

Brown versus the Board of Education

In 1951, thirteen families in the small community of Topeka, Kansas got together to do something about an unjust situation. The board of education of their community was allowing racial segregation in the school system based on an out of date 1879 law. The leader of this group of concerned parents was Oliver J. Brown and the outcome of what started out as a few parents trying to make life better for their children became one of the most infamous and influential supreme court cases in history known as Brown versus the Board of Education.

The practice of school segregation had become a common and accepted practice in American society despite many movements in the history of civil rights to stop the separation of black society from white. The justification that segregation provided a "separate but equal" setting which benefited education, the truth was it was a thinly veiled attempt to deprive African American children of the quality of education that all people need to excel in the modern world.

The case continued to gather momentum until it came before the Supreme Court in May of 1954. The decision was stunning and decisive when it came back 9-0. The statement of the court was brief, eloquent and to the point stating that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

Now even such a definitive statement from the Supreme Court did not end the struggle between segregationists and those who would end the practice that deprived African American children of quality education. In 1957 the Arkansas governor tried to block the integration of schools in his state and the only thing that could stop him was the intervention of federal troops sent by President Eisenhower. A similar but much more well publicized event occurred in Alabama where Governor George Wallace physically blocked black students from entering the University of Alabama. It took the intervention of federal marshals to physically remove him to assure that the law of the land, as mandated by The Supreme Court, was carried out. And the law of the land then and forever since then was that segregation was illegal in this country.

Since this landmark decision, there have been other more crafty attempts to resurrect segregation. But over the decades, attitudes have shifted to where such views on how our social institutions are set up are considered old fashioned and uneducated.

The integration of the schools was an important step in the ongoing struggle to create a truly equal society and to improve the chances of black children to grow up with the same opportunities as all other children in this country. As more and more African American children became well educated, the black

population has been able to make a strong contribution to the culture and to the advancement of knowledge in every discipline of learning. Further, the growing educated black population brought about the black middle class which equalized society from an economic point of view. As African Americans began to participate in all of the economic opportunities that middle class prosperity afforded them, the chances for whites, blacks and people of all races and cultures to mix has been healthy to heal the scars of racism and slowly erase divisions in the culture.

But maybe the most important outcome of integration of the schools is the opportunity it has given for children of all races to learn, play and grow together. As young black and white students have attended classes, gone to football games and hung out at pep rallies together, they have become friends. They have had chances to work together on teams and socialize under many situations and as that has become the social norm, racism began to evaporate from the hearts of young America.

As a result, youth of modern times look on racism as a strange and primitive viewpoint from long ago and not in step with an up to date view of the world. This kind of true acceptance both by whites toward blacks and by blacks toward whites will go further to finally end racial separation and intolerance more than any riot or protest or march or even ruling from the Supreme Court could ever do. And we have Oliver Brown and that small group of parents from Topeka, Kansas to thank for this. By doing what was best for their kids, they did something wonderful for all of America's children both now and for generations to come.

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