

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka / Immediate Reaction to the Decision

The editorials below are from “Editorial Excerpts from the Nation’s Press on Segregation Ruling,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1954.

Directions:

Read the following excerpts from editorials in newspapers and consider these questions:

- Does the editorial seem to support or reject the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown*? Find sentences that support your position.
- How are the editorials similar? How are they different? What do you believe accounts for the differences in perspectives?

Complete the table on page 4.

1. New York Times (New York, NY): “All God’s Chillun” (May 18, 1954)

It is true, of course, that the court is not talking of that sort of “equality” which produces interracial marriages. It is not talking of a social system at all. It is talking of a system of human rights which is foreshadowed in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, which stated “that all men are created equal.” Mr. Jefferson and the others who were responsible for the Declaration did not intend to say that all men are equally intelligent, equally good or equal in height or weight. They meant to say that all men were, and ought to be, equal before the law. If men are equal, children are equal, too. There is an even greater necessity in the case of children, whose opportunities to advance themselves and to be useful to the community may be lost if they do not have the right to be educated.

No one can deny that the mingling of the races in the schools of the seventeen states which have required segregation and the three states which have permitted it will create problems. The folkways in southern communities will have to be adapted to new conditions if white and Negro children, together with white and Negro teachers, are to enjoy not only equal facilities but the same facilities in the same schools.

The highest court in the land, the guardian of our national conscience, has reaffirmed its faith—and the undying American faith—in the equality of all men and all children before the law.

2. Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL): “End of Dual Society” (May 18, 1954)

Neither the atom bomb nor the hydrogen bomb will ever be as meaningful to our democracy as the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that racial segregation violates the spirit and letter of our Constitution. This means the beginning of the end of the dual society in American life and the . . . segregation which supported it.

3. Washington Post and Times-Herald (Washington, DC): “A ‘Healing’ Decision” (May 18, 1954)

The Supreme Court’s resolution yesterday of the school segregation cases affords all Americans an occasion for pride and gratification. The decision will prove, we are sure—whatever transient difficulties it may create and whatever irritations it may arouse—a profoundly healthy and healing one. It will serve—and speedily—to close an ancient wound too long allowed to fester. It will bring to an end a painful disparity between American principles and American practices. It will help to refurbish American prestige in a world which looks to this land for moral inspiration and restore the faith of Americans themselves in their own great values and traditions.

4. Jackson Daily News (Jackson, Mississippi): “Bloodstains On White Marble Steps” (May 18, 1954)

Human blood may stain Southern soil in many places because of this decision but the dark red stains of that blood will be on the marble steps of the United States Supreme Court building.

5. Atlanta Constitution (Atlanta, GA): “The Supreme Court Has Given Us Time” (May 18, 1954)

The court decision does not mean that Negro and white children will go to school together this fall. The court itself provides for a “cooling off” period. Not until next autumn will it even begin to hear arguments from the attorneys general of the 17 states involved on how to implement the ruling. Meanwhile, it is no time for hasty or ill-considered actions. It is no time to indulge demagogues on either side nor to listen to those who always are ready to incite violence and hate. It is a time for Georgia to think clearly. Our best minds must be put to work, not to destroy, but to seek out constructive conclusions.

6. Boston Herald (Boston, MA): “Equality Redefined” (May 18, 1954)

The Supreme Court's history-making decision against racial segregation in the public schools proves more than anything else that the Constitution is still a live and growing document. . . . The segregation ruling is frankly expedient. It recognizes the growing national feeling that

the separation of Negro (or other minority) children from the majority race at school age is an abuse of the democratic process and the democratic principle. But it is also the culmination of a series of judicial opinions which circumspectly prepared the way for change.

7. Cavalier Daily (University of Virginia): “Violates’ Way of Life” (May 18, 1954)

It is too early to tell what effect the Supreme Court decision to abolish segregated schools will have on the South Although it is hard from a strict legal point of view to justify any action contrary to law, we feel that the people of the South are justified in their bitterness concerning this decision. To many people this decision is contrary to a way of life and violates the way in which they have thought since 1619.

Based on the article excerpts, complete the table below. What were the excerpt’s main arguments? Was it in favor of following the precedent set in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (keeping segregation) or in favor of overturning the precedent (integration)?

Newspaper	Main arguments	Stay with Precedent/ Keep Segregation?	Overturn Precedent/ Begin Integration?
1. New York Times			
2. Chicago Defender			
3. Washington Post and Times-Herald			

4. Jackson Daily News			
5. Atlanta Constitution			
6. Boston Herald			
7. Cavalier Daily			