

Right to equal education

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

1、Case Background

In 1951, the educational institutions of Topeka, Kansas, declined to enroll the daughter of Oliver Brown in the school situated in proximity to her residence, instead mandating her attendance at a remote facility that exclusively served the African American community and upheld racial segregation. Mr. Brown, in conjunction with 12 other local African American families, instituted a class-action lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education within the federal juridical system. They contended that the enforced policy of segregating black students into distinct educational institutions was repugnant to the Constitution and infringed upon the equal protection provision of the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, stipulating that no state entity shall withhold equal protection under the law from any individual within its domain. The lawsuit sought the revocation of the school board's policy that sanctioned racial segregation, Children's equal right to education should be guaranteed.

Over the preceding six decades, racial segregation had been a pervasive feature of American racial dynamics, with such discriminatory state measures being upheld by the Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The Court opined that racial segregation did not contravene the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, provided that the accommodations for separate racial groups were equivalent, thereby establishing the doctrine of "separate but equal".

2、The parties' claims

The plaintiffs, the Brown family and twelve like-minded black families, advocate for the abolition of segregated education, arguing that the educational system is unconstitutional and demanding that African-American students should be afforded the same educational opportunities as white students, ensure equal access to education for children.

The defendants, the Board of Education, argued for the preservation of current educational policy, arguing that segregated education was legal and consistent with the educational system. It does not violate students' right to equal education, emphasizing the right of educational institutions to set educational policy, and arguing that the Court's interference violated their educational autonomy.

3、Judgment Process

In 1951, the Browns and 12 other similarly situated black families sued the Topeka Board of Education in federal court. However, the U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas ruled against the plaintiffs, citing the Supreme Court's judicial precedent in 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* provided the basis for their judgment. Despite the adverse effects of segregation on black children in public education, the court refused to provide assistance on the grounds that the black and white people schools in Topeka were essentially the same in terms of architecture, transportation, curriculum, and teacher qualifications.

After the district court's decision, the Browns, represented by NAACP Chief Counsel, Thurgood Marshall, appealed directly to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Browns. The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown* overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*, holding that the principle of "segregation but equality" was unconstitutional for U.S. educational institutions and public schools, and ordered states to implement a comprehensive, non-segregated education system as soon as possible.

4、 Legal Basis

The judge recalled the "segregation but equality" principle established in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Although the legality of segregated facilities was recognized in that case, the Court in *Brown* held that even if the facilities were qualitatively equal, the segregation itself would be psychologically damaging to African-American students and would not be equal for them.

Psychologists have provided evidence that segregated education negatively affects the psychological development of African-American students. Separate educational environments may lead to a sense of racial discrimination and a decline in self-worth, making them feel marginalized and seen as inferior.

Social scientists have provided data showing that segregated education may result in African-American students not having access to the same educational resources and opportunities as students of other races and that African-American students experience a decline in academic achievement, limiting their educational opportunities.

The justices focused on relying on the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This clause states that states shall not deprive any person of the right to life, liberty, or property, nor treat citizens in a manner contrary to the principles of equal protection by the legal system. The judge found that segregated education violated this equal protection principle. The Court firmly upheld the applicability of the equal protection principle in the field of education, which is a right equally accessible to all.

5、 Case Evaluation

The case decision overturned the principle of "separate but equal," laying the groundwork for the end of segregated education and the rise of the civil rights movement, to promote social awareness and inspire more people to stand up for equal rights. It promoted racial equality and racial integration, safeguarded the rights of blacks, and provided an important legal basis for eliminating racial discrimination. At the same time, the case also upheld the rights of black students to receive education, ensuring that every student has equal access to education.

6、 Case Impact

The ruling of this case has aroused the attention of the masses to the policies of ethnic discrimination and inequality, prompted people to re-examine equality, justice and fairness, and promoted social awareness and cognitive changes, and inspired broader social movements.

Although the Supreme Court issued two unanimous, carefully worded decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education*, there was considerable resistance, and many difficulties and challenges were encountered in the implementation of the decision. In addition to the obvious opponents of apartheid, some constitutionalists argued that the ruling violated legal tradition because it relied heavily on evidence from social scientists rather than precedent or established law. Proponents of judicial restraint argue that the Supreme Court is overstepping its constitutional authority by effectively making new laws.

In the South, some state and local governments resisted the ruling by various means, including laws, administrative obstructions, and threats of violence. In Virginia and other places, there was a "mass boycott" movement, and the state government implemented boycott rulings by closing schools and transferring funds, resulting in a large number of students not going to school. There was even violence in some areas, with schools integrating

resistance and intimidation against black families and students.

However, even if the ruling does not go smoothly, minority groups and members of the civil rights movement have been emboldened by the Brown decision. The Brown case brought great changes to the American legal system and promoted the development and perfection of the civil rights law

With this decision striking down the principle of "separate but equal," any legal segregation may be found unconstitutional for violating the right to equality protected by the Constitution; Over the next few years, the United States began to dismantle all policies of racial segregation; The civil rights movement in the United States also took a big step forward because of the case, and after the case, the United States also began to carry out racial integration and civil rights expansion and other movements. It also promotes equality in the field of education, ensuring that every student, regardless of race, color, cultural background or social status, has equal access to quality educational resources and opportunities, laying the foundation for the realization of educational equity.