



Elusive Equality: Desegregation and Resegregation in Norfolk's Public Schools

Jeffrey L. Littlejohn, Charles H. Ford

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In *Elusive Equality*, Jeffrey L. Littlejohn and Charles H. Ford place Norfolk, Virginia, at the center of the South's school desegregation debates, tracing the crucial role that Norfolk's African Americans played in efforts to equalize and integrate the city's schools. The authors relate how local activists participated in the historic teacher-pay-parity cases of the 1930s and 1940s, how they fought against the school closures and "Massive Resistance" of the 1950s, and how they challenged continuing patterns of discrimination by insisting on crosstown busing in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the advances made by local activists, however, Littlejohn and Ford argue that the vaunted "urban advantage" supposedly now enjoyed by Norfolk's public schools is not easy to reconcile with the city's continuing gaps and disparities in relation to race and class.

In analyzing the history of struggles over school integration in Norfolk, the authors scrutinize the stories told by participants, including premature declarations of victory that laud particular achievements while ignoring the larger context in which they take place. Their research confirms that Norfolk was a harbinger of national trends in educational policy and civil rights.

Drawing on recently released archival materials, oral interviews, and the rich newspaper coverage in the *Journal and Guide*, *Virginian-Pilot*, and *Ledger-Dispatch*, Littlejohn and Ford present a comprehensive, multidimensional, and unsentimental analysis of the century-long effort to gain educational equality. A historical study with contemporary implications, their book offers a balanced view based on a thorough, sober look at where Norfolk's school district has been and where it is going.

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