



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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From “Plessy v. Ferguson” to “Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas”: The Supreme Court Rules on School Desegregation

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The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, has been credited with much significance. For some, it signaled the start of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. For others, it represented the fall of segregation. However even in the footnotes of the decision the Court raised questions as to how much authority it had and how to proceed toward getting compliance. Nevertheless the *Brown* decision was a landmark because it overturned the legal policies established by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that had legalized the practices of “separate but equal” and the Jim Crow laws. Our schools are still by and large not integrated—and probably not even desegregated. All over the United States people are calling for “quality” education and neighborhood schools rather than for forced desegregation. Today, few would support separate but equal schools but “de facto” segregation has again become a reality. I want to bring these issues into the classroom so that the students can understand the history that shaped these issues and learn how to figure out their opinions and state them clearly. To do this I have focused on understanding the legal documents issued by the Supreme Court and some first-hand accounts by participants on the effects of these decisions.

Students will be expected to read a textbook for historical context. The final project will be to present their opinions on specific topics before the entire class. This course is for 11th and 12th graders with solid academic skills .

(Recommended for 10th-12th grades but of solid academic achievement Law, American History, Race Relations and Sociology)

Key Words

Education School Desegregation History Afro-American American History Judicial System Supreme Court Cases Prejudice Race Relations

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