Sophie Osunkoya

Professor Dominic Brewer

The History of U.S Education

10th of November 2023

Unmasking Educational Discrepancies: The Evolving Integration of The United States School System.

The United States is a strong nation renowned for its abundance of diverse intellectuals who contribute to the advancement and development of the nation. The country has changed dramatically since the Declaration of Independence in 1776, when the country was founded on the principles of liberty and freedom for all. As we have seen over the last couple of centuries those freedoms were not initially granted to every American in the country. Minorities in the United States have been fighting an uphill battle in hopes of attaining the same liberties and freedoms as their white counterparts. Unfortunately, this discrimination and discrepancies were prevalent in every aspect of society, especially the educational system. As a country founded on liberty and freedom, the United States was supposed to provide educational opportunities to all of its citizens, but this was never the case. The evolution and integration of the United States education system is a remarkable movement that has allowed so many more minorities in the United States to have access to opportunities that they deserve, thereby bolstering the US economy in a wide range of career sectors. Through a focused examination of key Supreme Court cases, this essay argues that the integration and evolution of the United States education system were significantly shaped by the persistent obstacles faced in legal decisions, paving the way for subsequent education acts.

The integration and evolution of the United States school system is known to have historically started as a result of the civil rights movements. Which began in the 1950s as a result of advocacy against the disparities that persisted in the United States nearly a century after slavery was abolished. However, nearly a century before the civil rights movements, desegregation began in Boston, where African American families decided to take action against harmful educational disparities and seize control of their own fate. “The campaign for school integration in Boston began in earnest with this petition from African American parents asking for racial integration of all schools in 1846” (The Desegregation of Boston Schools, page 53). Roberts vs the City of Boston raised awareness of the disadvantages of having separate schools and shone a light on the detrimental effects of having separate schools based on race. As stated in the Primary Schools Committee's letter to the residents of Boston “The establishment of exclusive schools for our children is a great injury to us and deprives us of those equal privileges and advantages in the public schools to which we are entitled as citizens” (The Desegregation of Boston Schools, page 53). The victory in this case led to the integration and evolution of public schools in Boston and initiated the hope that the progression of integration within the United States was a possibility.

Advocates against the segregation of schools began to assemble and pioneered the mission to have the Supreme Court overturn Plessy v. Ferguson. Plessy v. Ferguson was a Supreme Court case decided in 1896 in which the judges ruled that schools could remain segregated while attempting to be equal. That legislation clearly did not work because there were still significant disparities between colored and white schools. Discrepancies included differences in academic rigor, the quality of teachers, and access to educational resources. The Plessy v. Ferguson case essentially did nothing but create a legal basis for the discrimination and segregation that was already prevalent in the United States to continue after the legislation was passed. The fight for initiation within the American school system started with smaller judicial case petitions that were designed to get the attention of the Supreme Court justices and raise awareness about the ongoing discrimination agenda. The Supreme Court case of the University of Maryland v. Murray was one of the cases that was extremely important to the integration movement because it brought focus to the separation and discrimination that were happening even within law school. Murray and his lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, fought tirelessly for his admission to the segregated law school, arguing that he should have been admitted on merit rather than race. Following that, ten years after families in Westminister, California fought for California school districts to integrate public schools in Mendez v. Westminister. Families taking action and suing the school district paved the way for minorities to pursue legal action when their children face the consequences of inequality and segregation. One of the last Supreme Court cases that was invaluable to the permanent integration of U.S. schools was Mclaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. In this case, McLaurin was admitted to a school to pursue his doctorate, but he was kept hidden in black-only areas, which hampered his educational growth. He petitioned the courts, and they determined that segregation violated the 14th Amendment's guarantees to citizens. At this point, a few states within the United States had implemented integration; however, there was still a prevalence of the idea that separate versus equal should be upheld within the schools. That was the case until Brown v. Board of Education.

Brown versus the Board of Education was a “class-action lawsuit brought by multiple parents against the Topeka school board” (Desegregation of Schools: the History of School Desegregation, Page 1). The class action lawsuit argued that Plessy versus Feguson was unconstitutional as it didn't award the same rights and opportunities to every United States citizen, regardless of their race. After it was overturned in 1954, the court ruled for all the schools in the United States to integrate, giving every student in the education system equal access to the same educational resources, which was pivotal to the civil rights movement. Although the minority population celebrated this watershed moment, the Supreme Court justices faced widespread criticism for their new decision. A lot of white parents and politicians found it absurd that these minorities were being offered the same opportunities that they have had for centuries. They did not believe that everyone, regardless of race, was equal under the Constitution. This supremacist mindset was apparent in a high school in Arkansas, even after the declaration of integration as a result of Brown versus the Board of Education. Because students at that high school were still segregated, a group of nine black students attempted to integrate and were met with immediate resistance. It was completely unconstitutional for the school to withhold integration from these students in 1957, which drew the attention of "US President Dwight Eisenhower, who sent federal soldiers to escort the students to school” (Desegregation of Schools: the History of School Desegregation Page 1). This was but one event that exemplified the struggle in actually implementing the Supreme Court's order. The integration took a couple more years before the defiance subsided and the general population started evolving into a more inclusive mindset considering access to education.

Following the civil rights movement and the integration of races in the American school system, the country was in a state of evolution and development. This led to subsequent acts that aimed to make the country a more productive and well-equipped environment. In the 1960s, President Lyndon B Johnson took the initiative to build a great society that worked to end poverty, improve education, and provide more affordable healthcare plans, among other things. The civil rights movement “exterted a strong influence on presidential policies and decisions during the 1960s (The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Great Society 1965 page 281).  This initiative resulted in the creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which aided the American education system in determining how certain political legislation hampered educational progress for many children. He was fighting for more opportunities for underserved schools in terms of books, learning techniques, and developing curriculums that truly challenged the students. He really believed that "in all we do, we need to strengthen our state and educational systems” (The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and  the great society, 1965 page 283). This evolutionary thinking arose as a result of the integration and development of the educational system as a result of the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education.

This essay investigates the factors and consequences of the development journey that shaped the United States' integration and evolution. Through an analysis of key Supreme Court legal cases, it delved into the complexities of the obstacles that came with the fight for integration. Evaluating the court decisions and considering the educational progression that resulted from school integration. This reflection examines the progress of the United States educational system in terms of racial disparities. It focuses on the issues surrounding segregation and shines a light on the tireless efforts of advocates who constantly petitioned the courts to create a world in which all citizens have equal educational opportunities under the law.

Work Cited

“Desegregation of Schools: The History of School Desegregation - 2023.” *MasterClass*, 2022, www.masterclass.com/articles/desegregation-of-schools.

Johnson, Lyndon B. “Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).” *SpringerReference*, https://doi.org/10.1007/springerreference\_69908.

*Student Desegregation Plan: The Public Schools of the City of Boston*. 1974.