



## A Look at Three New Books that Reflect on the *Brown v. Board Decision*

[by Lee Louis Gabriel]

Three new books deal with the ramifications of the *Brown* decision on schoolchildren and the broader implications on racial justice for all African-Americans. All three authors are unanimous in saying that *Brown* was a dismal failure in its effect on African-American schoolchildren. The United States resisted the mandate of *Brown* requiring equal and integrated schools. The authors blame the Supreme Court, who decided both *Brown I* and *Brown II*. They agree that *Brown I* was a courageous decision because it struck down legal discrimination and that *Brown II* was a major step backwards when it declared that desegregation should take place with “all deliberate speed.” The Court did not vindicate the rights of African-Americans with an immediate remedy; it basically asked African-Americans to be patient and to wait for equality. It was this phrase that gave politicians license to ignore *Brown*, ensuring that on its 50th anniversary, African-Americans are still waiting.

In *All Deliberate Speed: Reflections on the First Half-Century of Brown v. Board of Education*, Professor Charles Ogletree says that the failure of integration and equality in race relations is not the failure of African-Americans or some “amorphous sense of Black entitlement;” rather it is due to the failure of White America to live up to the ideals of “Reconstruction” or the “Great Society.” Professor Ogletree considers *Brown* a bold decision that ultimately failed because of three words: “all deliberate speed.”

Professor Ogletree said that the pursuit for integration in American higher education has also not been achieved. Although Michigan cases upheld affirmative action in higher education, Professor Ogletree posits that they fail to dispense with the “all deliberate speed” mindset that was adopted in the *Brown* case. He further asserts that although the Supreme Court did not raise further obstacles to *Brown*'s legacy of integration and equality, it also did very little to further the mandate of *Brown* in these cases.

Professor Ogletree also touches on the controversial issue of reparations. To him, reparations are a valid way for African-Americans to collect their “debt” from America. He believes that reparations are justified in light of American society's failure to adopt

the ideals set out in *Brown*. According to the author, many African-Americans have not benefited from the legacy of *Brown* or from affirmative actions already in place. The “all deliberate speed” or “go-slow” attitude of the United States towards integration and equality and not providing quality education to African-Americans has created the impetus for a lawsuit that wants compensation for the culpable role of the United States in using slave labor to build a strong economy.

In *Beyond Brown v. Board: The Final Battle for Excellence in American Education*, Ellis Cose states that on the 50th anniversary of *Brown*, the pursuit for excellence of African-Americans in American school systems is far from complete. Mr. Cose claims that to level the playing field in education, we must provide more resources to poor schoolchildren than to privileged schoolchildren, even if that means that states must spend more on poor schools than on rich schools.

Mr. Cose also points to South Africa, where the emphasis on school education is not on desegregation but rather on improving segregated schools. Mr. Cose acknowledges that integrated schools are important because in the United States, that is where the bulk of the money is found. Mr. Cose asserts, however, that rather than forcing integration at all cost on an unwilling

society, we should fund and improve poor schools where there is usually a large minority population. Mr. Cose asserts that we need to improve the schools in the communities where African-Americans live so that parents are able to be active participants in their children's education.

In *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, Professor Derrick Bell states that *Brown* was a decision that “promised so much but accomplished little.” Professor Bell provocatively argues that the *Brown* decision was a post-World War II decision that served to improve the United States' standing in the world. For the United States to extol the virtues of democracy and the evils of communism, the *Brown* decision was important to international relations, in order to have the upper hand in the moral war with the Russians. The United States could not have the Russians derisively pointing to it as a democratic country that allowed certain sectors of its population to remain repressed and legally discriminated against. To that end, many *amicus* briefs were filed in the *Brown* case pointing out the international ramifications of legalized discrimination jeopardizing the United States' standing in the world.

Professor Bell further states that standing alone, racial discrimination is insufficient



to make the government act and that relief from racial discrimination is only obtained when it benefits American society. Professor Bell posits that African-Americans are "third-party beneficiaries." Racial injustice has never been the major motivation for "racial remedial policies," but rather, it is the apparent self-interest of whites that has prompted a change in policy, thus making justice for African-Americans only incidental.

Overall, all three authors view the *Brown* decision as reluctantly embracing the ideals of integration and equality. To be sure, the authors also agree that *Brown* laid the foundation for the civil rights movement and gave validity to African-American claims of equality as Americans. The authors also conclude that African-Americans are certainly better off now than before the *Brown* decision. However, Brown's goal of integration and equality in the African-American community is still the exception rather than the rule.