

# Permission to Remain Among Us: Education for Blacks in Oberlin, Ohio, 1880-1914

Cally L. Waite



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Waite details the history of the community of Oberlin, Ohio, which demonstrated a commitment to the education of blacks during the antebellum period that was rare at the time. By the end of Reconstruction, however, black students at Oberlin were becoming segregated, and events at the college influenced the rest of the community, with neighborhoods, houses of worship, and social interaction becoming segregated. Waite suggests that Oberlin's history mirrors the story of race in America.

The decision to admit black students to Oberlin College, and offer them the same curriculum as their white classmates, challenged the notion of black intellectual inferiority that prevailed during the antebellum period. Following the model of the college, the public schools of Oberlin were integrated in direct opposition to state laws that forbade the education of black children with public funds.

However, after Reconstruction (1877), the nation tried to negotiate the future of a newly freed and barely educated people. In Oberlin, this change was evidenced by the gradual segregation of black students at the college. In the community, newly segregated neighborhoods, houses of worship and social interaction took hold in the former interracial utopia. The country looked to Oberlin as a model for integrated education at the end of the 19th century only to find that it, too, had succumbed to segregation. This study examines why, and focuses on the intersection of three national issues: the growth of the black church, increased racism and discrimination, and the transformation of higher education.

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