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Legacy and Modern Implications of *Brown v. Board*



More than half a century after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Americans continue to debate the effectiveness and legacy of the landmark ruling. On paper, the Supreme Court ended legal segregation in public schools. However, the goal of truly integrated and equal education remains only partially fulfilled.

One of the long-term challenges was that the Court's decision did not include a detailed plan for how to enforce desegregation. This allowed many states to delay integration or find creative ways to continue separating students. Over time, federal courts issued more rulings and Congress passed civil rights laws to reinforce the decision. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave the federal government more power to withhold funding from segregated schools, leading to more substantial progress in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Yet, as decades passed, a new trend emerged: re-segregation. After initial progress, many urban schools became increasingly racially isolated once again—not because of official laws, but because of residential patterns, housing discrimination, and local school zoning. In some cities, white families moved to suburban areas or enrolled their children in private schools to avoid integration. As a result, many public schools today are made up mostly of students from one racial or economic background, even though there are no legal policies requiring segregation.

Modern scholars refer to this phenomenon as “de facto segregation,” meaning separation that happens in practice rather than by law. While this is different from the state-enforced segregation challenged in *Brown*, the effects can be similar. Schools in low-income areas, which often serve mostly Black or Latino students, may lack funding, experienced teachers, and up-to-date resources. Meanwhile, schools in wealthier, mostly white areas often benefit from stronger tax bases and community support.

Still, *Brown v. Board* remains one of the most celebrated Supreme Court decisions in American history. It changed how the Constitution is interpreted and established that equal protection under the law must be applied to all children, regardless of race. It also marked a turning point in the civil rights movement and inspired activism that would lead to further legal and social change.

Today, many educators and advocates continue the work begun in 1954. They push for fairer school funding, more diverse classrooms, and policies that address inequalities. The legacy of *Brown* is not only in what it accomplished, but also in the ongoing fight to make its promise real.

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Comprehension and Critical Thinking Questions (Legacy and Modern Implications)

1. What is “de facto segregation,” and how does it differ from the segregation that existed before *Brown v. Board*? (Short answer – 2–3 sentences)

2. What role did the Civil Rights Act of 1964 play in enforcing the *Brown* decision? (Short answer – 1–2 sentences)

3. Why did some schools become re-segregated in later decades, even without legal segregation? (List at least two contributing factors)

4. How does unequal school funding continue to affect students today? (Short answer – 1–2 sentences)

5. Choose one quote from the passage that you think best represents the legacy of *Brown v. Board*. Explain why you chose it. (Quote identification + 2–3 sentence explanation)

6. In your opinion, has the goal of *Brown v. Board* been fully achieved in modern America? Why or why not? (Longer written response – 5–6 sentences)

7. If you were a policymaker today, what steps would you take to reduce modern school segregation or inequality? (Longer written response – 5–6 sentences)