

A Promise Unfulfilled: 150 Words on Brown v. Board

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A Promise Unfulfilled

By Alfie Kohn

Brown v. Board is a promise unfulfilled, a vision of racial justice unrealized. Segregation continues even as our society has become more diverse; disparities persist in the allocation of resources and the quality of education. Minority students are still more likely to get older books, larger classes, burnt-out teachers, and factory-style scripted instruction focused on facts and isolated skills instead of ideas. What's outrageous isn't that African-American (and Latino) kids' test scores are low, but that their schooling is more likely to be about raising scores than about promoting meaningful learning.

Yet *Brown* defines exactly how far we have to go, reminding us why we should be dissatisfied, even outraged, and active. Its declaration that separate is never equal also applies to other forms of segregation (including by gender) and to segregation within schools, such as when honors and gifted programs primarily benefit whites while children of color are disproportionately subjected to harsh discipline and "special needs" labels.

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