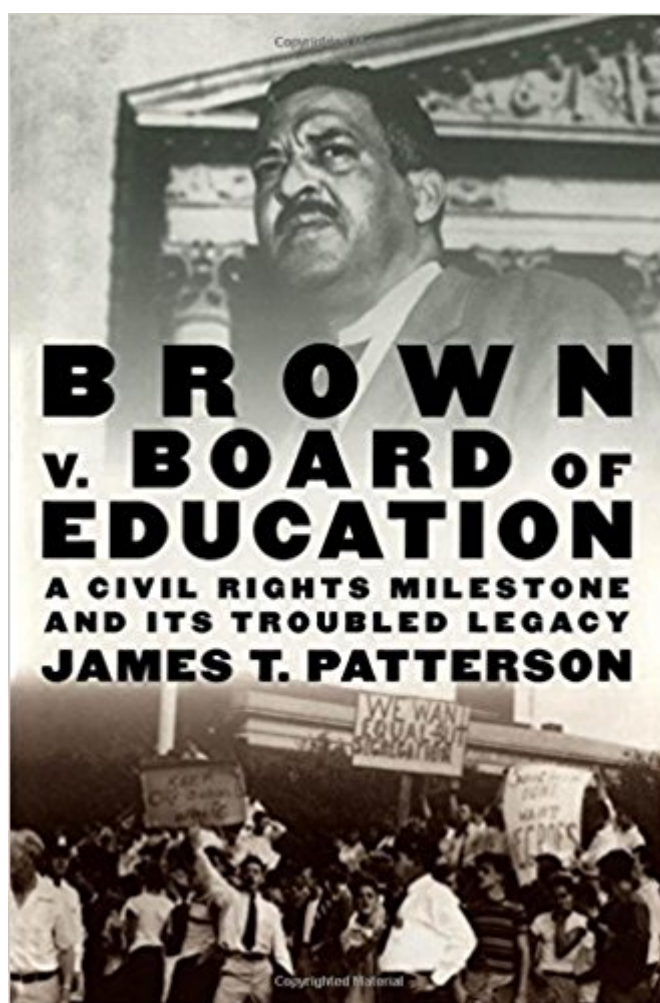


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# Brown V. Board Of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone And Its Troubled Legacy (Pivotal Moments In American History)



## Synopsis

2004 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's unanimous decision to end segregation in public schools. Many people were elated when Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in May 1954, the ruling that struck down state-sponsored racial segregation in America's public schools. Thurgood Marshall, chief attorney for the black families that launched the litigation, exclaimed later, "I was so happy, I was numb." The novelist Ralph Ellison wrote, "another battle of the Civil War has been won. The rest is up to us and I'm very glad. What a wonderful world of possibilities are unfolded for the children!" Here, in a concise, moving narrative, Bancroft Prize-winning historian James T. Patterson takes readers through the dramatic case and its fifty-year aftermath. A wide range of characters animates the story, from the little-known African Americans who dared to challenge Jim Crow with lawsuits (at great personal cost); to Thurgood Marshall, who later became a Justice himself; to Earl Warren, who shepherded a fractured Court to a unanimous decision. Others include segregationist politicians like Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas; Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon; and controversial Supreme Court justices such as William Rehnquist and Clarence Thomas. Most Americans still see *Brown* as a triumph--but was it? Patterson shrewdly explores the provocative questions that still swirl around the case. Could the Court--or President Eisenhower--have done more to ensure compliance with *Brown*? Did the decision touch off the modern civil rights movement? How useful are court-ordered busing and affirmative action against racial segregation? To what extent has racial mixing affected the academic achievement of black children? Where indeed do we go from here to realize the expectations of Marshall, Ellison, and others in 1954?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In one of the most explosive legal decisions of the century, *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that racial segregation in America's public schools was unconstitutional. The chief attorney for the African American families who initiated the legal challenge was Thurgood Marshall, who later became the first black person to serve as a Supreme Court Justice. In this brief, detailed book, historian James Patterson reconstructs the complex history of the watershed 1954 case, from its legal precursors to its troubling legacy. "To be sure, *Brown* called for changes that the Court itself could not enforce," he writes. "In time, however, some of those changes came to pass, even in schools, those most highly sensitive of institutions." Patterson outlines the stories of several influential pre-*Brown* cases and details the thinking and exploits of the legal minds involved with *Brown*, including Marshall and Chief Justice Earl Warren. He also follows the various responses to the decision by those most affected by it, including bigoted Arkansas governor Orval Faubus as well as President Dwight Eisenhower. More than a simple chronology, *Brown v. Board of Education* raises many questions about America's unfinished business of truly democratizing its educational system once and for all. Both instructive and disturbing, this book calls for us to question whether we will turn back the clock or demand movement forward. --Eugene Holley Jr. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Patterson (history, *Brown Univ.*, *Grand Expectations*) is eminently qualified to lead us through the saga of the Civil Rights movement as it relates to public education. The U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1954 decision overturned a way of thinking that had persisted largely unchallenged since the end of the Civil War. A commonly accepted legal theory supported by an 1896 Supreme Court decision (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) was based, the author notes, upon archaic psychological theories that had been superseded by modern theory supporting a linkage between racial segregation and concomitant feelings of inferiority and damage to motivation and, hence, to learning. The author devotes the rest of the book to the tedious and thorny issues of implementation that he believes were needlessly protracted because the Court, in an effort to achieve unanimity and, feeling the need to placate the Southern states by abstaining from inflammatory rhetoric or threat of force, laid down only broad guidelines. The result, notes the author, is a process that has lately actually

fluctuated back in the direction of permitting re-segregation in neighborhood schools where demographic changes resulting from private choice rather than public policy have produced a different racial mix. The issues are complex, profound, and ongoing, but the author provides balanced and extensive coverage. Recommended for academic and law libraries. DPhilip Y. Blue, New York State Supreme Court Criminal Branch Law Lib., New York Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book provides a credible introduction to a nuanced study not only of *Brown* but its limitations, particularly its inability to crack deeper structures of racial inequality in the United States. Patterson argues that these structures, rather than the product of irrational racial prejudice in the South, were in fact integral components of America's larger social and economic formation. Patterson does much to shed light on this formation and to show that, as much as Jim Crow might have angered liberals like Chief Justice Warren, it did not repel them enough to call for fundamental changes in American society. Just as Patterson deftly captures Warren's liberalism, so too does he convey white America's conflicted stance towards race. Eager to appear reconstructed, America proved reluctant to pay the price necessary for real reform. Eager to make an example of the South, Northern and Western whites proved remarkably conservative, quickly seeking refuge in the suburbs when their racial liberalism started to boomerang back on them. Relying on an impressive swath of secondary sources, Patterson weaves together parallel historiographies not only of the Supreme Court, but also the civil rights movement, massive resistance, white flight, suburban sprawl, and Republican politics. This sets the stage for an impressive argument, one that focuses not only on struggles to implement *Brown* in the South, but across the country. Indeed, Patterson's final hundred pages provide a compelling narrative of myriad, subtle rollbacks in civil rights gains during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s at the national level. Not only does Patterson capture the incessant subterfuges of southern segregationists, in other words, ones that lasted well into the 1980s and beyond, but he deftly expands his lens to show how these same segregationists found fervent allies in northern cities like Chicago and in liberal states like California. Patterson's expansive, national view points the way to new avenues of historical inquiry, and in particular to broader, more expansive understandings of *Brown*. Not simply a notable Supreme Court case, the ruling constituted something of a battlefield flare, a political event that illuminated a much larger struggle for economic, political, and even cultural resources. This struggle, undergirded by the hegemonic dominance of racial ideology in America, manifested itself in a tension between black activism and white resistance, between the rhetoric of tolerance and the reality of America's racialized social

hierarchy. Patterson has produced a well-written, judicious analysis of the Supreme Court's difficulties in orchestrating racial equality, one of America's most elusive, and perhaps for that very reason, grandest expectations.

Patterson shows the long road to integrated schools and it's still not truly implemented as "white flight" keeps schools and neighborhoods mostly segregated. . showing the limitations of legislation this book outlines the cases that helped shape Brown V. Board of Ed. not only showing the CONSTANT struggle to get this legislation passed but also the absolutely appalling stall tactics that went on for more than a decade to implement the follow through and state's and governor's abilities to stall and stall. everyone was worried about their children, everyone wanted the best for their kids, with that there is racism, evil, and violence..so many people wanting "what's best for their children" and willing to kill.. harm, maim to get what they want.. the fear and racism that this book shows becomes hard to fathom.. until you look at today's schools and realize .. many things have not changed at all.. while ..not "illegal" to integrate schools.. the poor and urban schools are still mostly non-white..and the struggle continues..

James T. Patterson's Brown v. Board of Education is an exceedingly well researched historical work on the pivotal cases faced on all judicial levels in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s regarding segregation in our nation's schools. Professor Patterson masterfully writes on not just the legal implications of the landmark decision(s) in Brown but also in regard to their social impact. He puts into a greater racial and societal context not only the meaning of Brown but also the strategies of Thurgood Marshall and his associates in deciding to bring before the Court when many other challenges to Jim Crow could have been argued with much legal and moral merit. Patterson tirelessly, but interestingly, cites case after case and puts each before the reader in the context of a broader societal consequence. He dispassionately argues the merit and challenges of desegregation as society was changing at a precipitous rate with "white flight" from our urban centers to affluence and the ability to "avoid" integration with the availability of private schools obviously not covered by Brown or the 14th Amendment. A theme seemingly in most, if not all, of Patterson's writings on the American 20th Century is the effect of expectations of the populous. Indeed his wonderful contribution to the Oxford Series of United States History is entitled "Grand Expectations". It is interesting how he weaves that theme into this much more specific narrative. "This is another way of reiterating an essential truth about Brown: so many larger postwar forces- rising expectations and restlessness among blacks; slowly changing white attitudes about racial

segregation; the Cold War, which left Jim Crow America vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy when it claimed to lead the Free World - were impelling the nation toward liberalization of its racial practices. This is a great book and is part of the Oxford Series of Pivotal Moments in American History. To state the utter obvious, the reader should be aware that this "moment" is still very much ongoing and, as such, this book is much broader, out of intellectual necessity, than one, or really two, Supreme Court decisions.

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