# (Un)Intended Consequences?

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## (Un)Intended Consequences?: The Impact of the Brown v. Board of Education Decision on the Employment Status of Black Educators


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# *(UN)INTENDED CONSEQUENCES? The Impact of the* Brown v. Board of Education *Decision on the Employment Status of Black Educators*

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The displacement of Black educators after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was an extraordinary social injustice. The wholesale firing of Black educators threatened the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children. The author presents a historical perspective of the work of Black educators in the pre-*Brown* era; discusses the impact of *Brown* on the professional careers of Black teachers, principals, and superintendents; describes some of methods used to fire Black educators; and concludes with a discussion of the impact of these losses on the Black community and an agenda for Black education.

***Keywords:*** *Black educators;* Brown v. Board of Education; *Black education*

March 13, 1953

Miss Darla Buchanan
623 Western Avenue
Topeka, Kansas

Dear Miss Buchanan:

Due to the present uncertainty about enrollment next year in schools for negro children, it is not possible at this time to offer you employment for next year. If the Supreme Court should rule that segregation in the elementary grades is unconstitutional our Board will proceed on the assumption that the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ negro teachers next year for White children. It is necessary for me to notify you now that your services will not be needed for next year. This is in compliance with the continuing contract law. If it turns out that segregation is not terminated, there will be nothing to prevent us from negotiating a contract with you at some later date this spring. You will

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understand that I am sending letters of this kind to only those teachers of negro schools who have been employed during the last year or two. It is presumed that, even though segregation should be declared unconstitutional we would have need for some schools for negro children and we would retain our negro teachers to them. I think I understand that all of you must be under considerable strain, and I sympathize with the uncertainties and inconveniences which you must experience during this period of adjustment. I believe that whatever happens will ultimately turn out to be best for everybody concerned.

Sincerely,

Wendell Godwin, Superintendent of Schools
WG: la
cc: Mr. Whitson Dr. Theilmann Mr. Caldwell

## INTRODUCTION

The letter that begins this article was read to an audience at the January, 2004, kickoff of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Symposium at the University of Michigan. The audience sat spellbound as the speaker, Linda Brown Thompson read the letter from Superintendent Godwin to Miss Buchanan. Mrs. Brown Thompson was a plaintiff in the now historic case, *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. the Topeka (KS) Board of Education (Brown)* (1954). As we observe the 50th anniversary of the *Brown*, this letter crystallizes one of the most important aspects of the case: the wholesale dismissal of Black[1] educators.

The letter to Miss Buchanan and thousands of other Black educators, mostly teachers, expressed the sentiments of many White southerners at the dawn of school desegregation. In many ways, the letter represented a fear of losing a segregated educational system, the fear of being in close physical proximity to Blacks, and the fear of having White children taught by Black teachers. The firings threatened the livelihood of Black educators, the structure, values, and cultural norms of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children. This article is organized into four sections. In the first section, I present a historical perspective of the work of Black educators in the pre-*Brown* era. In the second section, I discuss the impact of *Brown* on the professional careers of Black teachers, principals, and superintendents. In the third section, I discuss some tactics that were used to dismiss Black educators from their positions, and in the final section I conclude the article with a discussion of the impact of these losses on the Black community and an agenda for Black education.

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: A TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

A tradition of excellence and an agenda for Black education dates back to the1860s (Foster, 1997; Pollard, 1997; Siddle Walker, 2000, 2001). Black educators helped to build and operate schools, secure funding and other needed resources, worked with the Black community, and worked as advocates for the education of Black children. In addition, the educational philosophies of Black educators generally reflected the collective ethos of a Black community that believed education was the key to enhancing the life chances of their children. A unique system of Black education could be found in both public and private schools and African American leaders served dual, but complementary roles as educators and activists whose collective vision for the education of Black children was the impetus for an agenda for Black education. In Dempsey and Noblit's (1996) description of Rougemont, an all Black school in a small southern town, they noted that the school reinforced community values and served as the community's ultimate cultural symbol. Thus, even though the school was segregated, it was "valued" by the Black community (Siddle Walker, 2000).

As I have noted elsewhere (Tillman, in press), the work of Black educators is a historical and cultural artifact. Indeed, although separate school systems were the order of the day in a pre-*Brown* era, it was Black educators who taught and nurtured an important segment of the Black community—its children. Henig, Hula, Orr, and Pedescleaux (1999) noted that, "By the second half of the 20th century, Black teachers and principals were important role models and respected leaders in their communities. They also comprised a significant proportion of the African-American community's middle-class" (p. 44). In addition, education was one of the few vocations open to middle-class Blacks in the pre-*Brown* era (Foster, 1997; Orfield, 1969; Pollard, 1997; Siddle Walker, 2000, 2001).

Teaching was a significant profession in the Black community and served as a primary leadership role, particularly for Black women (Ethridge, 1979; Foster, 1997; Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkison, 1986). Black teachers overwhelmingly were hired to teach Black children; thus, most Black teachers were employed in the segregated South. According to Foster (1997), "Of the 63, 697 black teachers in the United States in 1940, 46, 381 were employed in the South" (p. xxv). These teachers saw potential in their Black students, considered them to be intelligent, and were committed to their success. Teachers and principals collaborated to help students build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses. Siddle Walker (2001) noted that these well-trained African American teachers of the South exemplified an "epis-

temology of teaching" rooted in cultural norms. According to Siddle Walker, "The best characterization of the teachers is that they were preparing students to compete in the desegregated world that did not yet exist" (p. 769). In her essay on Black teaching in the South, Siddle Walker synthesized a variety of perspectives on Black teachers and identified five principles that capture the beliefs they held about their roles: Teachers should develop a relationship with the community, teachers should be committed to professional ideals, teachers should care about their students, teachers should relate the curriculum to students' needs, and teachers would receive community and school forms of support. These principles exemplify the teachers' willingness to be involved in the community, their dedication and commitment to the academic achievement of Black children, and their willingness to support one another through various forms of mentoring. The work of Black teachers in the pre-*Brown* era represented distinguished contributions to the long history of Black education.

Black principals were also central figures in segregated schooling and in the Black community (Henig et al., 1999; Pollard, 1997; Siddle Walker, 2000). Black principals served as connections to and liaisons between the school and the community. They encouraged parents to donate resources to the schools, helped to raise funds for schools, were models of servant leadership, and were professional role models for teachers and other staff members. As instructional leaders in these segregated schools, Black principals provided vision and direction for the school staff, helped to insure the inclusion of relevant curriculum, and transmitted the goals and ideals of the school to a philanthropic White power structure. Rodgers' (1967) analysis of Black principals described them as superintendents, supervisors, family counselors, financial advisors, community leaders, employers, and politicians. They were leaders in the struggle for Black education.

Research on Black superintendents is limited before the pre-*Brown* era. As such, a focus on the Black superintendency did not begin to evolve as a distinct area of research until the 1970s. Recent research on Blacks and the superintendency (Alston, 1999; Alston & Jones, 2002, Jackson, 1995, 1999; Jones, 2003) has enhanced our knowledge about the particular circumstances of Black superintendents generally and African American female superintendents more specifically. There were no Black superintendents in 1954, and there were less than a dozen Blacks classified as assistant superintendents (Ethridge, 1979). Approximately 200 Blacks who were Jeanes Supervisors or Jeanes Teachers were considered part of the central office staff. Alston and Jones (2002) noted that most of the Jeanes Supervisors were women who sought to improve the education for Blacks in the South. They were both teachers and administrators whose duties included introducing

new teaching methods and curricula, organizing in-service teacher training workshops, and often serving as assistants to the county superintendent of schools. According to Alston and Jones, Jeanes Supervisors also served as negotiators, crisis-handlers, resource allocation specialists, disseminators of information, staff developers, and personnel specialists. These Black women were chosen because they were "self-effacing, stimulating others to put forth their best effort rather than making . . . [themselves] too active or too prominent (Alston & Jones, 2002, p. 69)".

Similar to the research on Black principals, research on Black superintendents has usually been grouped in the category of women and minorities, and information on the specific numbers of Black superintendents, and their roles and their responsibilities before the 1970s is sketchy. The demand for African American school superintendents increased as minority representation on school boards and the numbers of African American students in schools increased (Jackson, 1995). Jackson wrote,

> It was not until the 1970s that African Americans (most of them men) were appointed to head urban school systems in any number. Considering the thousands of school districts, the 43 black superintendents listed in 1974 nevertheless amounted to a very small number. (p. 44)

In addition, Jackson noted that like big-city mayors, those early Black superintendents were called on to "represent the entire race and extraordinary expectations were placed on them" (p. 44). Dr. Barbara Sizemore was the first Black woman to be appointed superintendent in a large urban city in 1973. As superintendent of the Washington, D.C., school system, Sizemore attempted to make the school system more responsive to a predominantly Black student population. Her efforts were met with opposition, and she was subsequently fired in 1975. Jackson also noted that Black school superintendents, like Black mayors "are symbolic leaders and have an influence beyond their cities" (p. 45). According to Jackson, this symbolism is important for Blacks as they have typically been labeled as "inferior and incapable of carrying out high-level responsibilities" (p. 45). Finally, Jackson noted that, "A dilemma faces these black leaders: they must be superintendents of all the people and at the same time meet their black constituents' expectation that black children will be given a better opportunity for success" (p. 59).

The structure of the modern day superintendency has changed and many school districts have split the traditional duties of the superintendent. In some districts, the position of superintendent has been replaced with chief operating officer, chief academic officer, and chief financial officer. Thus, there may be a combination of experienced school educators and nontraditional

leaders like businessman or city finance directors, who perform duties that were once viewed as the job of one person—the superintendent. Although the history of the Black school superintendent is not as well documented as that of Black teachers and principals, we do know that Black superintendents have been in the forefront of the struggle to educate Black children.

## NO BLACKS NEED APPLY

Was the loss of employment for Black educators one of the (un)intended and (un)anticipated consequences of desegregation after *Brown*? Dempsey and Noblit (1996), in their discussion of school desegregation, noted that

> we acted as if we were ignorant of the fact that desegregation was disproportionately burdening the African Americans with the bulk of busing, with the closure of African American schools, and with the demotions and firing of African American educators. (p. 115)

Dempsey and Noblit touched on one of the harsh realities of school desegregation—the loss of employment by Black educators. The years between 1954 and 1965 were the most devastating for Black teachers and principals (Ethridge, 1979). Ethridge identified five factors that contributed to the loss of jobs for Black educators after the *Brown* decision: Judges were confronted with the question of inferior schools, and thus Black teachers were perceived to be inferior; judges were reluctant to interfere with the segregated policies and practices of local school boards; the courts had no experience responding to the kind of massive resistance to the *Brown* mandate to desegregate elementary and secondary schools; there was a lack of monitoring and a lack of effective data collection after the court orders; and *Brown* was more of a civil rights decision than an education decision. Ethridge noted that "the lack of effective data collection throughout the first fourteen years of desegregation will prevent the true impact of the *Brown* decision on Black educators from ever being really known" (p. 222). Yet history tells us that many Black teachers, principals, and to a lesser extent, Black superintendents lost their jobs as a result of the *Brown* decision.

### TEACHERS

Although Black educators in general were affected, Black teachers were most often the victims of segregated policies and practices that cost them

**TABLE 1**
**The Impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* on the Employment Status of Black Educators**

| | |
|---|---|
| Pre-1954 | Approximately 82,000 Black teachers taught 2 million Black children who attended mostly segregated schools. |
| 1954 | On May 17, the U.S. Supreme court ruled in the case *Oliver L. Brown v. the Topeka (KS) Board of Education.* |
| 1954-1965 | More than 38,000 Black educators in 17 southern and border states were dismissed from their positions. |
| 1975-1985 | The number of Black students who chose teacher education as a major declined by 66%. |
| 1984-1989 | New teacher certification requirements and teacher education program admission requirements resulted in the displacement of 21,515 Black teachers. |
| 2001 | African American teachers represented 6% of the public school teaching force, whereas African American students represented 17.1% of the public school student population. |

SOURCE: Hudson & Homes (1994), Ethridge (1979), Orfield & Lee (2004).

their jobs. Hudson and Holmes (1994) in their discussion of the impact of *Brown* on Black teachers and the teaching profession wrote,

> In 1954, the year of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, approximately 82,000 African American teachers were responsible for the education of the nation's two million African American public school students. A decade later, over 38,000 Black teachers and administrators had lost their positions in 17 southern and border states. Between 1975 and 1985, the number of students majoring in education declined by 66% and another 21,515 Black teachers lost their jobs between 1984 and 1989. (p. 388)

A more complete picture of this impact is shown in Table 1.

Voices in the Black community attempted to reassure Black teachers that they would not lose jobs due to desegregation. According to Foster (1997) and Franklin and Collier (1999), editorials in the *Journal of Negro Education*, *Jet*, and *Ebony* magazines reported that even though some Black teachers in states such as Oklahoma had lost their jobs, teachers should not be fearful because among other reasons, there were not enough White teachers to replace them in desegregated schools. A 1951 editorial in the *Journal of Negro Education* stated, "Even if school desegregation resulted in the loss of

all the 75,000 black teachers it would be offset by the elimination of desegregated schools" (Foster, 1997, p. xxxv). Editors of these journals and magazines also wrote that several non-Southern states such as Indiana, Illinois, and Arizona had accomplished desegregation without incident and featured articles about Black teachers who were teaching in White classes after school desegregation. Despite these reassurances, Black teachers did begin to lose their positions in large numbers immediately after the *Brown* decision. Although some teachers were able to transfer to other schools, this was usually not the case.

According to Orfield (1969), "the widespread firing of black teachers" (p. 106) was not an issue that had been considered when the 1966 Guidelines for Desegregation of Schools were drafted. By 1964, a "disturbing pattern of firing teachers after schools were integrated had developed in several southern states" (p. 106). For example, 13 Black high school teachers in Asheboro, North Carolina were fired when the school was closed. The teachers requested help from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund (LDF). The LDF drafted a memorandum on behalf of the teachers indicating that recent court decisions required the Office of Education to "require faculty integration as an integral part of school desegregation" (p. 107), and that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did permit the Office of Education to forbid the firing of Black teachers. The Office of Education supported the LDF and announced that the "systematic firing of Negro teachers would violate a district's promise of 'good faith' compliance with its desegregation plan" (p. 107). Despite support from the Office of Education, the firings continued. Orfield noted that less than a week after the announcement, a small town in Florida fired all its Black teachers (even though some of the teachers held master's degrees) and the less qualified White teachers retained their jobs. Thus, another group of Black teachers were denied an opportunity to earn a living, resulting in the disruption of their lives and an educational and economic assault on the Black community. Shortly after this incident, the LDF predicted that 500 Black teachers would be fired in North Carolina, whereas the National Education Association (NEA) estimated that more than 5,000 teachers in 11 southern states covered under *Brown* would also be dismissed from their positions.

Ethridge (1979) quoted a Health, Education, and Welfare attorney who, when explaining the absence of language that addressed the hiring, dismissal, or promotion of Black teachers in the Guidelines for Desegregation of Schools, remarked, "In a war there must be some casualties, and perhaps the Black teachers will be the casualties in the fight for equal education of Black students" (p. 220). Indeed in 11 southern states, there was little integration of faculties between 1954 and 1965 in the majority of the schools. In

addition, because the border states of Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware had only a few schools with large populations of Black students, when the all-Black schools in these states were closed, Black students were sent to neighborhood schools and Black teachers lost their jobs. Ethridge estimates that more than 6,000 teachers in the southern and border states lost their positions between 1954 and 1965. The Moberly, Missouri school district fired all of its certified Black teachers (one who held a doctorate degree), whereas all of the 125 White teachers were retained, including those who had only provisional certificates. Foster (1997), in her book *Black Teachers on Teaching* noted that one of those teachers was Mary Ella Tymony, a plaintiff in *Naomi Brooks et al. v. School District of the City of Moberly, Missouri*. Foster noted that neither Ms. Tymony nor any of the other Black teachers were ever reinstated. Ms. Tymony was fortunate enough to be hired by Lincoln University, a historically Black institution in Jefferson City, Missouri. The judge in the *Moberly* case ruled that the Board of Education had the "right to make that decision," and almost every case involving Black educators who charged discrimination between 1954 and 1965 was dismissed on the basis of the *Moberly* ruling.

Ethridge, who worked for the National Education Association noted that he regularly received requests from Black teacher associations in the South asking NEA to develop programs that would prevent the mass firings of Black teachers as a result of desegregation. Ethridge documented the large numbers of Black teachers who lost their jobs reported earlier in this article. He also noted that he and other researchers at NEA suspected that the numbers were much higher; however, because of poor record keeping, the exact number of losses could not be determined. These numbers did, however provide preliminary evidence of the severity of the displacement factor for Black teachers. By 1970, 31,584 Black teachers in the 17 southern states had lost their positions as a result of desegregation. Two years later, the number had risen to 39,386 in these same states. Data from a 1975 Office of Civil Rights report indicated that six White teachers were employed for every Black teacher in the South during the periods between 1970 to 1971 and 1975 to 1976. According to Ethridge, "thousands of educational positions which would have gone to Black people in the South under a segregated system have been lost for them since desegregation" (p. 231). Clearly, with the loss of thousands of teaching positions formerly held by Blacks, there was very little desegregation of faculties in the southern and border states.

Desegregation of schools and faculties was slow in many northern cities as well. Doughtery (1998) reports that in 1956 major northern cities had very few Black teachers in relation to their Black populations. For example, one year after *Brown*, the Black population of Gary, Indiana was 50,000, whereas

there were only 300 Black teachers; Cleveland, Ohio had a Black population of 175,000 with only 700 Black teachers; Columbus, Ohio had a Black population of 52,000 with only 131 Black teachers; and New York City had a Black population of 850,000 with only 2,500 Black teachers. These examples indicate that the numbers of Black teachers employed by public schools was disproportionate to the numbers of Blacks in the population. In his discussion of Black teachers and the early Civil Rights Movement, Doughtery noted that a year after *Brown* Milwaukee, Wisconsin, had a population of 45,000 Blacks and only 50 Black teachers employed in the public schools. Through the efforts of the national and local Urban League, by 1965 Milwaukee had 450 Black teachers, which was equal to the proportion of the Black population.

Cross-over teaching adds another dimension to the discussion of the loss of jobs for Black teachers due to desegregation. Wilson and Seagall (2001) wrote about the Austin, Texas school district's reluctant and slow efforts to comply with court-ordered desegregation. After the Austin school district could no longer avoid compliance with *Brown*, the district implemented a cross-over plan to desegregate schools beginning with the teaching faculties at the high school level. Between 1964 and 1971, 33 Black and 52 White teachers participated in the cross-over plan. Wilson and Seagall conducted interviews with 18 of the Black teachers who participated in the involuntary reassignment to Austin high schools with predominantly White and Hispanic student populations. According to Wilson and Seagall (2001),

> The teachers' narratives transport us back some thirty years to segregated high school classrooms, and the process of desegregating those classrooms. Revealed through their narratives was the dominant culture's exclusive control over the political, cultural, and social institutions. In many ways, this study demonstrated the dominant culture's overwhelming need to continue the sociopolitical controls limiting the discourse of Blacks regarding an important period in the history of schools. (p. 4)

Austin, Texas was a community that did not want school desegregation, but these Black teachers were "willing to risk being the first Black teachers in formerly White schools" (p. 26). The Black teachers had taught at the all-Black Anderson High School. Yet, unlike the White teachers who crossed over, Black teachers were reassigned without being asked whether they wanted to leave Anderson High. White teachers who crossed over were asked to volunteer and were given a choice of schools where they could work. Essentially, the Black teachers who participated in the cross-over plan had no choice—they could either participate in this involuntary reassignment or lose

their jobs. One of the Black teachers, Iola Taylor, described the process of being reassigned to a White school and enduring the hostility of not only White teachers, but students as well. Taylor described this phenomenon as "un-selfing" and defined it in the following statement:

> *Un-selfing* was the psychological kind of interaction that occurs between people that can breed mistrust in any kind of relationship. It means that you either overtly or covertly take a person's dignity. It can be done very, very subtly, but it can be done. (p. 41)

Un-selfing took place when these Black teachers were forced to leave their positions in the all-Black Anderson High School, when they entered hostile environments in the White high schools, and when they were not recognized as professionals. The dimension of cross-over teaching proved to be one more way in which the un-selfing of Black teachers and the Black community took place after *Brown*. Indeed, as Hudson and Holmes (1994) argued, teaching became the almost lost profession.

Finally, the dismissal of Black teachers occurred across the nation in various ways. Franklin and Collier (1999) provided information about some of these occurrences in their chronology of the Civil Rights era, 1954 to 1965. For example, in June of 1955, the White citizens council members in Greenville, Mississippi, demanded that local school boards fire Black teachers who were registered voters. In July of 1961, two Black teachers in Mound City, Illinois, filed a federal suit because they were fired after the all-Black and all-White schools merged; all of the Black teachers were fired and all of the White teachers were retained. In July of 1965, the Cincinnati, Ohio, chapter of the NAACP filed a federal suit because the school district practiced discrimination in the hiring and assignment of Black teachers. Franklin and Collier noted that there are countless stories of Black educators who were dismissed from their positions because of racial discrimination during the Civil Rights era. Table 2 describes other instances that illustrate the displacement factor for Black teachers.

Clearly, the loss of Black teachers had a profound impact on the Black community and its Black children. Hudson and Holmes (1994) noted this impact and cited a 1986 report from the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy that states,

> The race and background of their teachers tell [students] something about authority and power in contemporary America. . . .These messages influence children's attitudes toward school, their academic accomplishments, and their

**TABLE 2**
**Significant Events in the Lives of Black Educators, 1954 to 1965**

| *Date* | *Event* |
|---|---|
| September, 1954 | In Jackson, Mississippi, in the face of "voluntary segregation plans" put forward by the all-White Mississippi Education Association, 250 Black leaders in the state issued a statement in support of the NAACP's public school desegregation activities. |
| August, 1955 | The Georgia state board of education adopted a resolution that barred teachers in the state from membership in the NAACP. Any teacher who refused to quit the organization faced revocation of his or her teaching license. |
| April, 1966 | In Chicago, Illinois, in an article on "Oklahoma's Jobless Negro Teachers," *Jet* magazine profiled several of the estimated 175 Black teachers who lost their positions. Governor Raymond Gary and state school superintendent Oliver Hodge threatened to withhold state funds from school districts that refused to integrate; however, local school officials decided to "drop Negro teachers in the bargain." Many Black educators took up the situation with NAACP officials, who threatened to take the issue to court. |
| May, 1957 | In Prince Georges County, Maryland, school superintendent William Schmidt, responding to inquiries from the local NAACP, stated that there were no plans to have "mixed" faculties in the public schools. The Supreme Court's *Brown* decision, according to Schmidt, did not deal with integration of teachers. |
| July, 1958 | In North Little Rock, Arkansas, Lois Patillo, mother of Melba Patillo, one of the Little Rock Nine, finally had her teaching contract renewed for the 1958-to-1959 school year. The New York Times reported earlier (6-7 May) that she was fired from her teaching position in the North Little Rock public schools. School officials declined to explain the long delay in making the decision on her reappointment. |
| January, 1960 | In Phoenix, Arizona, Black substitute teacher Louis Pete charged that the school district of Phoenix discriminated against Black teachers. The district hired only one African American during a 2-year period. |
| July, 1961 | In Mound City, Illinois, former schoolteachers L. L. Owens and his wife Gertrude filed a federal suit charging they were fired because of racial discrimination. After an all-White and an all-Black school merged, all of the Black teachers were fired, whereas all of the White teachers were retained. |

*(continued)*

**TABLE 2 (continued)**

| *Date* | *Event* |
|---|---|
| November, 1962 | In Clarksdale, Mississippi, Mrs. Noelle Henry, wife of Aaron Henry, the state's NAACP president, was fired from the teaching position she had held for 11 years. She filed suit against the school board in the district court's Delta Division. |
| November, 1963 | In New Orleans, Louisiana, the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered a district court to hear Sybil Morial's suit challenging the state law prohibiting integration. She was a public school teacher and the wife of the city NAACP leader Ernest Morial. |
| August, 1964 | In Raleigh, North Carolina, Willa Johnson filed suit in federal court charging that her teaching contract was not renewed because of her civil rights activity. She stated that she was active in voter registration in Halifax County and that her dismissal was designed to punish her and intimidate other African Americans. |
| December, 1965 | In Little Rock, Arkansas, eight Black teachers who lost their jobs when the all-Black school was closed appealed to the federal court to be reinstated. A lower court ruled that school officials did not have to guarantee positions to teachers displaced because of school desegregation. |

SOURCE: Franklin & Collier (1999).

views of their own and others' intrinsic worth. The views they form in school about justice and fairness all influence their future citizenship. (p. 390)

## PRINCIPALS

The literature on the impact of *Brown* on Black principals is not as prominent as that for Black teachers. As Ethridge (1979) noted, records were poorly kept regarding teacher losses and this was even more the case for Black principal losses. Yet we do know that the tradition of excellence in Black school leadership was dramatically changed by desegregation, particularly in the South. Valverde and Brown (1988) reported that prior to school desegregation Black principals were key actors in the executive ranks of schools. Although some Black principals retained their positions after the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, generally desegregation negatively impacted Black school leaders (Ethridge, 1979; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998; Pollard, 1997; Valverde & Brown, 1988;

Yeakey et al., 1986). Yeakey and colleagues reported that the system of separate, segregated schooling usually favored Black principals. However, the dismantling of this system significantly reduced the number of Black principals. According to Yeakey and colleagues,

> Since racial patterns in most communities, especially those in the South did not countenance blacks supervising whites in any capacity, much less teaching, principals of formerly black schools usually were reassigned as assistants to white principals or as central office supervisors. (p. 122)

Early research on the loss of Black principal positions was conducted by Hooker, (1971), Coffin (1972), Ethridge (1979), Abney (1980), and Valverde and Brown (1988). According to Coffin, 90% of the Black high school principals in 13 southern and border states lost their jobs. Coffin noted that the numbers were even higher for Black elementary principals in these states. Hooker reported that in a survey of 11 southern states, between 1967 and 1971, the number of Black principals in states such as North Carolina, Virginia, and Arkansas dropped dramatically. For example, the number of Black principals in North Carolina dropped from 620 to 40.

During the period immediately following *Brown*, Whites believed that Black children had not learned because Black principals had not been effective in assuring that these children were educated. "Expert witnesses" who testified during a period of constant legal proceedings about the issue of desegregation called for the dismantling of all Black schools and replacing Black principals with White principals. For example, when Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware closed most of their all-Black schools between 1954 and 1965, more than 50% of the Black principals in these states were dismissed. In 1975, Ethridge reported that more than 6,000 Black principals would need to be hired to reach equity and parity nationally.

Abney (1980) studied the status of Black principals in the state of Florida from 1964 to 1965 and 1975 to 1976. He found that in the 1964-to-1965 school year there were Black principals in all of the 67 school districts in Florida. Ten years later, in the 1975-to-1976 school year, 27 of these districts had no Black principals. Abney found that some districts decreased the number of Black principals, even though the Black school-age population was increasing. During the 1975 to 1976 school year, Florida added 165 public schools, but lost 166 Black principals. He speculated that the all-White makeup of Florida school boards and control by White superintendents in many of the districts figured prominently in the under-representation of Black principals.

Yeakey et al. (1986) reported that nationally Blacks continued to be underrepresented in the principalship throughout the 1970s. These authors point to a 1977 survey of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), indicating that only 3% of all high school principals were Black. In 1975, the United States Equal Opportunity Commission reported that approximately 16% of the full time assistant principals were Black. However, the higher percentage of Black assistant principals did not translate into higher numbers of Blacks moving into the principalship. Rather the number of Black principals actually declined between 1964 and 1974, with only 7.7% of principal positions being held by Black men and women. Today, the impact of these losses remains problematic as Black principals represent only 10.8% of all principals nationally (Valverde, 2003).

Clearly, one of the consequences of *Brown* and the subsequent desegregation of America's schools was the loss of Black principals and thus the exclusion of voices and perspectives that were critical to the education of Black children. Not only were positions lost in the numerical sense, but more important, there was a loss of a tradition of excellence, a loss of leadership as a cultural artifact in the Black community, and a loss of the expertise of educators who were committed to the education of Black children.

## SUPERINTENDENTS

As is the case with the data on Black principals, the data on the loss of Black school superintendents after *Brown* is also limited. Jackson (1999) reported that although national data on the makeup of the superintendency had been collected by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) since 1953, *race* did not appear as a category until 1982, and data on Black superintendents was subsumed under the category of minorities. As noted earlier, there were no Black school superintendents in 1954, there were less than a dozen Black assistant superintendents and approximately 200 Black Jeanes supervisors.

Since the 1970s, Jackson noted that Black school superintendents have typically served in large, urban cities such as Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Chicago that have majority Black populations. Valverde and Brown (1988) reported that in 1982, there were 57 Black superintendents representing 0.7% of the school superintendents nationally. By 1982, the percentage of Black superintendents had increased to only 1.2% of the national total. Jackson (1995) reported that in the 1989-to-1990 school year, the number of Black superintendents had increased to 142, or 1.6% of superintendents nationally. Valverde (2003) reported that in the 1997 school year, 47%

of all urban school superintendents were Black, but this percentage decreased to 42% in 1999.

Yeakey and colleagues (1986) reported that legalized segregation was replaced by urban segregation largely based on housing patterns, and this was particularly the case in the North. Black superintendents typically served in large urban districts and it was the prevailing thought that these districts were the best places for Blacks. Moody (1973) studied 21 big city school districts that employed Black superintendents and had majority Black student populations. He found that Black superintendents were rarely appointed to districts that provided them with the necessary resources or that provided students with educational programs relevant to their needs.

Over the past decade, there has been a shift in the trends in the hiring of Black school superintendents. Richard Hunter, an African American, has been a school superintendent in three large urban school districts: Richmond, Virginia; Baltimore, Maryland; and Dayton, Ohio. In a personal conversation with Hunter,[2] he stated that job losses for Black superintendents after *Brown* occurred mostly in the South. As was the case with Black principals, it was believed that Black school superintendents could not effectively lead the districts, and that Whites would not cooperate with a Black superintendent.

Hunter noted that during his tenure as school superintendent in Baltimore, Maryland (1988 to 1991) almost all of the large, urban, big city school districts such as Washington, D.C., Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and Detroit were led by Black superintendents. Hunter identified several reasons why there has been a shift away from hiring African American superintendents, particularly in large, urban school districts. First, Hunter stated that shifts in the pattern of appointing Black superintendents to appointing White superintendents follow the pattern of electing more White mayors in big cities than Black mayors. Second, Hunter noted that mayors are assuming greater control over the cities; thus, White mayors are choosing to have White school superintendents or Chief Executive Officers. Shipps's (1998) analysis was consistent with Hunter's assessment of the influence of White mayors in big city school districts. In her discussion of the Chicago school system, Shipps noted that it was significant from a symbolical standpoint that the management team of the Chicago school system was "headed by a White male, after a decade of African American superintendents" (p. 181). According to Hunter, another reason for the shift away from hiring Black superintendents is an emphasis on accountability and the public's view that African Americans are not as competent as Whites to lead African American students to academic achievement. Hunter's view on this point was consistent with Jackson's (1995) argument that Black superintendents are not viewed as capable of carrying out the responsibilities associated with upper level school

leadership or administration. Finally, Hunter noted that the salaries of school superintendents and additional perks increased (e.g., chauffeurs) and with these increases became increased competition for these positions.

According to Hunter, as *Brown* unfolded and more White flight occurred, many schools became more single-race schools with predominantly African American student populations. The political control of Black politicians as well as the number of Black administrators increased. Today, even while the demographics of the student populations have not changed (and in some cases there are more single-race schools), educational leadership is going through a period where White superintendents and principals are leading these schools. Thus, Blacks have lost a great deal of their political power in the large, urban cities, and this is reflected in the makeup of the superintendency.

## FORCED OUT OF THE PROFESSION

The ways in which Black educators lost their positions were many and varied, but racism was the primary reason for the widespread firing of Black educators. The desire of White southerners and many northerners to maintain a segregated system of education unfolded in court verdicts and in documents such as the *Southern Manifesto* (Franklin & Collier, 1999; Wilson & Seagall 2001). The *Manifesto* was issued in March of 1956 and came about when 96 congressmen from 11 southern states joined together to derail the implementation of the *Brown* decision. According to the framers of this document, "Integration would replace the present friendship and understanding between blacks and whites with hatred and suspicion" (Franklin & Collier, 1999, p. 43), and they pledged resistance by all lawful means. Racism was also pervasive in Austin, Texas where "with all deliberate speed" became "with all deliberate slowness" (Wilson & Seagall, 2001). Federal courts helped to maintain segregation by upholding the practices and policies in local school districts in Texas. Black educators, and particularly teachers, were often powerless to defeat school districts as courts upheld these discriminatory policies that allowed the mass firing of Blacks.

The closing of all-Black schools was also used as a way to dismiss Black educators (Ethridge, 1979; Foster, 1997; Yeakey et al., 1986). Most Black educators worked in all-Black schools like Anderson High School in Austin, Texas. When schools like Anderson High were closed, teachers lost their positions and were left without employment. They were usually left to their own resources to find other jobs that would utilize their professional and

personal gifts. Oftentimes these educators were also forced to seek legal counsel in an effort to be reinstated in their positions. A teacher in Foster's (1997) life history project of exemplary Black teachers had taught in the Hampton, Virginia, school system before desegregation. In her reflections about the impact of desegregation on Black teachers, she stated,

> I was one of the first black teachers to go into the desegregated schools in Hampton. I say "desegregated" because busing at that time meant closing the schools in black neighborhoods and sending the black kids to white areas. They closed all of the black schools. The idea was to get the schools out of the black neighborhoods—and they did a good job of it. (p. 56)

Franklin and Collier (1999) reported that Black educators were also dismissed because of their membership in Black organizations and because of their civil rights activism. Black teachers were regularly dismissed because they were members of organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, and Black teacher organizations such as the American Teachers Association (ATA). For example, a White Citizens Council in Little Rock, Arkansas called for the dismissal of Black teachers who were members of the NAACP and Urban League. Black teachers in many states were required to submit a list of the names of organizations to which they belonged, and their employment (and income) was contingent upon this list. A Louisiana school superintendent ordered Black teachers who supported integration to resign from the National Education Association (NEA). Registering to vote was also used against Black teachers. In many districts, those Black teachers who dared to register to vote and who participated in voter registration drives were usually fired from their jobs. Although Black educators had the legal right to vote and to hold membership in Black organizations, these rights were still considered to be reserved for Whites only and Black educators could be punished for exercising their rights.

Other measures used to deny employment to Black educators included revoking their teaching licenses, eliminating college and university teacher education certification programs, and evaluating Black teachers based on standardized tests. Franklin and Collier (1999) noted that in 1957 Allen University had its teacher certification withdrawn when several professors were alleged to be communists. Standardized tests such as the National Teacher Examination (NTE) and the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) were often used to evaluate and/or screen out Black teachers. This was the case in a Louisiana parish that used the NTE to dismiss 29 Black teachers. Finally, Delpit (1997) noted that this pattern continued in states like Georgia, where there is a shortage of teachers. According to Delpit, Georgia was considering a state

certification test that would eliminate approximately 70% of the Black teachers. The combination of these factors—racism, closing all Black schools, membership in Black organizations, the failure of the courts to uphold the mandates of *Brown*, exercising the right to vote, and increased reliance on standardized tests were used to deny Black educators employment. The loss of income profoundly impacted the Black community. Ethridge (1979) reported that between 1970 and 1971, $240,564,911 in salaries were lost after Black teachers in 17 southern states were dismissed from their positions.

## THE "UN-SELFING" OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The loss of jobs by African American educators after *Brown* affected the African American community culturally, socially, economically, and academically. The loss of income for a group that was already being paid less than their White counterparts proved to be devastating to the economy of the African American community. Although there are varied interpretations of who is considered the Black middle class, it is clear that Black educators represented a segment of the Black middle class in the decades before and immediately after *Brown*. As has been noted, education was one of the few vocations open to formally educated Blacks. Thus, the economic balance of the Black community and the expertise of Black educators as a cultural artifact was disturbed.

The effects of the decline in the numbers of African American teachers, principals, and superintendents have in some ways continued today. Currently, there is a shortage of African American teachers, particularly in urban school districts (Tillman, 2003). In addition, there are fewer African Americans who enter teacher education programs and then choose teaching as a career (Gay & Howard, 2000; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; King, 1993). According to Gay and Howard (2000), the majority of elementary and secondary teachers (approximately 86%) were White, and the number of African American teachers declined 5% between 1970 and 1998. The reasons for this decline include more lucrative career opportunities for African Americans, limited student financial assistance, reliance on standardized tests, and the lack mentoring to help African American teachers experience career and personal success.

The disproportionate numbers of minority principals compared to minority students is exemplified in a National Center for Educational Statistics

(NCES, 1998) report indicating that 65% of principals in urban schools with predominantly African American, and other minority student populations were White. Thus, although the nation and K-12 education has become increasingly diverse, the field of educational leadership remains underdiversified and particularly with regard to African Americans. African Americans represent only 10.8% of all principals nationally. Modest increases in the number of African American principals have been recorded, yet they still represent a very small number of principals in all school types at all levels.

The loss of control of the education of African American children has also had a negative impact on the educational culture of the African American community. Edwards (1996) noted that desegregation put African American children in a racist context, a context unfamiliar to their parents and other members of the African American community. Thus, it was no longer the case that Black parents felt confident that their children would be taught by teachers who cared about their social, emotional, and academic success, and that their children would be prepared to compete in a White-dominated society. A collective vision for educating African American children, an African American epistemology of teaching, and an agenda for African American education were interrupted. Numerous scholars have written about the loss of community and the negative effects on Black children (e.g., Edwards, 1996; Foster, 1997; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Siddle Walker, 2000, 2001). Hudson and Holmes noted that, "It was during this period (post 1954) that the problems of low self-esteem, decreasing aspirations, ability grouping and tracking, assignments to educable mentally retarded classes, and other systematic victimizations of Black youngsters developed" (p. 390). Today, the underachievement of African American students is a major concern. The (un)intended and (un)anticipated consequences of *Brown* still resonate in the academic lives of many African American children.

To some extent, these losses also extended outside of the immediate community. Siddle Walker (2001) wrote that before *Brown* positive relationships and collaborations with college and university professors enhanced the potential of African American educators and ultimately their students. Professors and practitioners felt that they were "all working together on a common goal" (p. 762). Today, collaborations between African American educators in K-12 and African American professors are not as common. Much of the research about African American educators and African American children is conducted by White researchers in White colleges and universities who are outside of and have little knowledge about the varied experiences of African Americans. Much of this research positions African Americans as emotionally, socially, culturally, and academically deficient. Thus, it is

imperative that African American researchers take the lead in conducting and reporting research on African American education. More important, this research should be sensitive to the cultural ways of thinking, believing, and knowing of African American educators and African American children. As I have argued elsewhere, "Research frameworks that are grounded in the knowledge and culture of African Americans can not only contribute to educational research, but more important, validate knowledge that can promote educational excellence for this group" (Tillman, 2002, p. 9). The collective struggle to continue a tradition of excellence in African American education must include a resistance to theoretical dominance. As I have also noted, "The cultural standpoints of those persons who experience the social, political, economic, and educational consequences of unequal power relations must be privileged over the assumed knowledge of those who are positioned outside of these experiences" (p. 6).

## CONCLUSION

Cohen (2004) noted that "*Brown* remains the most important legal decision of the 20th century, perhaps of all time" (p. 22). Yet there were (un)intended and (un)anticipated consequences for African Americans. Ten years after the *Brown* decision, Thurgood Marshall was dismayed by the slow progress toward desegregation and stated, "Desegregation obviously has not proceeded as fast as we would have liked" (Williams, 1998, p. 310). Despite Marshall's contention that "come hell or high water we'll be free by '63", a decade later he conceded that it would take "at least a generation to bring about any social change" in segregated schools (Williams, 1998, p. 310). Twenty years after *Brown*, Marshall again lamented that there had been no substantial progress toward desegregation. Commenting on a 1974 Supreme Court decision to overturn a Detroit, Michigan desegregation plan he stated, "After 20 years of small, often difficult steps toward equality, the court today takes a giant step backward" (Cohen, 2004, p. 23). Indeed, 50 years after *Brown*, Orfield and Lee (2004) reported that K-12 schooling in the United States has experienced a "substantial slippage toward segregation in most of the states that were highly desegregated in 1991" (p. 2). Orfield and Lee also noted that

> the vast majority of intensely segregated minority schools face conditions of concentrated poverty, which are powerfully related to unequal educational

> opportunity. Students in segregated minority schools face conditions that students in segregated white schools seldom experience. (p. 2)

African Americans must establish the agenda for the education of their children. This agenda must include increasing the number of African American teachers, principals, and superintendents who interact with, nurture, guide, and protect African American children. We must reverse the "manufactured crisis" in the education of African American children. In their 1994 article on the impact of *Brown* on Black teachers, Hudson and Holmes (1994) suggested four strategies to "chart a new course" (p. 392) for the education of African American children. These strategies are particularly applicable today. African American educators must (a) exercise leadership by setting a rigorous educational agenda and high expectations for African American students, (b) engage in community planning that connects K-12 and higher education systems in African American communities, (c) participate consistently in the formulation of state and local educational policy, and (d) closely monitor how and where various state and local educational polices are implemented.

Although the losses after *Brown* were daunting, it is more important than ever that we now join our collective voices, talents, gifts, and knowledge in the struggle to educate African American children. Fifty years after *Brown* and 40 years after the Civil Rights Act, African American educators must bring their gifts, reclaim the tradition of African American excellence in leadership, and chart a new course for African American education.

## NOTES

1. Since the days of slavery, a variety of terms have been used to describe African Americans: colored, Negro, Black, and now African American. In the pre-*Brown* era, African Americans were usually referred to as "colored" people or "Negro" people. I acknowledge all of these terms, and will use them interchangeably throughout this article.

2. Personal conversation with Dr. Richard Hunter, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, February 8, 2004.

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