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## Review of *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* By James T. Patterson

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*Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy.* By James T. Patterson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Photographs, map, illustration, appendices, notes, bibliographic essay, acknowledgments, index. xxx + 285 pp. \$27.50.

Rendered during the postwar consensus period, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision struck at the core of *de jure* segregation. Recognizing the American educational system as a "great equalizer," Thurgood Marshall and other advocates insisted that the "separate but equal" doctrine codified by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case needed to be overturned to ensure opportunities for African Americans. Marshall found an ally in Chief Justice Earl Warren and his supporters on the Supreme Court who based their decision in the *Brown* case on the social science research of Kenneth and Mamie Clark and Gunnar Myrdal. Their findings suggested that African American children perceived themselves as inferior as a result of attending segregated schools. Integrated schools would provide African American students with the skills and resources necessary to succeed in a pluralist society.

*Brown* elicited a variety of responses as American school districts struggled to implement desegregation plans. Patterson uses an examination of desegregation attempts prior to *Brown* and a discussion of the impact desegregation had in Charlotte, Denver, and Boston (among other cities) as bookends for his description of the legal wrangling surrounding the 1954 case. The ideas and theories used in the *Brown* ruling spawned a multiplicity of opinions that would influence desegregation policies throughout subsequent decades and contribute to a revisionist critique of *Brown* by the 1990s.

Rather than concentrating solely on the 1954 case, Patterson highlights several early desegregation attempts at the Universities of Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas before discussing events in Topeka. These references to Great Plains communities allow the reader to

perceive segregation as not limited to southern states. Patterson uses the reflections of individuals such as the members of the Carter family of Mississippi to illustrate the abuse African American students faced in integrated settings and their determination to succeed at the secondary and university levels. These personal accounts demonstrate that African Americans held differing interpretations of desegregation. At one end of the continuum, proponents believed that other social, political, and economic restrictions would be lifted as a result of the ruling. Others, like the novelist Zora Neale Hurston, criticized Warren's conclusion that "separate but equal" educational facilities deprived children of equal opportunities and exacerbated inferiority. Hurston bristled at the assumption that held that African American students were inferior because they attended black-run community schools.

The exhaustive nature of this study helps illuminate the conflicting nature of race relations in the late twentieth century.

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