

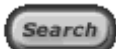


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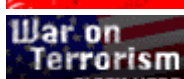
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Indianapolis has come a long way, despite its ranking

Integration lives where North meets South and KKK once ruled

By BRUCE MURPHY
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Last Updated: Jan. 14, 2003

Indianapolis native Rozelle Boyd grew up in a neighborhood that was "absolutely and totally segregated," as he put it. The public schools he attended also were "absolutely and totally segregated."

Today, Boyd, 68, lives in a new subdivision on the city's northeast side with a nearly even split of blacks and whites. Boyd has served on the 26-member City-County Council, and its predecessor body, for 35 years and is one of its six African-Americans. The council's total of seven minorities closely reflects the population of Marion County (about 24% minority), which the council has overseen since the state's unified government law merged city and county.

"Indianapolis has changed very, very significantly," Boyd said recently. "There are vestiges of old behavior and white flight, but it is more and more the case that if a person has the economic wherewithal, you can live where you want."

That's not the view of academic researchers,

Closer Together

Indianapolis



Photo/Charlie Nye

Rozelle Boyd, a member of the Indianapolis City-County Council, says the city has changed from the segregated place it was when he was a boy. Researchers nationally still describe the metro area as "hypersegregated," but a new study by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee researchers tells a different story

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who call Indianapolis "hypersegregated" and one of the "most segregated" metro areas, according to an index they've used to rank cities since the 1960s. But a new study by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee argues this index heavily favors white metro areas and is biased against cities with high black populations. In the new study, no region jumps more in rank than the Midwest and no Midwestern city ranks higher than Indianapolis.

All but two of the 19 Midwestern cities rise significantly in the rankings. The losers are Minneapolis-St. Paul, which drops from 39th to 64th, and Wichita, which drops from 41st to 61st, meaning both cities rank below the national median in the level of black-white integration.

St. Louis rises from 90th to 26th place, Cleveland jumps from 94th to 36th and Milwaukee rises from 98th to 43rd. Indianapolis jumps from 84th place to 24th place, the highest ranking for any Northern city in America. (Two border cities do rank higher: Washington ranks 10th and Baltimore ranks 12th).

"While clearly there are pockets of extreme discrimination, Indianapolis has become a much more integrated city in my lifetime," said Mayor Bart Peterson, 44, who is white.

The UWM study found 39% of African-Americans in the Indianapolis metro area live on blocks that are heavily (at least 80%) black. But the rest have considerable exposure to other races.

Prototypical city

When it comes to black-white relations, Indianapolis may be the prototypical American city. The nine-county metro area is 14.4% black, close to the average (13%) for the entire country. And its central position in Indiana has given it a mix of Southern and Midwestern cultures.

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Quotable



“ There are vestiges of old behavior and white flight, but it is more and more the case that if a person has the economic wherewithal, you can live where you want. ”

- Rozelle Boyd,
Indianapolis City-
County Council


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The Series

 **SUNDAY**: A dubious index used by researchers nationwide has long branded Milwaukee and other northern cities as the most segregated communities in America. That assessment is deeply flawed, a new study demonstrates.

 **MONDAY**: Most researchers who measure segregation begin with the premise that it's bad to have many African-Americans in a neighborhood. That's the first

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"I've always said the Mason-Dixon Line is really U.S. 40, the highway running through the center of Indianapolis," Peterson said. "If you look at the history, the northern part of Indiana was settled by people from the Northeast and the southern part by people from the South."

Indianapolis was usually one of the first Northern stops on the underground railroad, a haven for blacks escaping slavery. But because it was so close to the South, it was also a place where "slave catchers" hunted runaways.

By the early 1900s, blacks made up 9% of the city's population, higher than in any other Northern city. The city had four African-American newspapers, including the Indianapolis Freeman, the first illustrated black newspaper.

The size of the black community helped fuel a backlash, and Indiana became a hotbed for the Ku Klux Klan. Klan members dominated Indianapolis politics in the 1920s, and city officials enforced segregation by creating the Crispus Attucks High School, which all black students were required to attend.

The black community took a bastion of segregation and made it a showcase. Crispus Attucks attracted some distinguished black instructors and became the training ground for many future African-American leaders. In 1955, a Crispus Attucks basketball team led by Oscar Robertson became the city's first to win the state high school championship, and Robertson and the team repeated the feat in 1956.

Boyd, who taught at Attucks for 12 years, believes strong black leadership helped Indianapolis avoid unrest that struck elsewhere in the 1960s.

As Peterson put it, "The black leadership here has been very focused on bringing us together."

The strength of that leadership is suggested by its creation of Indiana Black Expo in 1970, which has become the biggest African American-oriented event of its kind in the country. More than 250,000 people attend its entertainment and cultural displays.

The success of this annual summer event led Black Expo leaders to create the Circle City Classic, which draws 150,000 people to the city for a fall weekend centered on a football game matching historically black colleges.

in a series of misguided goals, expectations and conclusions that fuel accepted research on segregation.

■ **TUESDAY:** Salt Lake City scored well even though it is overwhelmingly white. Indianapolis scored poorly even though it is growing more integrated. Take a close look at these cities, and others, and it becomes apparent that complex metro areas cannot be defined by single statistical ratings.

On the Web

■ Check out the UWM research at the Employment and Training Institute [Web site](#).

The key white contribution to the racial ambience of Indianapolis was the creation of "Uni-Gov" in 1969. At the time, blacks and Democrats saw the combination of the city and county into one united government as a power grab by Republicans who were beginning to lose influence in the city.

Many see it differently today.

"As a Democrat, I have to say that Uni-Gov is one of the best things that ever happened to Indianapolis," Peterson said. "It was visionary."

Uni-Gov gave Indianapolis a broader tax base to rebuild downtown and combat neighborhood deterioration, Peterson noted. It also ended the natural antagonism between city and suburb, which can often have a racial coloring. "The psychological impact was: We were all citizens of Indianapolis," he noted.

Today, the county is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, and it's rare to see the "race card" played by either party, Peterson said.

"We have a network of people in Indianapolis who work very diligently on issues of diversity and inclusion," noted Charles Williams, the longtime president of Black Expo.

Unlike Milwaukee or St. Louis, where the media and community leaders frequently refer to its ranking as the "most segregated" city, Indianapolis leaders and The Indianapolis Star seem to have simply ignored the designation.

"That would defy the understanding most people here have of this city," Peterson said.

A version of this story appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Jan. 14, 2003.

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