

### NOW TO REALLY TACKLE DISCRIMINATION

Louisville, Kentucky, is a nice town. I'm biased—I grew up there. It's not South, North, East, or West in make-up, but a bit of all four. It is home to horse racing and bourbon, but also to the world's largest producer of Braille books and the Louisville Slugger baseball bat.

Louisville is back in the news these days because its plan for integrating schools, like Seattle's, was overturned recently by the Supreme Court. However divided is opinion over this decision, it should force us to look more deeply into what a well-integrated society means and requires. Public debate should range far beyond the use of race as a factor in determining which kids can go to which schools. Besides school systems, we should be challenging institutions ranging from universities to charity and corporate boards to governments on ways to diversify that go well beyond simple ratios of blacks to whites or females to males.

Return to Louisville. In 2000, it achieved what many major cities around the nation must envy. It integrated into a single jurisdiction the former city of Louisville, with its one-third black population, with the surrounding Jefferson County, which has a much larger concentration of whites. That's right. They merged, and the suburbs basically agreed to work with the inner city on issues ranging from school integration to money per pupil to access to government support services. Now this may only be one step, but it could matter more to minorities in Louisville than whatever change in its schooling formula the recent Supreme Court decision might trigger.

Schools can be integrated in many ways besides racially. In Alexandria, Virginia, for instance, the high school integration problem was solved simply by merging all the high schools into one. A 2000 movie named "Remember the Titans" chronicled that event (at least as well as Hollywood could do it; Alexandria, next to the nation's capital, was described as a small southern town where football was a way of life).

Many school systems can also use basic statistics better to ensure the well-being of all students. The new court decision doesn't prevent school districts from tying admission or access to alternative schooling to family need or income or homeownership or housing value—replacing racial integration with class integration, but almost certainly promoting racial equality in the process. Even more to the point, districts should be measuring the improvement of every student in every environment, constantly re-jiggering requirements, school structures, quality of teachers, number of teachers' aides, early childhood education, and whatever is under their control to serve all our children.

We'll never integrate society solely by pressuring primary and secondary schools. That's why major universities that claim to have integrated are now coming under greater scrutiny. Harvard or Yale might have little problem taking in the children of doctors and generals and lawyers who also happen to be minorities, but, even with all their intellectual firepower, most elite schools provide little data on their record in serving those from poorer or disadvantaged households. Some recent studies, for instance, point to the low percentage of students at these schools who were admitted with income-related Pell grants.

If we really want an integrated society, we should re-engage the working world, not just schools, to meet that challenge. Consider boards of directors. My colleague, Francie Ostrower, recently chronicled the low participation of minorities on charity boards—even some of those serving minorities. As for corporate boards, the glass ceiling is well noted, but even when it is cracked, boards often tap the same minority person or woman over and over again rather than reach out to more people from largely excluded classes.

Closer to home, residential segregation lives on, thanks to various ordinances, such as minimum size housing or lots. Some rules prevent two families from moving to a single house in a neighborhood where schools are better—even when their combined families might have fewer total members than a single family in a similar home. How about zoning that encourages McMansions to be built in high-land value areas to the exclusion of high-density developments that the middle class could afford?

Moving toward a truly integrated society—like combining Louisville and Jefferson County into a single jurisdiction—requires hard work, creativity, and a reshuffling resources as opportunities arise. A single statistics or ratios can't be the measure of success. Whatever else the recent Supreme Court sets in motion, let's hope it catalyzes a real public discussion of the many dimensions of an integrated society and how to promote opportunity for all.

*The Government We Deserve* is a periodic column on public policy by [Eugene Steuerle](#), a senior fellow at the nonpartisan [Urban Institute](#) and a former deputy assistant secretary of the Treasury. To subscribe or unsubscribe to *The Government We Deserve*, click [here](#), or simply reply to this e-mail with a request to be removed.

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