

RESEARCH BRIEF

Is *Brown v. Board of Education* the Cause for the Continual Decline in Black Teachers?



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Introduction

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was and will continue to be a landmark Supreme Court case (Irvin, 1988; Tillman, 2004). The ruling of *Brown* affected Black students, Black teachers and the Black community as a whole directly and indirectly (Foster, 1993). Since *Brown*, the Black teacher population has seen a steady decline. While various challenges make it difficult to determine whether the decline in Black teachers is due to *Brown* or other factors, research has been gathered and analyzed to answer the question, is *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) the cause for the continual decline in the Black teacher population?

Background

Throughout the 1950s-1970s, becoming a teacher was highly looked upon as a career within the Black community, especially for Black women (Graham, 1987; Howard & Milner, 2004; Tillman, 2004). Black teachers were viewed as more than teachers within the Black community (Foster, 1993; Karpinski, 2006; Irvin, 1988; Tillman, 2004). Black teachers were and are often still seen as mentors, and these teachers created kinship type relationships with their students, leading the students and families to view their teacher as more than just a teacher (Foster, 1993; Irvin, 1988; Tillman, 2004). Before *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), there were approximately 70,000 Black teachers throughout the nation accounting for roughly half of all Black professionals (Howard & Milner, 2004; Irvin, 1988). One of the key reasons as to why the Black teacher population was so large is

because of segregation. Due to segregation, there was a great need for Black educators because Whites would not and did not teach Black students in the South, which ensured many Blacks a job if they decided to become an educator (Karpinski, 2006; Irvin, 1988; Tillman, 2004).

After *Brown* passed, a noticeable shift occurred amongst the Black teacher population. Many Black teachers following the ruling of *Brown*, reported having unpleasant experiences within the new schools they were employed in if they were able to get hired (Howard & Milner, 2004). Black teachers continually had to “prove” their worth to White administration in order to get hired (Howard & Milner, 2004). Between 1954-1972, there were 39,386 document cases of Black teachers and administration being terminated from their jobs; these terminations occurred in 17 Southern states (Howard & Milner, 2004; Irvin, 1988). In other words, one-third of all Black teachers and administration were fired post-*Brown* within 18 years primarily in the South (Howard & Milner, 2004).

Research

Before *Brown*, 85 percent of the Black teacher population resided in the South (Ladson-Billings, 2004), making the loss of one-third of Black teachers and administration substantial. Likewise, between 1980-1981 and 1983-1984, the Black teacher population continued to decline further to roughly 6.4 percent or 5,000 in 10 southern states (Irvin, 1988). In 2011-2012, the current Black teacher population was reported to be at 8 percent, whereas Whites comprise 82

percent of the teacher population (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In addition, Ingersoll and May (2011), found that between the years 2003-2004, although minorities entered and/or re-entered the workforce as teachers in high numbers, 47,663, nearly 20 percent of all minority teachers, 56,244, left the following year.

The reasoning behind why Blacks are not becoming and/or are leaving the field of education varies. Some believe because Blacks are afforded more job opportunities, the desire to become a teacher is no longer present (Graham, 1987; Tillman, 2004). Likewise, Gordon (1994) conducted a research study with 140 teachers of color over a two-year timeframe to assess what they believed to be the reason for why students are color do not have a desire to become a teacher. Through her study, she concluded the three primary reasons why students are color do not become teachers are educational experiences, cultural and community concerns, and social and economic obstacles (Gordon, 1994). Each of the three categories has subtopics that further explained the cause behind students of color having a lack of interest in becoming a teacher which included: lack of preparation, more opportunities elsewhere, the absence of role models, lack of academic encouragement, negative image...etc. (Gordon, 1994).



Conclusion

Determining whether the continual decline in Black teacher population is directly correlated to the ruling of *Brown* depends upon whether one understands that *Brown* had many unintended consequences. While it is clear that because of *Brown* many Black teachers after the ruling and for years to follow lost their jobs, it is still unclear if *Brown* is fully responsible for why the decline in the Black teacher population has continued. If one understands and acknowledges that *Brown* forced a shift, then one may conclude that *Brown* is the reason for the longstanding shift in career for Blacks. In contrast, if one views the changes that occurred within the Black teacher population as a natural progression in the job market, then the findings merely display the constant change in job choice for Blacks.

Recommendations

1. Continue research to understand why Blacks are leaving and/or do not have a desire to become a teacher anymore. Research has clearly displayed that before *Brown*, the Black teacher population was larger and post-*Brown*, there has been a steady decline. Although a correlation between the two is clear, examining the influence individual state policies could potentially have on Black teachers is crucial. This includes continuing to research whether the teacher examination is indirectly racialized as Petchauer suggest as well as research how to minimize the impact regional location has on the Black teacher population.

2. Continue the discussion about what incentives are being made to recruit Black teachers and determine which ones will provide long-term success. The federal government has created the TEACH Grant to recruit more

teachers to teach in urban schools with an emphasis on future Black teachers. Analyzing the impact of said grant as well as other incentive measures the federal and state governments have created to recruit Blacks back into the field of education, could further unpack what long-term success will look like to recruit Black teachers.

3. Continue to analyze the benefits of reestablishing the Black teacher market. Research has shown teacher-student representation has a positive impact on students, especially Black students. If recruiting more Black teachers will have a positive effect academically, understanding whether more Black youths interest in teaching is a topic to explore.

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