

Brown v. the Board of Education: Before and After

Educational Studies 370
Spring 2004
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Nettie Hunt and her daughter on the steps of the U. S. Supreme Court Building¹

Introduction

2004 is the 50th anniversary of the 1954 Supreme Court decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which racially separate schools were unanimously declared inherently unequal. It is one of the most pivotal opinions ever rendered by the Supreme Court, effecting changes in national and social policy that left no one untouched.² In the intervening years additional cases have come before the Supreme Court further redefining the 1954 ruling. During the 1970s and 1980s, the focus of desegregation was on the physical integration of black and white students through such measures as busing, school choice, magnet schools, use of ratios, redrawn school district boundaries, mandatory and voluntary intra- and inter-district transfers, and consolidation of city districts with suburban districts.³ In the 1990's however, many urban school districts moved toward de facto resegregation of their schools.⁴ Moreover, the primary concern of desegregation activists – educational equity – is being challenged by contemporary educational practices such as tracking, standardized testing, and school funding, within apparently integrated schools.

The content of this course crosses many disciplines: law, education, history, sociology and politics. We will trace the educational history of Black Americans from segregation to desegregation to resegregation. We will review the legal cases before and after *Brown* and their aftermath in educational policies and practices. This will include the issues surrounding college admissions. We will read and listen to first hand accounts of the lived experiences of parents, children, and teachers who lived through the era of desegregation. We will engage in scholarly inquiry about race and educational equity, and in particular take a critical look at taken-for-granted aspects of the white, middle-class experience of schooling with

¹ www.picturehistory.com/find/p14426/mems.html. Item 1960.000262

² *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site: <http://www.nps.gov/brvb/home.htm>.

³ Weiler, J. Recent changes in school desegregation. ERIC Digest 133. www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed419029.html

⁴ Orfield, G. (1996). Turning back to segregation. In G. Orfield, S. Eaton, & the Harvard Project on Desegregation (Eds.), *The quiet reversal of Brown v. Board of Education: Dismantling segregation*. NY: The New Press.

respect to success in school. In particular, we will examine the implications of the fact that today, *white students are the most segregated of all school children*.⁵

Texts

- Anderson, J. (1988). *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. (chapters 1, 5, & 7)
- Balkin, J. (2002). *What Brown v. Board of Education should have said*. NY: New York University Press. (chapters 1 & 2)
- Beals, M. P. (1994). *Warriors Don't Cry*. NY: Washington Square Press.
- Coles, R. (1967) *Children of crisis: A study of courage and fear*. Boston: Little Brown. (chapters 4 & 5)
- Orfield, G. & Eaton, S. (1996). *Dismantling segregation: The quiet reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*. NY: The New Press. (chapters, 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, & 12)

Additional Readings direct you to the websites below:

- www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience
- <http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct.html>
- <http://brownvboard.org/>
- www.nps.gov/brvb/
- www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu
- www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/post-civilwar

Assignments

As a class, we will negotiate the assignments for the course. I anticipate that the course will emphasize reading, research, writing, and discussion, and individual and collaborative projects. Assignments might include:

- brief *reflection/response papers*
 - your experience of, and observations about, race and educational equity
 - content of guest lectures
 - course films
- IWU *community education*
 - construction of a *timeline exhibit* in one or both student centers, detailing significant events and Supreme Court decisions related to segregation and desegregation.
 - assist with the research and planning in the development of and publicity for a special Ames *Library exhibit* in consultation with Librarian Julia Dickinson.
 - writing, directing and performing in a *Readers' Theatre* production based on the voices of students and teachers in Robert Coles' volume, *A Study of Courage and Fear*.
 - writing, directing and performing in a *dramatic re-enactment* of the Supreme Court arguments in the Brown case.
 - design and construction of a *Brown v. Board* educational and resource *website*.
- attendance at all campus *speaking engagements*, including outside class time and evenings, and some field trips to the University of Illinois at Champaign.
- Group projects:
 - the history of integration at IWU

⁵ The civil rights project, Harvard University: www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights
Reversing course: American schools are becoming more segregated. National Education Association.
<http://www.nea.org/neatoday/0111/scoop.html>

- equity in Bloomington-Normal schools
- oral histories of students and teachers of the 1940's, 50's, and 60's.
- a position and/or *research paper* on one of the current issues emerging from the *Brown* decision concerning educational equity and/or integration. You may propose a topic or choose one from the list below:
 - Freedom schools
 - Busing, including urban-suburban
 - School choice, magnet and charter schools
 - Segregation of Latino students
 - Costs of segregation for students of color
 - Costs of segregation for white students
 - Tracking
 - Testing
 - School funding
 - Separate but equal
 - Case studies:
 - Rockford, or Champaign, Illinois
 - Boston, MA
 - Prince George County
 - Washington, D.C.
 - Annotated bibliography on one of the above topics