



Worksheet 3c – Key Decisions 5 Questions and Answers

Read the extract from the Court's decision and then discuss the questions that follow. You should agree on your answers before sharing them with the class.

Brown v. Board of Education

We come then to the question presented: does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.

To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. The effect of this separation on their educational opportunities was well stated by a finding in the Kansas case by a court which nevertheless felt compelled to rule against the Negro plaintiffs:

"Segregation of white and coloured children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the coloured children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn ...".

...

Whatever may have been the extent of psychological knowledge at the time of Plessy v. Ferguson, this finding is amply supported by modern authority. Any language in Plessy v. Ferguson contrary to this finding is rejected.

We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

Questions

- What arguments are used to overturn the Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*?
- What do these extracts from the decision reveal about contemporary attitudes towards the civil rights accorded to African-Americans?