

## Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future

Grade Level: 7-12

Objectives: To engage students in a debate about the relevancy of desegregation today.

Supporting Arkansas Frameworks: CUS.19.AH.6, RE.2.CH.1, RE.E.CH.3, USC.5.AG.2, USC.8.AG.5, WWP.9.AH.7-8.4, WWP.9.AH.9-12.4, G.3.C.3, USC.7.C.4



The Little Rock Nine arrive at Central High School with members of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division soldiers, October, 1957. Photo courtesy Central High Museum Historical Collections/UALR Archives and Special Collections.



Several of the Little Rock Nine leave Central High School under troop escort, 1957. Photo courtesy Central High Museum Historical Collections/UALR Archives and Special Collections.

## Background

The 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* institutionalized racial segregation in the United States. Southern states in particular began to pass laws that legalized the social, political, and economic segregation of blacks and whites. State legislatures passed laws that required segregation in public accommodations and transportation, and the Supreme Court upheld these laws. These laws came to be known as “Jim Crow” laws.

The term “Jim Crow” originated as a character in a minstrel performance that played on stereotypical images of blacks. In general the Jim Crow era in American history dates from the late 1890s, when southern states began systematically to codify (or strengthen) in law and state constitutional provisions the subordinate position of African Americans in society. Most of these legal steps were aimed at separating the races in public spaces (public schools, parks, accommodations, and transportation) and preventing adult black males from exercising the right to vote. In every state of the former Confederacy, the system of legalized segregation and disfranchisement was fully in place by 1910. This system cut across class boundaries and reinforced the notion of white superiority. <sup>1</sup>



One teacher school, Vaezy, Greene County, Georgia 1941. Courtesy Library of Congress.



POTWIN SCHOOL  
Topeka, Kansas Jan. 31, 1950  
FOURTH GRADE  
Miss Dorothy Watson  
Fourth Grade Class, Potwin School, Topeka, Kansas 1950. Courtesy Topeka Shawnee Public Library.

In 1954, the Supreme Court reversed itself in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decisions that found racial segregation inherently unequal. The court stated in their decision, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.” This decision paved the way for monumental changes across the nation, and particularly in the South, to begin to eliminate the unequal treatment of black Americans. The first real test of the *Brown* decision came in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas at Central High School.



Mrs. Nettie Hunt and daughter on Supreme Court Steps. Courtesy Library of Congress.

In the aftermath of the *Brown* decisions African Americans increasingly demanded equal treatment, through such activities as the Montgomery bus boycott that lasted more than a year and nearly crippled that city's public transportation system before officials desegregated under a court order. Elsewhere, students staged lunch counter sit-ins and other non-violent protests. These actions served as a catalyst for Congress to pass the sweeping Civil Rights Act of 1964 that specifically prohibited discrimination in voting, education, and the use of public facilities. Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, which made it easier for southern blacks to register to vote. The evasive schemes that southern states used to keep blacks from voting, such as literacy tests, poll taxes, and similar requirements, became illegal under the act.



Montgomery Bus Boycott Carpool. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Racially diverse public schools of the late 1970s were doing more than most other major institutions in our society to bring people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds together and foster equal opportunity. But they could not, on their own, fulfill the promise of *Brown*.<sup>2</sup> As of 2000, between 85 and 90 percent of the students in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami-Dade, and Houston – the five largest central-city school districts were minorities. Overall, the twenty-seven largest school districts, which serve almost one-quarter of all black and Latino public school students, have lost the vast majority of their white enrollment.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of desegregation has evolved to include schools and other aspects of our social construct. This includes housing, highways, commerce, entertainment and even where we attend church.



Lunch counter sit-ins were another form of nonviolent protest. Courtesy Library of Congress.



Marching For Equality. Courtesy Library of Congress.

## Examples of Institutionalized Segregation

### Housing

Post World War II saw segregation being institutionalized within federal housing policies such as the FHA underwriting manual: “it was necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes.” The manual instructed appraisers to predict the ‘probability of the location being invaded by...incompatible racial and social groups.’<sup>4</sup>



Courtesy Library of Congress.

In November 1964, only four months after Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawing discrimination in employment, government programs, and public accommodations – the people of California, by a resounding two-to-one margin, approved a constitutional amendment, called Proposition 13, for their state that overturned an open housing law and effectively allowed racial discrimination in housing.<sup>5</sup> In 1967 the NAACP challenged Proposition 13 and successfully appealed to the California Supreme Court and was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court that the law had a racially discriminatory purpose and made the state effectively a sponsor of discrimination.



Courtesy DOT Illinois

### Highways

In the development boom of the 1980s federal highway spending tended to go toward the subdivisions that were being built on the outskirts of metropolitan areas. Census records indicate that the new suburbs being built were homes for predominantly white families. The former homes of these families were now occupied by predominately black families.

Development booms and land-use patterns have a way of following the highway spending.<sup>6</sup>

### Schools

Compare and contrast two high schools in Little Rock:

#### Central High School

600,000 square feet

\$1.5 million cost

New textbooks

Gym & stadium with practice fields

#### Dunbar High School

200,000 square feet

\$400,000 cost

Used textbooks

No gym or practice fields



Above: Central High School  
Below: Dunbar Middle School

Today schools across the U.S. have achieved some degree of desegregation. There are still some problems with total integration though. “Two student worlds in one building, intersecting but not integrating.”<sup>7</sup>

## Suggested Classroom Activity

To begin preparing for this debate review the historical background material and discuss with your class how segregation evolved after the Civil War through Jim Crow laws.

Discuss specific places that were segregated once Jim Crow laws were in place such as: schools, theaters, restaurants, drinking fountains, buses, parks, etc.

Have the students take the opinion poll found in this curriculum module.

**Set Objectives:** Divide the class into two groups. One group will represent the affirmative portion of the proposition the other group will represent the negative portion of the proposition. The proposition for this debate is:

### Schools should continue to be desegregated

It is important to use a proposition that is stated in a positive statement so as not to lead the students in a bias manner.

**Research:** Each group is responsible for finding scholarly research that support their position on the proposed statement above. Have each student find at least two articles to support their assigned position. The articles should come from primary source documents. Students can use the internet to locate articles, but they need to represent scholarly research from reputable sources.

**Preparation:** Hand out the “Debate! Take Part in a Useful Discussion About a Controversial Issue” handout found in this module. This will give good examples of supportive evidence for both sides of an argument. The handout will also provide the guidelines for the rules of debate. This will help you assess each student’s performance for the debate.

**The Debate:** Review the rules and summarize the issue. You might need to step in on occasion to referee, so it might be a good idea to have some sort of signal, like a bell, to get their attention. You might also put a time limit of 30 seconds for each argument and rebuttal.

**Conclusion:** After the debate discuss the issue again. Have the students re - take the same opinion poll and see if their opinions on the issue have changed at all.



# Desegregation Opinion Poll

**Desegregating/integrating schools:** Write “A” for Agree, “D” for Disagree, or “U” for Undecided next to each of the statements. There are no right or wrong answers, every opinion is good when you can give reasons for that opinion.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Desegregated schools have improved the quality of education for black students.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Desegregated schools have improved the quality of education for white students.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. It is more important that students be allowed to attend schools in their neighborhoods than to integrate schools.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Attending classes, socializing, and participating in after-school activities with students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds is important.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Desegregated school districts can be effective.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Courts should order busing to make sure that schools are integrated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Urban school districts with high minority populations should have the authority to set up magnet schools to attract white students from the suburbs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The most important aspect is to have a good quality education for everyone and it does not matter whether the schools are integrated or not.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Segregation harms blacks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Segregation harms whites.

# Debate!

## Take Part in a Useful Discussion About a Controversial Issue.

### I. Components of a Model Argument

- (A) The proposition is the statement that you will strive to either support or oppose.
- (B) Affirmative arguments will support the proposition and negative arguments will refute the proposition.
- (C) Evidence includes quotes, statistics, or other important information from knowledgeable people.
- (D) Sources must be cited for each piece of evidence. The author, the title of the article, the title of the journal, newspaper, or website, and the date of publication should all be cited. A web address (URL) alone is insufficient.
- (E) Your conclusion will show how well you can succinctly summarize the evidence and argument. It also reveals how well you understand what you have written earlier.

### II. A Model Argument about School Uniforms

**Proposition:** Wearing school uniforms improves the overall social and academic atmosphere of the school.

**Affirmative Argument:** Wearing school uniforms improves student behavior.

**Evidence #1:** Many teachers and administrators perceive improved behavior when students wear uniforms. According to an article entitled "Uniform Effects" by Debra Viadero (*Education Week*, January 12, 2005, pp. 27-29), Principal Rudolph Saunders of Stephen Decatur Middle School in Clinton, Maryland, states that students simply behave better when they are dressed in uniforms. "It's like night and day. We have 'dress down' days, and the kids' behavior is just completely different on those days." He

also perceives that students fight less and they focus on their schoolwork more. Teacher Betty Mikesell-Bailey, from the same school, says that in-school suspensions have declined and test scores have gone up since they instituted uniforms. Students no longer bully one another over their clothing.

**Evidence #2:** Long Beach, California was one of the first big-city school districts to adopt uniforms in 1994. Within the first year, crime dropped twenty-two percent (Alexis Aguilar, "Belleville West High Sizes Up Uniform Policy," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, September 9, 2004). Schools in and around St. Louis began adopting uniforms in 2000, and according to Superintendent Jed Deets of the Cahokia school district, behavior has improved. He also states that dress down days invite "a marked increase in behavior problems."

**Conclusion:** A requirement that students wear uniforms seemed to improve discipline in some schools where this was tried.

### III. Rules of Debate

- (A) The individual holding the ball is the only person who may speak. When finished, pass the ball to a person with an opposing argument. Give everyone a chance to speak.
- (B) Attack the argument, not the person. Any insult results in a deduction from your participation grade.
- (C) Earn full credit by quoting from your evidence (and understanding what you have quoted).
- (D) Some credit can be earned if you make logical arguments without citing research, but it is best to cite your sources.
- (E) A minimum of points can be earned by simply participating. Enthusiasm is good.
- (F) Zero points for zero participation. (Absentees must write a persuasive essay that cites from their research.)

**Sources used for this lesson:**

*Jim Crow History*: <http://www.jimcrowhistory.org>; *How Desegregation Changed Us: The Effects of Racially Mixed Schools on Students and Society*: <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/>; *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream* (Public Affairs Books, 2004), Sheryll Cashin; *By the Color of Our Skin: The Illusion of Integration and the Reality of Race* (Plume Book, 2000), Leonard Steinhorn and Barbara Diggs-Brown.

**For more information about curriculum or programs at Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, contact:**

Education Specialist  
Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site  
2125 W. Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive  
Little Rock, AR 72202  
501-374-3179  
[www.nps.gov/chsc](http://www.nps.gov/chsc)

**To schedule a guided tour of the historic site please contact:**

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site  
2125 W. Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive  
Little Rock, AR 72202  
501-374-1957  
[chsc\\_visitor-center@nps.gov](mailto:chsc_visitor-center@nps.gov)  
[www.nps.gov/chsc](http://www.nps.gov/chsc)

