

The Flaws in The Methods of Desegregation

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In 1954 the Supreme Court held that the segregation of public schools based on race was unconstitutional.¹ The Court reasoned that separate but equal was inherently unequal because it deprived black students from the benefits they would receive from racially integrated schools.² The focus of the Court was to alleviate the sense of inferiority racial segregation created amongst black students.³

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of the Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.⁴

¹ *Brown v. Bd of Educ. of Topeka, Shawnee Co., Kan.*, 347 U.S. 483, 494 (1954).

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While the Court recognized the sense of inferiority legally sanctioned racial segregation created, it failed to realize that desegregation methods could have similar detrimental effects. After the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the power to control desegregation was placed in the hands of those who fought to retain segregation.⁵ The powers that be agreed to integrate, but on their own terms.”⁶ The integration of public schools suffered from institutionalized racism that had a negative effect on black administrators, educators and schools throughout south. Although there has been progress since the beginning of public school desegregation, the harms still pervade the black community.

Desegregation disproportionately affected the livelihoods of black administrators and teachers. Before integration there were an estimated 82,000 black administrators and teachers that provided instruction to around 2 million black students.⁷ In the late nineteenth century, blacks in the southern states demanded that since whites insisted on color lines prohibiting the employment of black teachers in white schools, school boards appoint only black administrators

⁵ Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

⁶Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, Principle Cyrus Jackson (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

⁷ Daisy M. Jenkins, *Did School Integration Fail Black Children*, (August 17, 2014) http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/08/brown_v_board_of_education_anniversary_did_integration_fail_black_children.html

and teachers to public schools attended by black children.⁸ This compromise was considered the best bargain that blacks could get in the unjust system of racial segregation.⁹

Having black faculty in black schools became an affirmation of racial solidarity, which led black communities to fund the public schools who served them.¹⁰

Because of their “distinctive histories and traditions,” black schools can function as the center and symbol of black communities, and provide examples of independent black leadership, success and achievement. If separation itself is a harm, and if integration therefore is the only way that blacks can receive a proper education, then there must be something inferior about blacks. Under this theory, segregation injures blacks because blacks, when left on their own, cannot achieve. To my way of thinking, that

⁸ Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

⁹ Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

¹⁰ Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

conclusion is the result of a jurisprudence based upon a theory of black inferiority.¹¹

Black educators were well-respected in their communities and expected to not only educate but to engage in social work, public health campaigns, racially uplifting the students and interracial diplomacy.¹² Public schools in the black communities did so much more than solely educate students, losing what these schools provided left a void in their communities.

In the ten years post *Brown v. Board of Education*, an estimated 40,000 black teachers and about 90 percent of black principals in the southern states lost their jobs.¹³ Those who¹⁴Countless others were demoted or given meaningless titles with little to no authority.¹⁵ Some principals were placed in central administrative offices where they became assistant superintendents or

¹¹ *Mo. v. Jenkins*, 515 U.S. 70, 122 (1995).

¹² Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

¹³ Daisy M. Jenkins, *Did School Integration Fail Black Children*, (August 17, 2014) http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/08/_brown_v_board_of_education_anniversary_did_integration_fail_black_children.html

¹⁴ Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

¹⁵Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

federal coordinators.¹⁶ These positions were meaningless often described as “[a]ssistant to the superintendent in charge of light bulbs and erasers.”¹⁷ Black teachers were assigned to teach subjects out of their discipline and fired when they had trouble meeting expectations.¹⁸ In Georgia, a black man who had been a principal for 25 years found himself teaching social studies and history to seventh graders.¹⁹ In Alabama, a woman who had taught economics for over 20 years was transferred from an all-black school to an integrated school and assigned to teach second grade. After five days of her new contract she was fired for incompetence.²⁰ Many black educators either resigned or protested and were fired for insubordination.²¹ More often than not, those educators were promptly replaced by white teachers, some with less experience than their predecessors.²²

¹⁶ Robert W. Hooker, *Displacement of Black Teachers in the Eleven Southern States*, (December, 1970) <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED047036.pdf>

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A 1970 study revealed ongoing problems with desegregation in the southern states.

Hard evidence is elusive and personal opinions sometimes conflict, but the apparent effect of desegregation on black teachers across the South this year has been more negative than positive. Hundreds of them have been demoted, dismissed outright, denied new contracts or pressured into resigning, and the teachers hired to replace them include fewer and fewer blacks. Ironically, the southern version of school integration appears to be reducing, rather than expanding, the professional opportunities of many hundreds of black teachers.²³

Black school buildings also suffered as a result of the methods of desegregation. School boards closed black high schools, or converted the buildings into junior highs.²⁴ Schools that were named after prominent black historical figures or black teachers were given new names.²⁵ Which helped support the notion that the black schools and what they represented were inferior

²³ Robert W. Hooker, *Displacement of Black Teachers in the Eleven Southern States*, (December, 1970) <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED047036.pdf>

²⁴ Adam Fairclough, *The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration*, (April 23, 2006) <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Adam%20Fairclough%20-%20The%20Costs%20of%20Brown.pdf>

²⁵ Robert W. Hooker, *Displacement of Black Teachers in the Eleven Southern States*, (December, 1970) <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED047036.pdf>

to their white counterparts. The people in power believed that, in order to eliminate the inferiority even the names of the school must be erased. This in turn left a negative effect on the subconscious of black students, by erasing what the school stood for black students were implicitly told they were inferior. Black students began to spend more time commuting to schools outside of their communities to prevent white flight to the suburbs.²⁶ Desegregation was designed to be more convenient for white student than for black students, even though there was a belief that desegregation would make education an equal playing field.²⁷ The methods used to desegregate schools subconsciously bred a feeling of inferiority among black students by showing them that even if the facilities were “separate and equal” white facilities were more favorable and that although black teachers may have been just as, if not more, qualified they were still inferior to their white counterparts.²⁸ The demise of black educators and schools has had a lasting impact on the morale of the black community.

²⁶Daisy M. Jenkins, *Did School Integration Fail Black Children*, (August 17, 2014) http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/08/_brown_v_board_of_education_anniversary_did_integration_fail_black_children.html

²⁷Daisy M. Jenkins, *Did School Integration Fail Black Children*, (August 17, 2014) http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/08/_brown_v_board_of_education_anniversary_did_integration_fail_black_children.html

²⁸Robert W. Hooker, *Displacement of Black Teachers in the Eleven Southern States*, (December, 1970) <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED047036.pdf>

After desegregation, blacks became more suspicious of the teaching profession and its predominantly white administrators.²⁹ A generation of black administrators and teachers that suffered great losses during the transition phases of desegregation have influenced their children to pursue other careers.³⁰ As a result, young black people began to shy away from the education profession.³¹ A 2012 study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that among 3.3 million teachers in public schools where minority students made up the majority, 82 percent of them were white, 8 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent black and about 2 percent were Asian.³² The loss of black educators has led many to believe that black students have also lost their most impactful role models.³³ Although white teachers may be extremely qualified, many are ill equipped to meet the needs of their black students and their communities. A 2012 study from the American Sociological Association found that white teachers

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evaluated black student's behavior and academic potential more negatively than white students.³⁴ This study shows that although white teachers may have good intentions, many are still led by implicit bias and may be subconsciously subjecting their student to feelings of inadequacy.

Contrary to the goals of *Brown v. Board*, because of the lingering effects desegregation methods caused, black students have been systematically and subconsciously told they are inferior. The substantial shift from blacks becoming teachers and administrators to seeking more profitable occupations stem from the flaws in the methods of desegregation. Because of the decline in black educators many black students are left without role models that look like them and without teachers better equipped to help them deal with obstacles they will face in the future. The methods of desegregation have left many communities that formed around neighborhood schools in disarray for generations to come. Schools that were the backbone of black communities were left to rot or be demeaned in such a way that their history has become insignificant. The initial flaw in desegregation was the focus of *Brown v. Board*. If the Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* had focused more on using desegregation as a means to create diverse learning environments for the benefit of both black and white

³⁴ Daisy M. Jenkins, *Did School Integration Fail Black Children*, (August 17, 2014) http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2014/08/brown_v_board_of_education_anniversary_did_integration_fail_black_children.html

students, instead of focusing solely on the inferiority of black schools and the constitutionality of depriving black students from the white schools, then there might have been a stronger foundation for equality in education today.