Raleigh, some parents complained about "its inaccessibility and the necessary expense of street car travel." Almost immediately, requests poured in for a more centrally located high school and accusations intensified that the board had attempted to "put something over" on residents from the eastern, southern, and central parts of town.⁴⁸ "Several hundred citizens" signed a petition urging the selection of an alternate site on Benehan Square, located on East Hargett Street just a few blocks from the capitol and adjacent to the black business district. According to the petition, Benehan Square

meets the need for a high school centrally located with respect to the overwhelming large majority of the residents of the city. . . . Even if the city should ultimately grow largely in the western and northwestern portions, there would still be at least twenty-five thousand people or more who would need a high school located near the center of the present built up portion of the city. Moreover, all the development which is occurring and will occur in the northern and northeastern and southern sections of the city will greatly increase the need for such a central high school.⁴⁹

For these residents, a single white high school located on the northwestern site would be as inconvenient as Washington High School was to the black residents of Idlewild and College Park. Perhaps more important, the petitioners did not agree that growth toward the northwestern portions of the city was inevitable.

As a member of the school board, Clarence Poe also recommended a more centrally located site near the old Oakwood neighborhood, which was also closer to his estate in east Raleigh. According to Poe, "a radius of one mile would take in practically all the more thickly settled white areas, while 1.5 miles, according to a map issued by the Chamber of Commerce, would include the remaining well-settled sections of Boylan-Heights, Hayes Barton, Cameron Park, and the new developments eastward."⁵⁰ Poe's recommendation adds an interesting dynamic to Raleigh's suburban development because, after World War II, he would begin developing the land he had purchased to the east of Raleigh into an exclusive suburb named Longview Gardens.

His direct participation in the building program demonstrates at least two important points. First, not all elites wished to shift the city center to the north and west. Second, no “natural” barriers prevented suburbanization on the east side of Raleigh. Poe’s real estate investments did not mean that he lacked an interest in increasing segregation in the city, though. Because he hoped to increase white development on the east side, he did not want black suburban development to push farther to the east or northeast.⁵¹

The controversy over the location of the new high school dominated the 1923 municipal elections and survived a change in personnel on both the school board and the city commission before a compromise was finally reached.⁵² After a bitter year, the board members and city commissioners, who were more accountable to voters, agreed to build two white high schools: Morson High School on Benehan Square and Needham Broughton High School on the northwestern site along St. Mary’s Street.⁵³ The proponents of two high schools believed that the city’s rapidly growing population would soon justify the expense. The *Times*, however, remained unconvinced. Owner John Park called the solution of two high schools ludicrous. “We shall enter no protest” if the board “is satisfied that the high school should go on Benehan Square,” the editorial page argued, “but how it made up its mind to buy two sites for high schools, out of a bond issue which everybody knows attempted to provide for only one is something we won’t pretend to understand.”⁵⁴

Three years later, when it became clear that the first bond issue was insufficient to keep pace with the district’s needs, the school board invited representatives from Raleigh’s key civic organizations to discuss the possibility of a second bond issue. In response, the chamber’s Board of Directors appointed J. W. Bailey and Josephus Daniels to a special school committee to investigate the plan.⁵⁵ Ultimately, the chamber endorsed a second bond election for the full amount requested by the school board. As a final show of support, the city commissioners placed J. M. Broughton, the chair of the first bond campaign and a soon-to-be resident of the elite suburb Hayes Barton, on the school board in 1926.⁵⁶

Because the proponents of the bonds knew they needed black votes to carry the fifteenth and sixteenth precincts in southeastern Raleigh, they encouraged black residents to vote in the school election.⁵⁷ After the school board promised to build a new black elementary school, hopeful black residents organized for the election.⁵⁸ According to the *News and Observer*, one thousand black citizens registered to vote, representing about 22 percent of all registered voters. At the time, about one-third of Raleigh’s population was black. The numbers were still disproportionate, but they represented a remarkable showing, considering the multilayered disadvantages of second-class citizenship. According to the *Times*, African Americans showed “a keen interest in the success of the bond issue.”⁵⁹ Many black citizens believed that they would finally get an elementary school in the northeastern section of the city.⁶⁰

Soon after the election, the board announced that it had chosen an inexpensive site for the new black school, not too far from the Crosby–Garfield School in the southeastern part of the city. Among other problems, the site was “on a barren strip of land adjacent to the city dump” and next to “a rock quarry filled with stagnant water” that was a notorious “crime pit.”⁶¹ Black citizens found the choice demeaning and wholly unacceptable.⁶² In a letter to the editor, a resident of College Park pleaded with the board, “With neither voice nor vote in deciding this question, we have only the sacred right of petition.” A favorable outcome, he continued, would “cement and strengthen the bond of mutual confidence and cooperative helpfulness that has heretofore existed between the races in Raleigh,” and “Negroes would feel more like citizens and less like subjects.”⁶³ A week later, the *Times* published a letter signed by a dozen prominent black citizens and “four hundred others” that protested the board’s lack of response to twenty years of patient and polite requests for a black school northeast of the Capitol. With no voice in the city government or selection of board members, they argued, black residents could only “appeal to the Christian

conscience of the Christian white people of the community” and ask them “would you locate a white school upon a site with similar conditions, to say nothing of the need of this same school in another locality?”⁶⁴ In response, J. M. Broughton publicly defended the board by ignoring the existence of the well-established black middle-class suburbs in the northeast. “Obviously a school ought to be built somewhere near the children it is to serve,” he wrote. “Nearly ninety percent of the colored population live in the southern and southeastern sections of the city. Accordingly, this is where their schools ought to be, and their churches, too, for that matter.”⁶⁵ Thus, the school board proceeded with its plans, despite fervent and repeated protests.

Board members chose to build a single overcrowded school in a much more segregated area rather than provide two smaller black schools, including one in the black suburbs near Saint Augustine’s College. The new black school, Hunter School, served a substantially larger student population than the new white schools.⁶⁶ In 1929, student enrollment at the Hunter School was 828, compared with 570 at Hayes Barton, 231 at Boylan Heights, and 215 at West Raleigh.⁶⁷ In fact, Hunter’s enrollment was even larger than that at Broughton High School, in northwest Raleigh, where 780 students were enrolled. Many black residents suspected that more was going on than a callously undemocratic process for selecting school sites—first with Washington High School, then with the white high school, and finally with Hunter School. They believed that Raleigh elites wished to shift the city’s white population westward and northward as part of a tacit policy to increase segregation, leaving African Americans in the southeastern part of town with poor housing, few services, and little political representation. One black woman captured this sentiment in a letter to her uncle, a long-time resident of College Park. “I am sorry our white people handed such a raw deal in the matter of [the] school,” she wrote. “You see, they are trying to get all the Negroes segregated” in the southeast.⁶⁸

Ironically, an editorial by John Park in the *Raleigh Times* offered strong support for a black school located in either the Idlewild or College Park suburb and thereby demonstrated the complexity of elite views on the future development of the city. According to the editorial,

The negroes making protest are of the best element of the race in Raleigh. Many of them live in the northeastern section already occupied by a numerous, growing population of negro citizens, the majority of whom are owners of their own homes. They have built up with who knows what sacrifice a self-respecting and steadily improving community.

The editorial further argued, “It is a fact well-known that the northeastern negro section was due largely to the desire of better class negroes to escape the very Rock Quarry locality in which it is suggested the new school will take place.” Not only did Park’s sympathetic stance underscore the aspirations of Raleigh’s black middle class, it revealed the disagreements among elites about segregation and urban growth. As stated earlier, Park was a leading advocate of locating a “central” white high school in the northwest suburbs, where the neighborhoods, including his own, were “protected” by racially restrictive covenants. If the white population continued to follow him to the northwest, then he saw no harm in allowing black residents to move closer to St. Augustine’s College. For him, residential neighborhoods would still be fully segregated, with downtown businesses serving as a buffer between white and black Raleigh. Other elites, such as Clarence Poe, did not necessarily wish for the city center to shift to the northwest, but they did want to further segregate black residents in south Raleigh.

Ultimately, the location of the schools reflected the influence of both views, and the final results confirmed the fears of the black middle class: the spatial segregation of Raleigh schools was soon complete.⁶⁹ In 1931, the school board permanently closed the white Centennial School on Raleigh’s increasingly black south side; most of the remaining students transferred to suburban Boylan Heights, crowding the small school.⁷⁰ In 1955, one year after the *Brown* decision, the

last class graduated from Morson High on Benehan Square, the white school located adjacent to the downtown black business district. For the next seven years, Broughton High in north-west Raleigh served as the city's only white high school. In 1959, the school board converted Thompson School into a black elementary school, removing the only remaining white school from southeast Raleigh. Then in 1966, the board completed the process by permanently closing Oberlin School, the district's sole black school in western Raleigh.⁷¹ By the time the district faced court-ordered desegregation in 1971, no white schools existed in south or southeast Raleigh and no black schools existed outside of the three census tracts in which African Americans composed at least 95 percent of the population. Likewise, the three census tracts surrounding Broughton High School in the affluent northwest section ranged from 97 to 100 percent white.⁷² The only way that significant numbers of black and white students in these census tracts could attend school together was through extensive busing.

The Long-Term Impact

When Broughton High School opened on Raleigh's northwest side in 1929, Josephus Daniels himself christened "Raleigh's most magnificent school structure."⁷³ The *Raleigh Times* heralded the school's opening with another defense of its location: "Built on a site that was rejected and generally criticized by the general public when it was chosen for the high school, the building, one of the most beautiful in the city, is destined to be the pride of the city."⁷⁴ And as predicted, the suburbs surrounding the "magnificent school structure" grew to prosperity. In contrast, those neighborhoods outside Broughton's elite attendance zone saw their fortunes diminish over time. The children of Raleigh's white elite abandoned their stately Victorian houses in Oakwood and moved to the city's growing west side, leaving the once elegant homes to be divided up into deteriorating rental properties.⁷⁵ In addition, after the school board zoned the southwest Raleigh suburb of Boylan Heights to attend Morson High School rather than Broughton, that neighborhood declined as well. Residents began moving to suburbs farther north, especially once Centennial students began attending Boylan Heights after their school closed in 1931.⁷⁶

The decline of Longview Gardens, Clarence Poe's exclusive suburb on Raleigh's east side, serves as an even more striking example of the impact of school location on white suburban development. In 1955, the school board closed Morson High, forcing white students living in east Raleigh to make the long trip across downtown to attend Broughton (Figure 4). Unfortunately, the new school policy coincided with Poe's efforts to turn his vast estate into a premier residential community. During the late 1950s, Poe attempted to develop Longview Gardens into a model suburb with large lots, curvilinear streets, man-made lakes, a country club, and a modern shopping center (Figure 5).⁷⁷ What the suburb lacked, however, was convenient access to a high school between 1955, when Morson closed, and 1962, when the district finally built Enloe High School for the area. As a result, Longview Gardens never flourished like developments in the northwest: much of its suburban in-fill has been smaller homes on smaller lots, some of its grandest homes have deteriorated, and its impressive country club barely escaped bankruptcy in 2003.⁷⁸

Black suburbs such as Idlewild and College Park fared much worse because of school board decisions dating back to the 1920s. Jim Crow assignment policies allowed board members to require black suburban children to travel long distances to attend school. Thus, locating all of the new black schools in the southeast corner of the city discouraged black suburban development elsewhere. The impact was enduring since these policies often determined the location of schools for generations to come.⁷⁹ Despite repeated petitions from black middle-class residents, the Raleigh School Board failed to provide a convenient elementary school for Idlewild and College Park.

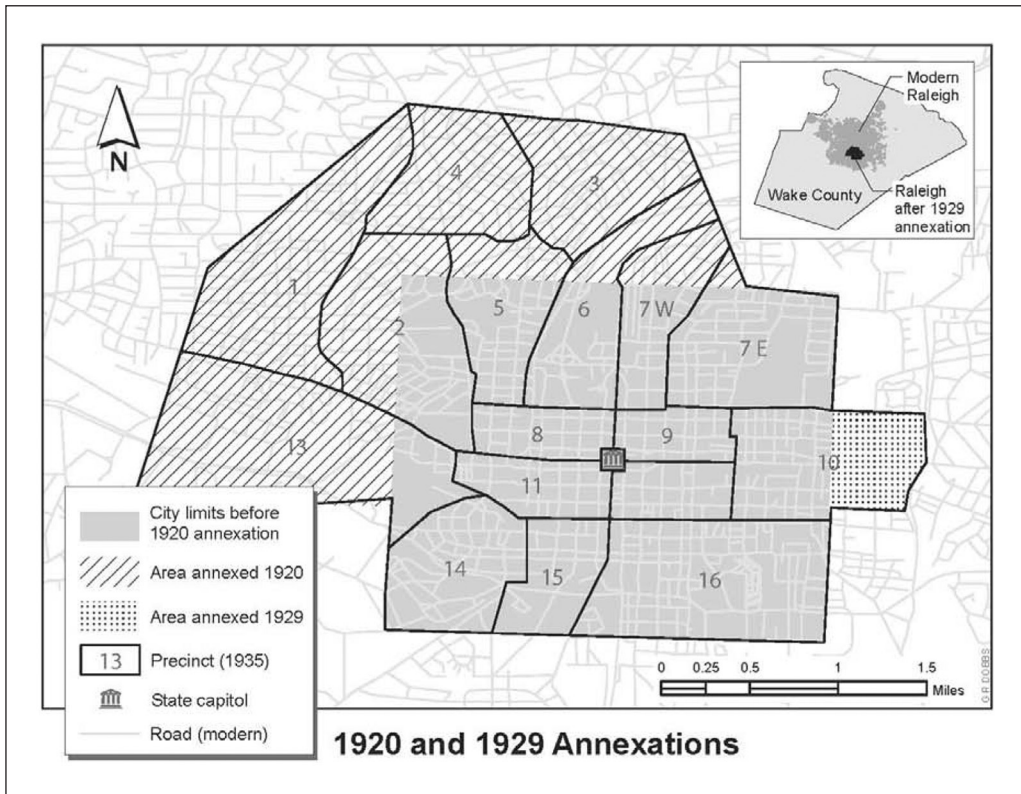


Figure 4. Raleigh school buildings built between 1920 and 1929

Map by Rebecca Dobbs. Base map courtesy of North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill.

During the 1960s, the Idlewild and College Park neighborhoods shifted from communities dominated by homeowners to ones dominated by renters. In 1974, the Raleigh Planning Department predicted that the high percentage of elderly residents put these communities at risk for further decline; for decades, Idlewild and College Park had lacked convenient access to schools and, therefore, could not attract a new generation of prosperous, young families.⁸⁰ Raleigh's 2007 *Comprehensive Plan for Future Development* explicitly documented their decline. Originally adopted in 1989 and more recently updated, the city plan provides detailed descriptions of the current physical, social, and economic conditions of Raleigh's older communities.⁸¹ According to the 2007 report, "a large number of houses" in Idlewild and College Park were either deteriorated or abandoned and boarded up. Without a conveniently located neighborhood school, the suburbs failed to retain their identity as thriving middle-class neighborhoods.

The impoverished communities of Raleigh's economically isolated south and southeast neighborhoods suffered an even starker decline. In 1969, an article that appeared in *Raleigh*, a booster magazine promoting local growth and development, captured both the decay and resentment within Raleigh's predominantly black communities. The article, titled "Progress Report on the Problem," recognized the concern that many elites expressed over urban "blight." The poverty created by decades of economic isolation in black neighborhoods now threatened the vitality of downtown. To illustrate "the problem," the author described the view of southern Raleigh from one of the city's downtown skyscrapers: "There, festering in its own dust and lying close to the ground as though an invisible hand were pressing it down, is the Southside." The white author

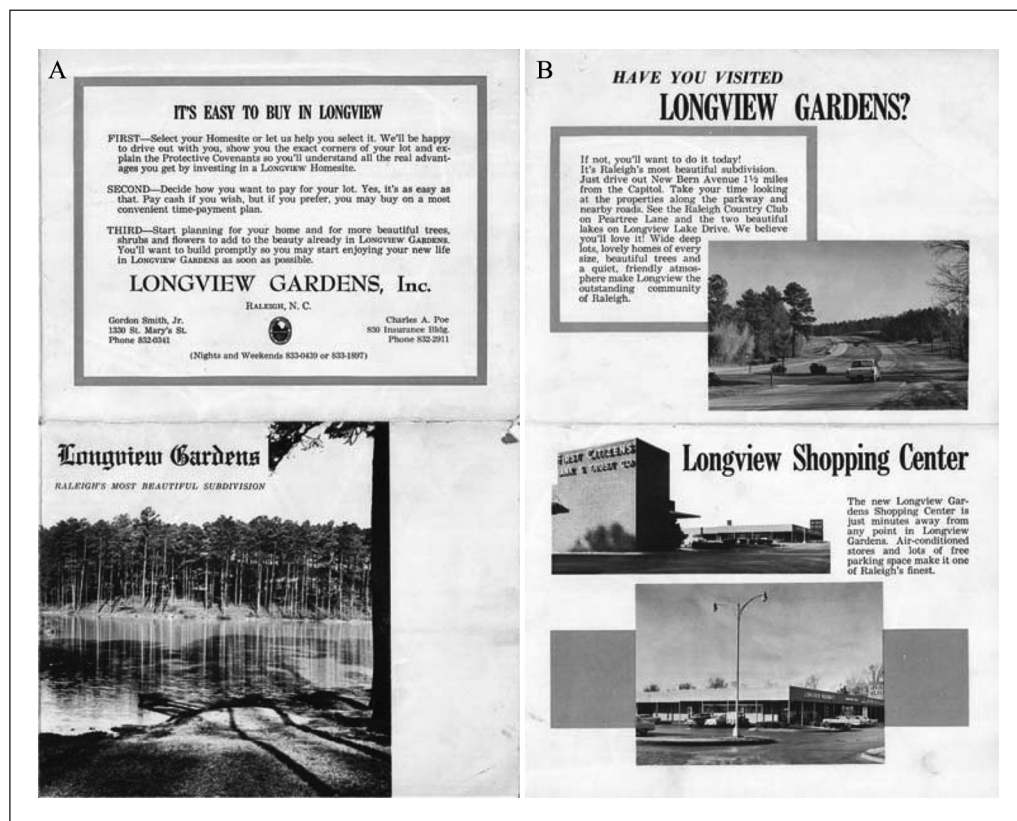


Figure 5. Longview Gardens sales brochure, circa 1962
 Courtesy of the Longview Gardens Neighborhood Association.

admitted, “Negroes in southeast Raleigh see malice in the residential pattern which pushes black people farther into that corner of the city.”⁸²

Like those living in cities across the country, most black residents also saw malice in the urban renewal plans of the late 1960s and early 1970s. School policies had effectively segregated Raleigh’s residential areas and helped shift the city’s center to the north and west. Yet in the 1960s, local elites grew increasingly anxious as impoverished black neighborhoods encroached on the valuable property near Capitol Square. Worried about the collapse of downtown, elites launched an urban renewal program to make the inner city more attractive to businesses, consumers, and professionals. Slum clearance, or “redevelopment” as the City Planning Department called it, allowed the local government to build fast and convenient roads into downtown and clear away “blight” from the view of commuters going into and out of the city. These projects also demolished two of the three remaining neighborhoods where black and white people lived in close proximity. After the completion of these projects, commercial spaces and fast roads would further separate white and black residential areas.⁸³ Moreover, with few alternatives, poor black residents displaced by urban renewal often crowded into healthier black neighborhoods in Southeast Raleigh, placing new strains on those communities as well.⁸⁴ Black middle-class residents who could afford to move elsewhere often did so.

As part of their effort to “save” downtown, local elites, dominated by Raleigh’s business interests, supported a merger between city and county school systems during the 1970s to protect the Raleigh school district, and thus downtown Raleigh, from further decline. As late as 1969,

a survey of schools throughout Wake County predicted that the Raleigh school district would continue to expand at the expense of county schools. In previous decades, as suburban residents pushed beyond district boundaries, they quickly petitioned for admission back into the more prestigious Raleigh school system.⁸⁵ After court-ordered desegregation, the trend reversed. In 1973, just two years after the Supreme Court ruled in *Swann* that cross-district busing to achieve racial balance was constitutional, the Raleigh district published an alarmist report about “shrinking school enrollment” that was creating “a steady rise in the percentage of black enrollment.” Fearing that a blacker, poorer city district surrounded by a whiter, wealthier county district would further damage the economic vitality of downtown, local elites hoped to merge the city and county systems and stem the flight of white residents out of the district.⁸⁶

Despite key support from the *News and Observer* and dire warnings of a “black Raleigh school system,” local elites could not garner the necessary grassroots support in favor of the plan. Their antiblack rhetoric offended many black residents, who might have otherwise been a strong base of support for the merger. Moreover, white working-class residents had recently joined with black residents to protest the city’s previous halfhearted desegregation effort, which had placed most of the burden of busing on them. Many worried that the school board would, once again, bus black and white students from Raleigh’s east side while protecting the neighborhood schools of wealthy, white residents in the affluent communities on the city’s northwest side. The protests of the early 1970s mirrored those of the 1920s, when black and white residents in older and more integrated areas opposed elite efforts to further segregate the city by denying them access to conveniently located, modern schools.

The greatest opposition, however, came from white suburbanites living in the county. They organized the Wake County Citizens Committee to warn of the dangers of crosstown busing and higher taxes if the plan passed.⁸⁷ When voters resoundingly rejected the merger proposal by a three to one margin in a nonbinding straw poll, elites bypassed the electorate and went straight to the state legislature, which approved the merger in 1974. Legislative action effectively staunched the bleeding and paved the way for a progressive, countywide desegregation plan, which involved two-way busing between the city and the suburbs.

Nevertheless, since most local elites were more concerned with protecting downtown than reinvigorating black communities, Raleigh’s politically and economically isolated southeast side continued to decline, with few reminders of the more integrated areas that once existed there. Evidence of this deterioration was apparent throughout the detailed descriptions in the “Small Area Plans” of Raleigh’s 2007 *Comprehensive Plan*. In the 1920s, the center of Raleigh’s black culture and commerce was located in the vibrant black business district on East Hargett Street, next to white Morson High School. The 2007 report found “very little commercial development” and few African American businesses in the East Hargett Street Neighborhood. Absentee “slumlords,” drugs, and crime plagued the once thriving community. Furthermore, South Park, near Shaw University and Jonathan Daniels’s boyhood home, had suffered remarkable decline. The neighborhood, which “enjoyed prosperity during the 1920s,” had been home to some of Raleigh’s “most notable” black residents. According to the report, “over 80 percent of all dwellings” were rentals. Absentee landlords had not properly maintained the houses, and many properties were abandoned, creating “both a visual and safety problem.”⁸⁸

In recent years, Wake County has received national recognition for having effectively solved the problem of desegregation through an effective busing program: prestigious magnet schools pull middle-class suburban students into the inner city, while poorer students from urban neighborhoods travel out to high-achieving suburban schools.⁸⁹ Some bus rides take almost an hour, but most parents like their schools.⁹⁰ More importantly, despite its Jim Crow past, Raleigh’s 2008 school demographics show much less evidence of racial segregation than in many northern and Midwestern school districts. And because it is based on economic rather than racial diversity, the

program is largely immune from recent court decisions that have worried many other school districts. In the 2007 decision *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, the Supreme Court placed limitations on school districts that wish to achieve greater diversity by considering race in individual school assignments.⁹¹ But the fact that Raleigh has so easily achieved meaningful racial diversity in its schools by substituting economic diversity for race demonstrates that the city has yet to address the inequities exacerbated by its school policies of the 1920s.

While the district's diversity plan is immune from recent court decisions, it has always been vulnerable to political shifts that undermine support for the busing program. In 2009, a new school board majority, representing districts in Wake County's outer suburbs, voted to revoke the district's nationally acclaimed diversity plan and replace it with a new policy emphasizing neighborhood schools. Prodiversity forces immediately organized to block the school board majority from resegregating students, creating high-poverty schools, and endangering the prestigious magnet program. After a contentious year of accusations, resolutions, protests, marches, arrests, lawsuits, the resignation of the school superintendent, a civil rights investigation by the U.S. Department of Education, and a review by the district's accrediting agency, the shape of Wake County's new student assignment plan remains uncertain.⁹²

As the debate continues, members of the North Carolina Housing Coalition have encouraged the school board to take a more active role in advocating for "inclusionary housing policies" to achieve economically and racially diverse, community-based schools.⁹³ According to Chris Estes and Carley Ruff, members of the Housing Coalition, a policy promoting neighborhood schools must be coordinated with housing ordinances that "increase the supply of good, affordable housing throughout the county" if that policy is to avoid creating racially distinct, high- and low-poverty schools. In arguing that "improved housing patterns" are the "ultimate solution" to equitable, community-based schools, the Housing Commission is asking the school board to assume a role in city planning and urban development—a role that school boards of the past actively embraced. During the first half of the twentieth century, school district policies in Raleigh—as elsewhere—shaped urban development by helping to create the segregated housing patterns that now dominate urban districts. And now, the lasting impact of residential segregation continues to frustrate efforts to maintain high-quality neighborhood schools that *all* parents would want their children to attend.

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