

De Facto vs. De Jure Discrimination

Until 1964, most white Northerners regarded race as a peculiarly Southern problem that could be solved by extending political and civil rights to Southern blacks. Beginning in 1964, however, the nation learned that discrimination and racial prejudice were nationwide problems and that black Americans were demanding not just desegregation in the South, but equality in all parts of the country. The nation also learned that resistance to black demands for equal rights was not confined to the Deep South, but existed in the North as well.

In the North, African Americans suffered, not from **de jure segregation**, but from **de facto segregation** in housing, schooling, and employment. De facto is a Latin expression that means "by [the] fact". De facto refers to something that exists in practice but is not necessarily ordered by law. Something is de facto if it exists in practice or actuality without being officially established. The term de facto is commonly used in contrast to de jure (which means "concerning the law"). Something that is de jure is in place because of laws. When discussing a legal situation, de jure designates what the law says, while de facto designates what actually happens in practice. "De facto segregation," wrote novelist James Baldwin, "means that Negroes are segregated but nobody did it."