

BOOK REVIEWS

David G. García. *Strategies of Segregation: Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. 296 pp. Illustrations. Paperback \$29.95.

Readers may be familiar with *Alvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931) and *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1947), court cases that paved the way for school desegregation in California. Few, however, know about *Soria v. Oxnard School Board of Trustees* (1971), the first school desegregation case filed jointly by Mexican American and black plaintiffs. This forgotten legal case was tucked away in the archives until historian David García pieced together the history of segregation that led to the *Soria* lawsuit. This effort produced *Strategies of Segregation*, an engaging, well-written, and deeply researched history of the school segregation that was carefully designed by white school board officials and their supporters in the city of Oxnard from the 1920s to the 1970s. It is also an inspiring account of the resistance and resilience shown by the students, parents, and groups who fought for educational equality. Compared to previous studies on Chicano/a educational history by Gilbert González, Guadalupe San Miguel, Victoria-Maria MacDonald, Rubén Donato, and Laura Muñoz, García offers a spatial and relational approach to school segregation and desegregation.

Drawing on sixty-plus oral histories as well as English- and Spanish-language newspapers, court documents, school board meeting minutes, maps, and photographs, García uncovers the four main strategies of segregation at work in Oxnard's public education. First, public school administrators established a racial hierarchy that positioned Mexican and black students at the bottom, below Japanese, Chinese, and whites. Second, they supported the racial covenants that protected the majority-white neighborhoods of the city's west side, restricting Mexican and black residents to public schools east of the railroad tracks. Third, school administrators intensified segregation efforts by creating a "school-within-a-school model" that relegated Mexican students to "all-Mexican classes" in west-side schools. School officials' fourth strategy was denying that they had intentionally segregated Mexican and black students. García convincingly argues that a form of "mundane racism" embedded in all four strategies systematically subordinated Mexicans and blacks within and beyond schools.

Born and raised in Oxnard, García was acutely aware of the racialized geography of its schools and neighborhoods. In chapter 2, he superbly weaves connections between the racially restrictive covenants on west-side properties that were bought, sold, and lived in by school officials, and the parallel schools that they operated with racist policies and practices. By analyzing the racialized language in the property deeds of school board trustees, García demonstrates that they had a vested interest in maintaining housing and school segregation. Inspired by George Lipsitz's and Laura Pulido's work on the geography of

racism, García shows how mundane forms of racism were enacted physically in actual places in the city.¹ Former students whom García interviewed recalled the sting of racism when visiting restaurants, movie theaters, playgrounds, and retail stores on the west side of the city. As one interviewee recalled, “They didn’t have to say Mexicans not allowed, you just knew it” (50–51). Racialized space shaped every aspect of life for Oxnard’s Mexicans and blacks, propelling them to come together to fight against racial injustice.

Using a relational framework developed by Natalia Molina, García explores other racialized communities in or near Mexican-majority neighborhoods to consider how these communities impacted each other.² Japanese immigrants who worked in Oxnard’s sugar beet industry are one example. Although Mexican and Japanese laborers allied in the early 1900s to form a multiracial labor union, their relationship had soured by the 1920s, when administrators allowed Japanese students into previously all-white schools because of their “high standard of intellect” (30). Japanese parents’ decision to honor Superintendent Richard Haydock, the chief architect of the city’s dual system of education, as an “egalitarian leader” further divided the Mexican and Japanese communities (75).

In the last three chapters, García closely examines interracial relations between African Americans and Mexican Americans. They shared a common educational experience at the overcrowded Ramona and Juanita schools in the La Colonia neighborhood, and each founded separate civil rights organizations: the former launched the Oxnard Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the latter the Ventura County Chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO). These two organizations found common cause in working to desegregate Oxnard schools. When school board members ignored protests and petitions, insisting that local schools were not segregated, black and Mexican American activists had finally had enough. On February 26, 1970, a group including community activist Juan Soria filed a federal class-action lawsuit charging Oxnard school trustees with intentionally—and, following *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), unconstitutionally—creating and maintaining racially segregated schools. The case dragged on for several years, with repeated appeals and objections by the school board defendants. Victory came when Soria’s attorneys discovered a “smoking gun” in school board minutes dating to the 1930s, proof that the board had intentionally created and maintained Oxnard’s racially segregated schools. This evidence convinced Judge Harry Pregerson to rule for the *Soria* plaintiffs and to order the Oxnard School Board to develop and implement a plan to integrate its schools. Unlike other Los Angeles school desegregation campaigns, which were characterized by little cooperation between African Americans and Mexican Americans, *Soria* proves the benefits of cooperation and offers important lessons for building interracial solidarity.³

In reading *Strategies of Segregation*, I found myself wondering if school administrators used a fifth strategy of segregation: a separate curriculum that delivered an inferior education to Mexican American and black students. In chapter 4, students at Ramona Elementary School remembered the “pre-first grade” that functioned as an Americanization class, with English-language instruction, vocational classes, low teacher expectations, and frequent corporal punishment. Even when students crossed the color line by attending white schools, they still experienced tracking through assignments to low-performing classes. The district’s integration plan did mention one remedy: an ethnic studies

curriculum “that included the history and contributions of racial and ethnic groups” (145). Unfortunately, it has taken almost fifty years for the Oxnard School Board to carry out this remedy by making ethnic studies a graduation requirement.⁴

Overall, *Strategies of Segregation* succeeds in rendering an indictment of the Oxnard school system and its white architects, who bore much of the responsibility for the mis-education of Mexican and black students. Learning about this history is the first step toward social change, as demonstrated recently when sixth-grade students at Haydock Academy of Arts and Science read this book.⁵ When they learned of Superintendent Haydock’s racist activities, they launched a campaign to rename their school. After students read passages of García’s book to them, school board members voted unanimously to change the school’s name. After a year-long survey for potential names, the school board decided to name the academy in honor of former Oxnard mayor Manuel Lopez.

Amid the racial reckoning and protests that have swept this country, *Strategies of Segregation* is a timely and invaluable contribution to California history, Chicano/a studies, and ethnic studies. It is also a reminder of the need to incorporate ethnic studies into California’s high schools, and to rethink naming schools for those whose names are tainted by racism. Now more than ever, black and brown communities need to learn from their shared experiences in order to stand together for future struggles.

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NOTES

1. George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Laura Pulido, *Black Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
2. Natalia Molina, “Examining Chicana/o History through a Relational Lens,” *Pacific Historical Review* 82, no. 4 (2013): 520–541.
3. Daniel Martinez Hosang, “The Changing Valence of White Racial Innocence: Black-Brown Unity in the 1970s Los Angeles School Desegregation Struggles,” in John Kun and Laura Pulido (eds.), *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 115–142.
4. Shahbano Raza, “Ethnic Studies Now a Requirement,” *Camarillo Acorn*, July 24, 2020.
5. Wendy Leung, “Oxnard Seeks New School Name as Haydock’s Racist Past Comes to Light,” *Ventura County Star*, January 25, 2020.

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. *Fan in Chief: Richard Nixon and American Sports, 1969–1974*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019. 368 pp. Paperback \$26.95.

Richard Nixon loved sports. Although never a gifted athlete, he bowled, played ping-pong, and golfed. He became the first president to attend the Kentucky Derby and the first Republican president to court enthusiasts of automobile racing, a political demographic later known as “NASCAR Dads.” He tried hard, albeit without success, to land the 1976 Summer Olympics for Los Angeles. Mostly, he proved an avid fan of spectator sports, particularly football and baseball, where he displayed encyclopedic knowledge. Historians and biographers have largely overlooked this aspect of Nixon’s presidency, which makes Nicholas Evan Sarantakes’s new book a welcome addition to the scholarly canon. In the