

Paper 3: Brown v. Board of Education Context and Analysis.

In order to analyze the “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka” supreme court case, we must first understand some previous developments. The Fourteenth Amendment, section 1 states that “No State shall . . . deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” (Congress) Meaning, that states could not treat whites and non-whites differently under the law. Another supreme court case that was important to the decision of “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka” was the “Plessy v. Ferguson” case of 1896. This case ruled that the segregation of blacks and whites was constitutional, but only when both parties had access to the same quality of resources. The “Plessy v. Ferguson” case essentially cemented the idea of “separate but equal”. (of the United States)

In 1954 the supreme court case “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,” where a conglomeration of similar cases from four different states would overturn the ruling of “Plessy v. Ferguson”. The plaintiff of each of the cases were seeking “admission to the public schools of their community on a nonsegregated basis” (Warren) but were denied because of segregation laws. The plaintiffs argued “that segregated public schools are not ‘equal’ and cannot be made ‘equal,’ and that hence they are deprived of the equal protection of the laws.” (Warren)

The supreme court unanimously decided against school segregation because of the inability of schools to provide equal care to whites and non-whites and the psychological effects of segregation on colored children. The decision in “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka” believed that “separate but equal” had no place in education. The combination of laws and funding that enforce attendance in schools means that we should be giving everyone as good of an education as possible. This decision to desegregate schools would have a considerable impact on the lives of many Americans and continue to push the civil rights movement.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was always looking to improve the standing of African Americans, gathering enough funds to tackle the “separate but equal” issue since the “Plessy v. Ferguson” case. The Legal Defence Fund (LDF) of the NAACP was looking for cases that they could use to take the issue to the supreme court, choosing cases from Virginia, Delaware, South Carolina, Kansas, and the District of Columbia. These cases were all opposed to the conditions of segregated schools, often without proper heating/cooling, course materials and understaffed and overcrowded.

“Brown v. Board of Education” was the most impactful case in American history in regards to the social, political, and economic fabric of the nation. (Urofsky) The ruling of “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka” did not immediately remove the racial segregation established with “Plessy v. Ferguson” in 1896. The case protected the rights of minorities, meaning to reverse the ruling of the “Plessy v. Ferguson” case. I believe that the case both presents a new precedent and enforces an older idea. The new idea the case presents is that everyone should have the right to a proper education and should not be forced to travel long distances and deal with unsavory conditions when there are more favorable ones available. The older idea being that “all men are created equal” is also enforced, it is just also being applied to African Americans as well.

The response to the decision was split between the north and the south. “Northerners hailed the decision as ‘momentous.’” (Urofsky) Whereas the south started to oppose the decision after they realized that the court would not be overturning the decision. White Citizens Councils began forming for “total war” in defence of segregation as they waited for the courts plan of implementation. Black communities were apprehensive about the decision. They felt that the decision was a step in the right direction but did not know how the plan was to be implemented or how the more zealous groups would respond.

Works Cited

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