
Maintaining Segregation: Children and Racial Instruction in the South, 1920-1955

Book reviews

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How did children understand and (dis)embody social segregation as an integral feature of the Jim Crow South before the civil rights movement? Where and how were they taught to do so? LeeAnn Reynolds' new socio-cultural history argues that southern children were strategically socialized to adopt and replicate existing segregation ideologies through formal and informal means, which differed importantly for black and white children. Looking at the pre-civil rights era as a means to interrogate dominant ideologies and socialization techniques, the author examines how notions of segregation were generationally, institutionally and socially reproduced through children.

Reynolds' attention to children in this text is illuminating since youth perspectives often afford insights adults might omit or relegate. As such, central questions guiding her study ask: "How did white children come to believe the sky would fall if segregation were violated?" and "How, despite daily encounters with the injustice of the system, did black children learn to adhere to the code without experiencing 'a constant state of fury?'" (p. 2). Thus, Reynolds' study aims to provide accounts of how the vast majority of black and white children were "conditioned to accept segregation" (p. 2). Final portions survey how youth diversely responded to this conditioning. Overall, the author's acknowledgment of meaningful racial socialization differences is one of this text's strengths.

Alongside childhood, a valuable intervention of Reynolds' study is her focus on the pre-civil rights era, which she argues helps clarify the particular context that founded and propelled the civil rights movement. As stated in her introduction's concluding sentence: "The accomplishments of the civil rights movement thus depended on an understanding of childhood racial conditioning and the means through which it might be overcome" (p. 15). Reynolds demonstrates that the pre-civil rights era's racial principles, as conveyed to and, therefore, upheld by children throughout various social institutions, ushered in subsequent forms of social change.

Employing a social institution approach throughout this text, Reynolds begins by examining racial instruction in white and black homes separately in chapters 1 and 2. She finds that white racial home instruction often proved implicit, as children simply observed and assumed segregationist ideologies and practices without clear instruction. In black homes, Reynolds claims that racial instruction was more explicit, and lessons typically centered on safety and survival since most black families were well aware of potential dangers in challenging segregation.

Next, Reynolds analyzes schools and churches, respectively, in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 explores the curricular similarities in segregated black and white schools despite resource disparities. Reynolds' analysis demonstrates that the version of history taught in schools aligned tightly with southern ideologies reinforcing segregation, black inferiority, and white superiority. Chapter 4 underlines fundamental contradictions within southern religious doctrine, as evinced in the lyrics from *Jesus Loves the Little Children* (p. 85). With this assertion of Jesus' love for all, white churches either overlooked their own

hypocrisy, or manipulated other parts of doctrine to validate their segregationist beliefs. Dissimilarly, black groups engaged religion to fortify their own dignity and self-worth, reminding themselves that they would reap the benefits of a holy earthly existence in their afterlife.

Although these chapters are instructive, their organization limit the text's effectiveness. Reynolds does not explain why she separates home instruction into two chapters based on racial group and does not follow the same structural scheme for churches and schools, a particularly odd choice because racial groups in the South regularly maintained or enforced segregated schools and churches. Her final chapters trace how these insights influenced the racial awakenings experienced by some black and white individuals, emphasizing instances of racially conscious and socially resistant individuals' transformation from compliant children into civilly disobedient adults.

This slim 158-page text is well researched, for its 45 pages of endnotes reflect meticulous and thorough documentation of extant source material. Reynolds extracted germane insights from myriad secondary sources, indicating the extent to which she mined existing works for mention of racial socialization. However, chief reliance on secondary source material discloses Reynolds' scant original research and integration of new sources. Further, by emphasizing more well-known figures, such as John Lewis, Coretta Scott King and Pauli Murray, the author eschews focus from more common folks and, therefore, misses an opportunity to shed light on perspectives that may represent more typical experiences of the Jim Crow South.

Understandably, Reynolds' focus is racially dichotomous, as black and white groups comprised the majority of southern populations during this era. A related strength is this text's dynamic portrayal of black and white groups, individuals and events, exposing discontinuities and tensions that punctuated and characterized children's racial socialization in the South. However, Reynolds does not lend comparable attention to other analytical categories such as gender or class, a palpable silence since both are central to southern history. For example, beyond her cursory remarks on gender roles in churches (p. 106) and concerns around interracial relationships (pp. 32-33, 50-53, 124, 138), Reynolds does not adequately assess the gendered contours that defined southern culture. As for class, the author briefly describes how higher socioeconomic standing shaped racial socialization in counter-mainstream ways, specifically for black children from more economically secure homes (pp. 44-47, 54-58). Still, a more rigorous and consistent threading of both gender and class throughout this text would enhance its contribution to the field's understanding of segregation.

Despite its drawbacks, this text is useful because it reorients discussions about segregation in the South toward two understudied aspects: children and the pre-civil rights era. And though it offers no new, groundbreaking findings, this monograph does complicate notions of racial awareness, conditioning, complicity and resistance, displaying their non-linear, untidy qualities. These important dimensions speak to ongoing social and economic issues nationally and globally, such as residential (re)segregation and school funding inequities. Accessible prose makes this study useful for a wide readership. Reynolds' even-handed assessment demonstrates scholarly work that does not unduly revere or rebuke any single group, and it is a helpful contribution to fields of US history, southern history and education history.

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