This book, which is a history of various efforts to desegregate northern schools during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, explores two dominant themes.

The first theme considers the role of law in accomplishing racial change. Most northern state legislatures enacted legislation after the Civil War that prohibited school segregation, and most northern courts, when called upon, enforced that legislation. Despite the legal prohibition of school segregation, government-sponsored school segregation – such as the assignment of black children to separate “colored” schools or classrooms – persisted in open defiance of state law in many northern communities until the late 1940s and early 1950s. This book tries to make sense of this sharp dissonance between legal rule and educational reality.

The second theme this book considers is the ambivalence in the northern black community over the importance of school integration. Since the antebellum era, northern blacks have sharply divided over the question of whether black children would fare better in separate black schools or in racially integrated ones. This book attempts to understand the competing visions of black empowerment in the northern black community over time as reflected in the debate over school integration.

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*The Battle over Northern School Segregation,*

*1865–1954*

**Davison M. Douglas**

*William and Mary School of Law*
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Acknowledgments

Though the life of the scholar has its solitary aspects, the academic life also affords the opportunity to engage with and enjoy the support of many others in the course of doing one’s research and writing. One of the pleasures of seeing this book in print is the opportunity to express my appreciation to those persons and institutions who assisted me along the way.

First of all, I would like to thank the Spencer Foundation and the National Academy of Education for their splendid financial support that permitted me to do much of the extensive research that this book required. I also thank the College of William and Mary School of Law for a variety of forms of support – leave time, research assistance, and superb library support. The nature of this book required me to make extensive use of interlibrary loan services, and I thank Joan Pearlstein of the William and Mary law library for her tireless efforts in tracking down numerous elusive sources.

No historian’s work is possible without the support of those historians and archivists who tend to the manuscript collections at the great libraries of the world. I have been wonderfully assisted by archivists at many collections, with particularly lengthy stays at the Library of Congress, the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute, the Chicago Historical Society, the Schomburg Center at the New York Public Library, and the Western Reserve Historical Society.

I presented various portions of this book at the annual meetings of the American Society for Legal History, the Association of American Law Schools, the Australia and New Zealand Legal History Society, the History of Education Society, the Law and Society Association, the National Academy of Education, and the Southern Historical Association. I also presented portions of this book at the law schools of the University of Cincinnati, Emory University, Florida State University, University of Georgia, Hokkaido University (in Sapporo, Japan), the University of Iowa, the University of Notre Dame, St. Louis University, and the College of William and Mary, as well as to a conference at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England. I wish to express my appreciation to the participants in these various
Acknowledgments

conferences and presentations for their helpful comments and stimulating questions.

Many friends and colleagues also read and commented on a chapter or more of the book, including Robert Cottrol, Neal Devins, Paul Finkelman, Michael Klarman, Patricia Sullivan, Carl Tobias, and Mark Tushnet. On several occasions, their insights helped me move in a new and useful direction. And I give special thanks to Lewis Bateman of Cambridge University Press, truly one of the great editors and a very patient man.

For the past several years, I have enjoyed research support from numerous William and Mary law students who helped me track down difficult-to-find source materials and cases; these students include David Blessing, Noelle Coates, Rebecca Ebinger, Jonathan Garlough, David Hitchens, Amber Jannusch, and Chris Secord. I am deeply appreciative of their diligence.

My wife, Kathy Urbonya, has lived with me throughout the research and writing of this book. I thank her for her love, support, and reminders that all books must come to an end.

Finally, I dedicate this book to the memory of my uncle, Arthur S. Link, who introduced me to the joys of history at a young age and encouraged me as I pursued an academic career. His life was an inspiration to me in so many ways, and I miss him.