



May 9, 2004

NEW YORK UP CLOSE

For a Historic Anniversary, Few Hurrahs for New York

By SETH KUGEL

P.S. 68 in Wakefield, the Bronx, is 87 percent black and 1 percent white. P.S. 21 in Ocean Hill, Brooklyn, is 93 percent black and 0.35 percent white. P.S. 56 in Staten Island is 1 percent black and 90 percent white.

A week from tomorrow, educators and others around the country will observe the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark court decision outlawing school segregation. But according to a nationwide study of elementary schools conducted by the Lewis Mumford Center at SUNY Albany, New York doesn't have much to celebrate.

In fact, New York's is the only one of the nation's 30 biggest school systems in which black-white segregation increased from 1968 to 2000, according to the "dissimilarity index," a measure used in the study. The index calculates the percentage of black or white children who would have to switch schools to achieve an even distribution. In New York, that percentage rose from 72.2 in 1968 to 81.7 in 2000, while everywhere else, it fell. "New York City has been stuck since the 1960's, and surprisingly so," said John R. Logan, the sociologist who did the study.

Choosing how to gauge segregation, however, is tricky. Mr. Logan favors the dissimilarity index, but Gary Orfield, a professor of education at Harvard and an expert on segregation, called it "a terrible measure" in cases where the school system has few white students. In 2000, New York's elementary schools were 15 percent white and 34 percent black, with Hispanics and Asians making up the bulk of the rest.

But Mr. Orfield agrees that New York is badly segregated, and a second measure used in the Mumford Center study, the exposure

index, leads to the same conclusion. This index calculates how many whites are in the school attended by the typical black student. In 1970, this hypothetical school was 21 percent white, but, by 2000, it was just 5 percent white. Although New York's was not the only big school system to regress, it fell the most.

Why has the city fared so badly? First, most segregation lawsuits were filed in the South. "Nobody ever had the money to sue New York," Mr. Orfield said.

Also, integrating areas like the South Bronx, where whites are rare, is difficult. "Reducing barriers in the housing market is, in the long run, the best and perhaps the only viable solution," Mr. Logan said.

Jerry Russo, a spokesman for the city's Department of Education, would not address the racial breakdown of schools directly, but said the department was seeking to furnish an equal education to all children.

New York has a few bright spots. White-Hispanic segregation has dropped since the late 60's, although less so than in many cities. And the average New York student is attending a school that is, on the whole, more diverse (though less white) once Hispanics and Asians are counted.

Still, the city is hardly a model for the nation. When Mr. Orfield comes to New York, he said, he likes to announce: "I'm glad to be here in the heartland of segregation."

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