

There has been a long history of the discrimination essay

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There has been a long history of the discrimination in public schooling in the United States. Before 1955, many southern and some western states, twenty-one in all, had laws requiring or permitting segregated schools. This is known as de jure segregation. In addition to traditions of discrimination, the doctrine of “ separate but equal” prevailed in American Education.

The basis for this doctrine was Plessy v. Ferguson. In this 1896 case, the Supreme Court ruled that a state law requiring federal railroad trains to provide separate-but-equal railroad cars for African Americans and Anglo-European American passengers who were traveling within one state did not infringe on federal authority to regulate interstate commerce. This separate-but-equal doctrine remained in effect for the schools until the decision of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. In Brown, the Supreme Court ruled nine to zero that state sanctioned segregation in public schools violates the equal protection of the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1954, the Supreme Court ordered school districts to desegregate with all deliberate speed. While Brown brought an end, at least legally, to de jure segregation, it did not affect de facto segregation, which is natural segregation resulting from individual choices of neighborhoods.

This is Linda Browns Thompson’s reflection on the case her father brought to the courts: “ It’s disheartening that we are still fighting,” said Mrs.

Thompson, “ But we are dealing with human beings. As long as we are, there will always be those who feel the races should be separated.” (Celis, 1994) Linda was just eleven when her father, the late Reverend Oliver L.

Brown, became the lead plaintiff in Brown. The issue of segregation was addressed in 1969 in Alexander v.

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Homes County Board of Education. The Court ordered the end to all dual systems of education. From this ruling, a major implantation principle resulted in Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education when the Court ruled in 1971 that involuntary busing was a legitimate means of achieving school integration. Many school districts across the United States have been ordered to bus students as a means of integrating schools.

However, busing has been and remains a controversial issue. Proponents of busing see it as a way to achieve equality and equality in education. Proponents say that the schools are the basis for an integrated society in which people live and work in peace and harmony. On the other hand, opponents see busing as a waste of valuable school resources that could be better spent on other school resources and services.

Opponents also see busing as disruptive of neighborhood school patterns and say it is unfair to bus children of one race to another school to desegregate it. As school districts integrate, busing is not always necessary to achieve desegregation goals. For example, a federal judge approved a settlement in Prince George's Maryland County School District that phases out mandatory busing. The plan also calls for building three neighborhood schools, maintaining magnet schools and providing extra resources for schools whose students are predominantly African American (Hendric, 1998). Busing is no longer seen as a solution to segregation.

When the program began in 1971 it was effective; however, since then things have changed. Both white and African American leaders say that busing is not the answer to the current problems. The NAACP and other

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leader's stress that emphasis instead should be placed on improving schools in the black community and by doing so, they contend, there will be overall improvement in quality and equity. For example, Prince George's County, a predominantly white area in 1972, now has one of the largest African American populations, thus making busing no longer necessary. Kenneth Johnson, Prince George's County school board chairman, comments, " We need to look at what busing was intended to do; it was never about black kids sitting next to white kids; it was about an inequitable distribution of resources.

" (Thorton & Murray, 1997)The Brown decision did not and has not everywhere eliminated attempts at de jure segregation. For example, in early 1970's, the Denver School District attempted to keep some schools white and some schools African American and by adjusting student assignments. In *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, the Supreme Court ruled that the actions of the school board resulted in de jure segregation. In *Greene v. County School Board of New Kent County*, the Court ruled that the tests of whether or not school districts are making progress toward integration consist of activities in six areas. (1) Balance in assigning students to attendance centers, (2) Transportation parity, (3) Equity in physical facilities, (4) Equal access to extracurricular activities, (5) Equitable allocation of resources and (6) Personnel placement that puts majority and minority teachers and principals in each building in proportion to their overall numbers in the system.

In legal writings, these six factors are referred to as the Green categories or factors. While efforts to desegregate the nation's schools continue more than forty years after Brown, some school districts may be even more segregated as ever (Athans, 1994). Integration is also on the decline in some states as well.

States such as Arizona, California, Florida, Indiana, New Mexico and Texas have the highest proportions of Hispanic Americans attending schools that are 90 to 100 percent white (The Harvard Project on School Desegregation, 1993). The Kansas City, Missouri, School District experiment in desegregation provides an interesting example of how efforts to desegregate may not always work as well as intended. In 1984, Federal Judge Russell Clark took partial control of the KCMSD in order to improve integration and correct educational deficiencies. The result was an unprecedented spending of tax dollars in an effort to restructure KCMSD in order to end segregation. The district court's desegregation plan has been described as the most ambitious and expansive remedial program in the history of school desegregation. Despite this investment Kansas City's fleet of specialized magnet schools were numbered.

Partly because its test scores and its non-African American enrollment have proved disappointingly low, the 400 student academy is slated to revert to what will be essentially a neighborhood school. In fact, despite spending nearly two billion dollars over a twelve year period to build new schools, integrate classrooms, and bring test scores up to the national level, the percentage of African-American students has increased and test scores have

not improved. The United States Supreme Court made three decisions relating to the KCMSD desegregation plan. The final one, *Missouri v. Jenkins*, reversed lower court decisions that led to the reconstruction of KCMSD. The Supreme Court also ordered the lower court “ to restore state and local authorities to the control of a school system that is operating in compliance with the Constitution” (Hendric, 1998). A major purpose of efforts to desegregate schools is to achieve integration, a mix of students of different races and cultures in schools and other educational programs. But there are other benefits as well, which are sometimes overlooked, such as the educational benefits desegregation provides all students.

In a review of the long-term effects of school desegregation, researchers found that desegregated African American students set their occupational aspirations higher than do segregated African Americans. The racial composition of schools African American students attend largely determines whether the colleges attended by students are predominantly white or African American. Desegregated African Americans choose predominantly white institutions. And students attending desegregated elementary and high schools show higher college attainment than those attending segregated schools (Wells & Crain, 1994). School desegregation has proven to be beneficial over the years, yet it is no longer the only desired goal. Equal educational access and educational integration are goals as well. Educational integration strives for a balance of white and African American students in classes. However, balance is not sufficient.

All students must have equal access to curriculum programs as well. Many minority leaders are now concentrating on improving schools internally rather than externally through bussing and other means of desegregation (Grier & Moreland-Adams, 1997). For example, Nashville will spend \$206.

8 million to eliminate most cross-country busing. Instead, over the next five years, Nashville will build at least eleven new schools, thus allowing students to attend schools in their own neighborhoods (Manzo, 1998). Plessy v.

Ferguson was the notorious 1896 Supreme Court case in which the Court decided that a “ separate, but equal” facility for White and African Americans in this country was not only legal, but preferable.

It stood for over fifty years until the Brown decision ended segregation in the schools. In many of our school districts we have not fulfilled the mandate of Brown v. Board of Education. In the nation as a whole most White students attend schools where they see very few African American students; most African American students attend schools where they see very few White students. And in many of our school districts we have not yet fulfilled the promise of Plessy v. Ferguson: the schools still remain separate and unequal (Grier & Moreland-Adams, 1997). There is a debate in education policy circles at the moment in which some claim that the key to improving educational outcomes for African Americans and other disadvantaged students is to improve their schools. Some claim that this is insufficient without providing the appropriate surround of social services.

Yes, the schools should be improved and the social services provided. In the meantime, in many of our cities two-thirds of male African American

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students do not graduate from high school. Subsequently, if not consequently, up to a third of young adult male African Americans pass through the criminal justice system and like other non-privileged members of our democracy, have lower lifetime income, poorer health, and shorter lives (Thorton & Murray, 1997). There are elementary schools all around the country violating the spirit of Brown with kindergarten enrollments that are 90% or more African American, others that are equally disproportionately impoverished. Some, perhaps most, of those schools also violate the spirit of Plessy, failing to help their students reach grade-level proficiencies in the early primary years. These would be good places to locate high quality pre-K programs, as is done in similar schools. It is my belief that everyone deserves and can benefit from access to the best possible education. Hopefully eventually, perhaps soon, all children will attend very good schools, where they would be cherished.

That would be a good beginning toward fulfilling the promise of Plessy. Then work could begin on implementing Brown. Reference: Athans, M. (1994, September 28). U. S. fires stern letter on school racial mix.

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