

Historic and Contemporary Segregation

St. Louis is a hyper-segregated city with 65% of the Black and White population having to relocate to end segregation. Within St. Louis segregation primarily occurs in a pattern of south and north relative to Delmar Boulevard. On the largely White south side of Delmar Boulevard residents have more than two times the income and four times higher property values than residents on the predominantly Black north side (Benton, 2017, p. 1113). In the early 20th century, the St. Louis government, spearheaded by the city planner Harland Bartholomew, effectively used zoning to segregate Black and White people. The zoning ensured that Black people were only legally allowed to live in densely populated neighborhoods in northern St. Louis. Bartholomew, St. Louis' city planner from 1918 to 1954, explicitly stated that the intent in zoning the city was to segregate Black and White people into different neighborhoods (Benton, 2017, p. 1121). Another prominent actor in the early segregation of St. Louis was the St. Louis Realtor Association. The realtors agreed to sell homes to Black people only in neighborhoods that were zoned for them. Realtors who did not cooperate risked losing their licenses and livelihoods.



St. Louis

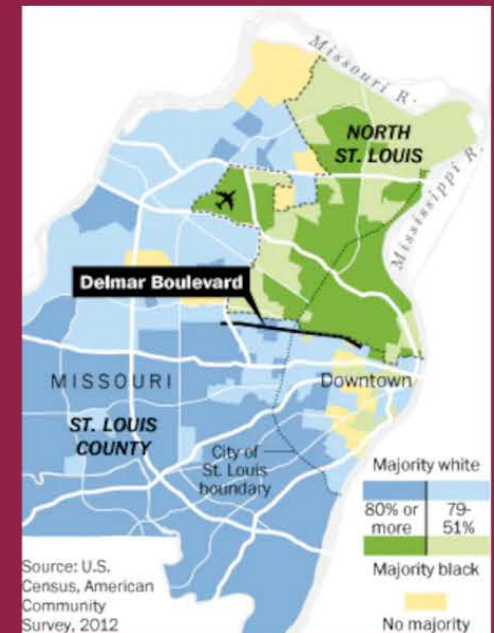
Photo of the St. Louis Arch by Federated Art from pexels.com.



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Delmar Boulevard

Like almost all metropolitan areas in the United States during the postwar period, St. Louis experienced a White flight from the city to the suburbs en masse. Between 1950 and 2000 the city lost half a million White residents (Benton, 2017, p. 1122; Sandoval, 2013). During this White flight, which was most intense from 1950 to 1980, St. Louis tried to reinvent itself through urban renewal. Central to this renewal was the clearance of slums and the devastation of many Black communities. This pushed Black residents into segregated communities and public housing as they could not move to the suburbs or the White neighborhoods of the city due to both economic and legal reasons. While public housing provided low-quality but affordable housing for many Black residents, it only exacerbated segregation along Delmar Boulevard (Benton, 2017, p. 1123). Today, the same Street that has divided St. Louis' Black and White population for over a century is still the line of segregation between the two races.



Map of the Delmar Divide from washingtonpost.com

The segregation of the St. Louis metropolitan area played a significant role in one of the country's most significant political and social events in the past decade, the killing of Michael Brown and the subsequent uprising of Ferguson's Black population. Through the 1960s, Ferguson was a sundown town. This means that after the sunset, no Black people were allowed to be in town. This was not an informal rule, the main road to the neighboring Black town would be blocked with a chain and construction materials at nighttime. During the postwar urban renewal in St. Louis, many Black people were displaced. This led to them moving to Ferguson and other northwest suburbs of the city and to Ferguson becoming a segregated town populated mostly by Black people (Rothstein, 2014).

This also led to all the government neglect and violence that the U.S. government has repeatedly directed toward Black communities which was exemplified in 2014 when an unarmed Black teenager named Michael Brown was killed by a White Ferguson police officer. The police left Brown's body lying in the street for four hours in the summer heat uncovered for all of residents to see. Multiple witnesses stated that Brown had his hands raised as the officer shot him multiple times. The town became engulfed in anti-police uprising in the months following the killing. During this, the national guard was called into Ferguson, and with aid of the police, repressed the protests with military-style gear, armored vehicles, body armor, and assault rifles. They used teargas, while brutally beating many people with clubs and violently arresting others (Everest, 2014). Although Michael Brown was an unarmed teenager, the police officer that killed him was not charged. This only confirmed the protester's accusations that the criminal justice system has a racial bias against Black people and in favor of White police officers (Rothstein, 2014).



Photo of Michael Brown from nbcnews.com.

Segregation Policies and Programs

In 2015, bill 260 was passed in St. Louis that made it illegal for a landlord to refuse a tenant's application who uses a housing voucher, marking for desegregation efforts. Yet a year later in 2016, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and the City of St. Louis announced they will be building a new 97-acre site in a historic north St. Louis neighborhood. All the residents in this neighborhood on the largely Black northside will be displaced by this project and will be forced to find new housing (Cambria, Fehler, Purnell, & Schmidt, 2018, p. 63). Further, the protests in response to Michael Brown's killing demanded police reform and a small number of politicians in the St. Louis region have promised reform. However, none have followed through as St. Louis police kill more civilians per capita than any other big department, and the St. Louis civilian oversight board that was set up as a post-Ferguson reform did not review any of the police killings in St. Louis from 2016 to 2019 (Freivgel & Sheffey, 2021).

Works Cited

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