
The American Psychological Association's Response to *Brown v. Board of Education*

The Case of Kenneth B. Clark

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In 1954, in Brown v. Board of Education, the Supreme Court struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine of the Plessy v. Ferguson decision (1896) that was the foundation of school segregation in 17 states and the District of Columbia. Brown is arguably the most important Supreme Court decision of the 20th century in terms of its influence on American history. Moreover, it has a special significance for psychology because it marked the first time that psychological research was cited in a Supreme Court decision and because social science data were seen as paramount in the Court's decision to end school segregation. This article describes psychologist Kenneth B. Clark's role in that case and the response of the American Psychological Association to scientific psychology's moment in a great spotlight.

If North American psychologists were asked to list the most important dates in the history of their field, certain events would likely be named: Gustav Fechner's mind-body insight on October 22, 1850; Wilhelm Wundt's establishment of his Leipzig laboratory in 1879; the publication of William James's *Principles of Psychology* in 1890; the founding of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1892; John Watson's behaviorist manifesto published in 1913; the first state psychology licensure law in Connecticut in 1941; and the Boulder Conference of 1949 that established the scientist-practitioner model of professional training in psychology.

Not on this short list, and perhaps not even associated with the discipline by many psychologists, is a date certainly important in American psychology's history: May 17, 1954. This date marks the public validation of psychology as a science through the use of psychological data in a 1954 Supreme Court case that many have called the legal decision of the 20th century because it changed the fabric of American society. How was such a monumental event received by psychologists? More particularly, how did organized psychology, specifically APA, respond to this historic occasion in which psychologists and psychology had been so intimately involved? We offer some possible answers to these questions by focusing on the psychologist most involved in the court decision, Kenneth Bancroft Clark.

The Brown v. Board of Education Decision

On the morning of May 17, 1954, there was no indication of any unusual activity on the agenda of the United States Supreme Court. That Monday promised to be uneventful. Reporters covering the Court sat in the pressroom waiting for the decisions to arrive by means of pneumatic tubes, thereby allowing them to file their stories for their papers or news agencies. They could choose to be part of the audience in the Court's chambers, hearing the decisions read aloud, but it was easier and faster to work from the printed opinions (Kluger, 1975).

Shortly after noon, the press was notified that the Court would be rendering its decision on the school desegregation cases that had occupied the lower courts before reaching the Supreme Court in December 1952 as *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Members of the press raced up the stairs to the courtroom to be part of the audience, many of them no doubt recognizing the historic significance of the moment. Chief Justice Earl Warren, who had been on the Court for only seven months and confirmed as Chief Justice only two months earlier, began reading the unanimous decision of the Court. He was two-thirds through the reading before he gave the first hint of what the Court's decision would be (Kluger, 1975).

The *Brown v. Board of Education* suit challenged the constitutionality of segregated public schools that had been

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sanctioned legally more than 130 years earlier and reinforced more recently by the Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that had established the “separate but equal” doctrine. In recent challenges to *Plessy*, opponents had argued that government-sanctioned separation of the races created a strong sense of inferiority among African Americans. Proponents argued that no such position was inherent in the law and that if African Americans interpreted it that way, then the problem was with them and not the law. As he spoke, Warren addressed that claim:

Segregation of White and colored children in public school has a detrimental effect upon the colored 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 the child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system. 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. (quoted in Kluger, 1975, p. 782)

That section of the decision and its footnote number 11—used to support the Court’s references to inferiority, motivation to learn, and retarded mental development—generated a firestorm of protest among legal scholars and many other critics who felt that the Court had based its decision on psychological rather than legal grounds. They not only pointed out the inappropriateness of appealing to psychology for legal judgments but also attacked the scientific soundness of the psychological evidence considered

by the Court (for arguments on both sides, see Cook, 1979, 1984; Gerard, 1983; Jackson, 2000a, 2000b). The Court asserted that the psychological evidence had been cited in the footnote only because it demonstrated the fallacy of the “cheap psychology of *Plessy*” and that it was not the foundation of the decision (Kluger, 1975, p. 706). As Richards (1997) has argued, however, “while, in point of fact, the Supreme Court . . . stressed that its decision was taken on purely legal and moral grounds, not scientific ones, the prominence given to the involvement in the case of psychologists and sociologists overshadowed this” (p. 245). Thus, the psychological evidence would become a lightning rod for critics of the decision in the years following *Brown v. Board of Education* (Tucker, 1994).

Kenneth B. Clark and the Desegregation Cases

Footnote 11 in the decision referred to the “psychological knowledge . . . supported by modern authority” (Kluger, 1975, p. 782). It listed seven social science publications. The first of these was “K. B. Clark, Effect of Prejudice and Discrimination on Personality Development (Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, 1950)” (quoted in Kluger, 1975, p. 785). In his history of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Richard Kluger has suggested that the placement of Clark’s (1950) work as first in the listing of seven sources was perhaps not arbitrary but a tribute to Clark for his considerable work in preparing the social science evidence for the case.

African American psychologist Kenneth B. Clark became involved with the litigation that would lead to *Brown v. Board of Education* in February 1951, when he was an assistant professor at City College in New York City. The call came from Robert Carter, an attorney with the Legal Defense Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where he was Thurgood Marshall’s deputy. Carter and Marshall were preparing to challenge the legality of segregated public schools. Carter had talked with Otto Klineberg, Columbia University psychologist and author of two critically important books, *Race Differences* (Klineberg, 1935b) and *Negro Intelligence and Selective Migration* (Klineberg, 1935a). Klineberg told Carter about the paper that Clark had prepared for the White House conference the previous year and suggested that Carter get in touch with Clark. Clark described his meeting with Carter as follows:

So Bob Carter and I met for the first time. He told me the problem they faced; they had to prove to the Court that segregation, in itself, damaged the personality of the Negro child. They had come upon this question themselves. They had formulated their legal approach and the only thing they didn’t know was whether they would get any support for it from the psychologists. They thought of Klineberg as the person who had done outstanding work in racial differences and he had worked with them before, giving testimony on the fact that there are no innate racial differences. So they went back to Otto and he said your man is Kenneth Clark. I wasn’t sure but I told Bob I would give him the manuscript to read, and if he felt it did fit into their legal structure then psychologists could help him. He took the manuscript and read it and

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called me about a week later, all excited. I'll never forget his words. He said, "This couldn't be better if it had been done for us." (Clark, n.d., pp. 132–133; see also Clark, 1986b, for a similar description)

Otto Klineberg (1986) has provided a supporting account and modestly claimed, "My own contribution to the case was the suggestion to ask Clark to work with the lawyers. The rest is history" (p. 55).

Marshall and Carter enlisted Clark's help almost immediately, asking him to testify in a segregation case in Charleston, South Carolina (*Briggs v. Elliott*) that was to come to trial in May 1951. Clark did so, taking to court his black and white dolls to explain how they had been used in the studies that he and his wife, Mamie Phipps Clark, had conducted on racial identification in African American children (see Clark & Clark, 1947; Lal, 2002, this issue). It was the beginning of a four-year involvement for Clark, including preparation for *Brown v. Board of Education* and assignments following the Court's 1954 decision. After South Carolina, he testified in cases in Delaware and Virginia, thus participating in three of the four desegregation cases that would be joined together as *Brown v. Board of Education*. Among the psychologists who testified for the plaintiffs in the lower courts were David Krech, Horace English, Louisa Holt, George Kelly, Helen Trager, Jerome Bruner, Otto Klineberg, Isidor Chein, M. Brewster Smith, and Mamie Phipps Clark.

Kenneth Clark joined Isidor Chein on a committee of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) chaired by Gerhart Saenger to prepare a social science appendix to the legal brief that the NAACP would submit to the Supreme Court. Stuart Cook later joined that committee, and he, Chein, and Clark wrote the initial draft of what would be called the social science statement ("Ap-

pendix to Appellants' Briefs," 1975). Their final product would be signed by 32 prominent social scientists including Floyd and Gordon Allport, Hadley Cantril, Allison Davis, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Katz, Gardner Murphy, Nevitt Sanford, and Brewster Smith. The seven sources cited in *Brown's* footnote 11 were drawn from the reference list to the social science statement.

Although there were many psychologists, sociologists, and other social scientists involved in supporting the efforts of the NAACP in the school desegregation cases, it was generally agreed that no one was more instrumental in that effort than Kenneth Clark. At a Division 26 symposium organized by John A. Popplestone and honoring the 25th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Brewster Smith (1979) said, "Kenneth Clark was the central figure in developing the social science support for the NAACP case" (p. 1). That opinion was echoed by Stuart Cook (1986) and, according to his biographer, by Thurgood Marshall (Williams, 1998). Clark used his passion, his energy, and his considerable work ethic to accumulate and organize the social science evidence needed for the trials. Subsequent to the May 1954 decision, he was heavily involved in gathering information and making recommendations about procedures to bring about school desegregation.

Psychology's Moment in the Spotlight

Since its beginnings in the last quarter of the 19th century, the "new" psychology had struggled to establish its identity as a legitimate science in America, separating itself from metaphysics, philosophy, and a popular psychology of the mind long in existence. In its early years, it sought to distance itself from phrenology, psychic research, and spiritualism, the pseudosciences that the public often confused with the new experimental psychology (Coon, 1992). In the 1920s, it battled psychoanalysis for the public's favor as the true science of the mind, a battle that psychologist-historian Gail Hornstein (1992) said was won by psychoanalysis.

In the 1930s, psychological science was attacked in books, magazine articles, and newspaper editorials as an art with misguided or unrealistic scientific aspirations (see Adams, 1931, 1934; "Page the Psychologists," 1934; Stolberg, 1930). The situation seemed bad enough that Walter Hunter, APA president in 1931, suggested changing the name of psychology to anthroponomy, a label that he believed was a more accurate description of the science and one that possessed fewer negative associations. In his autobiography, Hunter (1952) wrote, "I was never under any delusion that the designation of the science would be changed to anthroponomy, but the path of our science would have been much smoother in its public relations had some nonpsychic term designated it" (p. 172).

The success of psychologists' work for the military during World War II clearly helped the scientific and applied image of the field. Research opportunities for psychologists, largely through government contracts and grants, expanded the utility and visibility of psychological science after the war (Capshe, 1999). Moreover, the mental health needs of the returning veterans, along with

the planning of the Veterans Administration, the United States Public Health Service, and APA, were largely responsible for launching the professions of clinical and counseling psychology and the concomitant growth of academic programs to train those professionals. In the 20 years following the war, American psychology underwent a rate of growth unlike anything in its history in terms of both the science and the profession of psychology. Still, it could be argued that psychology had not overcome its lack of respect or what Keith Stanovich (2001) has lamented is its standing as the “Rodney Dangerfield of the sciences” (p. 194).

It was the continued quest for respectability and recognition that made the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision so important for psychology as science. Probably for the first time in American history, psychological research was cited as crucial evidence in a court decision—and in perhaps the most important court decision in 20th-century America.

A Time for Congratulations

For many African Americans living in 1954 and certainly for all of those psychologists, lawyers, clerks, and others who worked on behalf of the NAACP’s effort, May 17 must have provided a wealth of flashbulb memories. Otto Klineberg was working for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in Paris, France, when he got the word by telegram. He promptly wrote to his former student Kenneth Clark:

The great news has just reached me, and I am writing immediately because I know how you must be feeling, and because I want to take this occasion to congratulate you personally for the wonderful job that you have done. Although a number of social scientists did work with you, I have always felt that without your leadership and enthusiasm the task would not have been accomplished nearly so well. I noted with the very greatest of interest that there were a few references in the Supreme Court decision which indicated that what we collectively had to say did not go entirely unnoticed. . . . (Klineberg, 1954, p. 1)

Harvard University psychologist Gordon Allport, whose book *The Nature of Prejudice* (Allport, 1954b) had been published in January of that year, wrote to Clark the next day:

You are probably receiving congratulations on all sides. Let me add my word of admiration for your Herculean labors and adroit handling of social science evidence for the Supreme Court. The happy outcome marks an epoch in the development of social science, in the history of the Negro race, and in the improvement of American foreign relations. Since you had a large part to play in all these achievements I congratulate you with all my heart. (Allport, 1954a, p. 1)

The letters and telegrams in the Kenneth Bancroft Clark Papers in the Library of Congress congratulating Clark are full of admiration and praise for his organizational skills, leadership, and persistence. They express exuberance, warmth, and a clear appreciation of the historic significance of the decision. Many acknowledge the inherent endorsement of the value of social science, as noted in

the letters from Klineberg and Allport excerpted above. Many also indicate an awareness of the difficulties that lay ahead in making desegregated schools a reality and in eliminating other forms of segregation.

Buell Gallagher, president of the City College of New York, where Clark was a faculty member, wrote:

With you, I am proud, deeply moved, and humbly grateful. That the real task is now before us is the sobering meaning of the hour. But I cannot let the moment of rejoicing pass without entering in the record my profound appreciation of your part in setting straight the course of American history. (Gallagher, 1954, p. 1)

What must it be like to have a part in “setting straight the course of American history”? What is it like to know, as one writer put it in her letter to Clark, that one has “assisted in the future development of the educational, cultural, and economic life of the Negro citizens of America” (Lewis, 1954, p.1) or, from another letter, that one has advanced “the equality of all men” (Bachrach, 1954, p. 1)? In Clark’s case, he was ecstatic at the news of the decision: “My initial response was that of tremendous exhilaration. I just felt so enthusiastic. I felt joy at being an American. I was full of hope and optimism” (as quoted in Nyman, 1976, p. 112). In a few days, however, that feeling gave way to the grim realization of the many battles that lay ahead. Clark wrote to Klineberg:

These three weeks since the Court’s decision have been in many respects the most exciting period of my life. Starting from about 2:00 p.m. on May 17th, Mamie, Thurgood, Bob Carter and the entire staff of the Legal Defense and Educational Division of the NAACP and all of our friends have been celebrating. The first three or four days we were in the clouds and refused to be brought down to earth by a consideration of the really serious problems which we must now all face.

There are so many things which I wanted to enjoy with you during this period. My only regret is that you were not here to celebrate with us the victory of which you were so much a part. The Court left no doubt that it was basing its decision as much upon contemporary social science knowledge and theory as it was basing it upon law. Anyone who knows this field knows that you have been in the forefront of providing the basic facts upon which we could move from the ideas about racial differences which were prevalent at the time of the *Plessy* decision to those which we now hold and which made the present decision possible and tenable. (Clark, 1954b, p. 1)

Clark’s modesty was genuine and his feelings toward Klineberg ones of enormous respect and affection.

The Response of APA

While the NAACP team was celebrating its accomplishment and acknowledging the role of the social scientists in carrying the day for the lawsuit, what was happening within APA? To answer that question, we began by looking through the APA Papers and the Kenneth Bancroft Clark Papers, both housed at the Library of Congress, to see what correspondence existed between the two. We also looked at the minutes and correspondence associated with the APA Council of Representatives and Board of Directors. Furthermore, we examined all of the seemingly relevant cor-

respondence folders from 1952 to 1956, for example, the correspondence of Fillmore Sanford, the executive secretary of APA at the time of the *Brown* decision. We then expanded our search to the Stuart Cook Papers, Brewster Smith Papers, and SPSSI Papers, all housed at the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron, and to the Michael Amrine Papers at Georgetown University.

We were able to locate three letters from APA to Clark in 1954. One of those was dated four days prior to the Court's decision and, given the weekend, may have reached Clark on the Monday of the *Brown* decision. It was from Fillmore Sanford and informed Clark:

Two facts have just been brought to my attention: (a) you have expressed a willingness to have your name appear on a slate of candidates for election to the Committee on Academic Freedom and Conditions of Employment; (b) you are just before being dropped from membership in the Association for non-payment of dues. These two facts together constitute something of a problem. But only a technical one. . . . (Sanford, 1954a, p. 1)

These two events—news of the Supreme Court decision and news from APA that his dues were in arrears—make for an interesting juxtaposition! It seems a safe assumption that given the nature of the first event, the second one probably got no attention from Clark, at least not for some time. In fact, the evidence is clear on this point. Clark's secretary, Ruth Morton (1956), sent a check for \$58 to APA in September 1956, more than two years later, for "payment of dues for the years, 1954, 1955, and 1956" (p. 1).

The second letter from APA came from Lorraine Bouthilet, managing editor of the *American Psychologist*, and was written two weeks after the *Brown* decision. It informed Clark that he was scheduled for two presentations at the upcoming APA meeting and that APA guidelines limited participants to only one (Bouthilet, 1954). Had Bouthilet known Clark, one might assume that her letter would have included a note of congratulation, perhaps even as a postscript. There was none.

The third letter in 1954 was from Michael Amrine, who worked for APA as a public information consultant. He wrote to Clark in November encouraging him to use a speech he had given recently as the basis for an article in *Scientific American*. Clark replied, sending him copies of two presentations that he had given and asking for his suggestions about how they might be combined into a single article (Amrine, 1954a; Clark, 1954a).

It appears that there was no resolution from the APA Board of Directors or Council of Representatives commending Clark and the other psychologists for their excellent work on the case. None could be found in our search. Indeed, there is no mention of the *Brown* decision anywhere in the minutes of the board or council in the period from 1952 to 1956. The only evidence that the desegregation cases might have been discussed by the board appears in a report of board discussions by Sanford (1954b). The relevant section of the report is labeled "Psychology and Public Affairs," and it acknowledged that psychologists

were playing an increased role as expert witnesses in the courts and testifying before congressional committees, thus attempting to influence governmental decisions. Sanford commented that "such developments, pleasing to some and uncomfortable to others, appear to be inevitable concomitants of our maturation as science and profession" (Sanford, 1954b, p. 715). Perhaps paraphrasing some of the discussion at the board's September 1954 meeting, Sanford (1954b) noted that psychologists have

an increasing opportunity to contribute evidences, arguments, and points of view to the decision-making process of community, of government, and of society. Such an increasing opportunity brings with it an increasing responsibility and what to some represents an exhilarating challenge. How does psychology make its most effective contribution to its supporting society while maintaining its own sense of integrity? How does it play its increasingly influential role without doing insult to the traditions of science, scholarship, and democracy? (p. 715)

It is hard to imagine that in September 1954, with the *Brown* decision only a little more than three months old, the Supreme Court case and psychologists' participation in it were not part of the board's discussion of psychology and public affairs. Still, the report contains no such direct reference.

Perhaps there was an acknowledgment in "Across the Secretary's Desk," a monthly column in the *American Psychologist* that had been started by Dael Wolfe when the journal began publication in 1946 and continued by the subsequent executive secretaries of APA? That column typically reported Washington news related to psychology such as federal grants, legislation, Veterans Administration activities, and other items of interest to psychologists. Yet nowhere in those columns was any mention of *Brown* found, despite there being material where the *Brown* cases would have been relevant. For example, in a 1953 column, Sanford (1953a) included a section on "Psychology and the Law," yet no mention was made of the psychological testimony in the cases leading to *Brown* or the brief on social science research filed with the Supreme Court.

Were there any special acknowledgments for Clark and the others at the annual meeting of the association held in New York City, New York, in September 1954? No evidence could be found of a reception, social hour, or other session that recognized psychology's role in the *Brown* decision. Clark was involved in two symposia at that meeting (apparently he did not cancel one of those as requested by Bouthilet). One was a symposium on problems of desegregation sponsored by SPSSI. It was chaired by Isidor Chein and included presentations by Clark, John Dean (a sociologist from Cornell University), and Thurgood Marshall. It is not known for certain whether this symposium was organized before or after the court decision, but it seems likely, given the date of Bouthilet's letter, that it was before. The second symposium in which Clark participated was sponsored by APA's Division on Clinical Psychology and was on the subject of cultural approaches to psychotherapy.

At the 1955 APA meeting in San Francisco, California, there was another SPSSI-sponsored symposium on

research on racial differences in which Clark participated. At the 1956 meeting in Chicago, Illinois, there were two SPSSI meetings, one a symposium and the other a workshop, both on desegregation, but Clark was not listed as a participant in either. In summary, nowhere in the APA programs for 1954–1956 is there any mention of *Brown*.

We also looked at the articles, comments, and notes and news sections in the *American Psychologist* between 1951 and 1956 to see if there were mentions of the lower court desegregation cases, *Brown*, or issues of segregation. There was a brief article written by Martin Grossack, a professor at Philander Smith College, that appeared in the May 1954 issue, the month of the court decision. This article reported the results of a survey of African Americans' perceptions of psychology and called for psychologists to do a better job of communicating the results of their research, especially as it would benefit minority group members (Grossack, 1954). In the following year, there was a single comment by Robert Perloff (1955) encouraging psychologists to use their science to aid the transition in schools that was mandated by the Court's desegregation decision. Two articles were published in 1956 on psychologists as expert witnesses in court. Both articles were received in the journal's editorial office after the *Brown* decision, yet neither mentioned psychologists' involvement in the cases leading up to that lawsuit (McCary, 1956; Schofield, 1956). Finally, there were two items in the "Psychological Notes and News" sections in 1955, the first appearing about a year after the *Brown* decision, that announced a grant program sponsored by SPSSI for research on desegregation. Isidor Chein chaired the grant awards committee, which included Kenneth Clark and Brewster Smith as well (see "Psychological Notes and News: Grants-in-Aid for Research on Desegregation," 1955, "Psychological Notes and News: Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues," 1955).

In March 1955, almost a year after the *Brown* decision, Sanford wrote to Clark inviting him to do "a piece for the *American Psychologist* on psychological research and segregation" (Sanford, 1955, p. 1). The invitation was at the suggestion of Stuart Cook, a point Sanford acknowledged in his letter. Amrine was also encouraging of the article. Sanford (1955) added:

Such an article would, I feel, be of real interest to many of our readers and the story should be recorded. I would hope, however, that you could write with relative brevity. We are facing pretty stringent space problems in the *American Psychologist*. (p. 1)

It is likely that the "story" to which Sanford referred was the involvement of psychologists in *Brown* and the cases leading up to that decision. For reasons unknown, Clark did not write such an article for the journal or, if he did, it was not published. The latter seems unlikely because the article had been invited by the journal's editor himself. Stuart Cook, however, did publish an article (Cook, 1957) on desegregation in the *American Psychologist* in 1957. Although Cook's article referred to the 1954 decision, it was not a recounting, in any way, of the story of psychologists' involvement in that case.

Michael Amrine had been hired by APA in 1952 to spearhead its public information efforts. Six weeks before the *Brown* decision, he issued a press release on behalf of APA entitled "Desegregation: An Appraisal of the Evidence" (Amrine, 1954b). The release was intended to publicize a recent issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* written by Clark (1953) that provided data on American communities that had undergone voluntary desegregation of schools. The press release noted that

Dr. Clark's investigations are a direct result of the issue pending before the United States Supreme Court: whether segregation by law of facilities for Negro and White children in the public schools shall be ruled unconstitutional, regardless of purported "equality". The findings presented in this Journal, which has just been released, form part of the evidence under consideration by the Court. What, the Court asked in effect, is known about the social outcome of sudden or gradual segregation? (Amrine, 1954b, p. 1)

A search of relevant archival collections has not turned up any other APA press releases related to issues of desegregation or *Brown v. Board of Education* in the years 1952 through 1956.

In summary, following the 1954 Supreme Court decision, there was apparently no formal or official recognition from APA for any of the psychologists participating in *Brown*. There were no commendations from the APA board or APA council, no letters of congratulation or commendation from the office of the APA executive secretary. There was no official recognition of the work of the psychologists at subsequent APA meetings other than through the programs organized by SPSSI, and those do not appear to have been celebratory. There was no coverage of the subject in the *American Psychologist*, not even in the "Across the Secretary's Desk" column where such coverage would have been quite appropriate. Nor was there any coverage of *Brown* in the *American Psychologist* in the several articles on, for example, psychologists as expert witnesses, where not only would mention of the decision seem quite appropriate but its exclusion seems calculated. Only Robert Perloff's brief comment (Perloff, 1955) in the journal in 1955 made any mention of the court case in the years 1954 through 1956. How could it be that APA ignored such a visible accomplishment? Is it possible that the involvement of psychology in such a controversial case was not viewed as an accomplishment in 1954? Was racism a factor?

Why the Lack of Response From APA?

It is easy to slip into a presentist interpretation of the events of 1954 or what Butterfield (1931) called "Whig history," that is, an interpretation of the past in the context of the values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices of the present. Were psychological research to be cited in a Supreme Court decision today—especially one of the magnitude of *Brown v. Board of Education*—one can imagine a flurry of activity from APA that would include press releases, special symposia and celebratory events at the annual convention,

and citations from the APA president for the individuals whose research was cited or who worked on the court case. In short, there would be incredible fanfare over what Klineberg (1986) described (with reference to the mention of psychology in the *Brown* decision) as “the greatest compliment ever paid to psychology by the powers-that-be in our own or any other country” (p. 54). Yet America is very different today, psychologists are different, and APA, too, is a very different organization. In discussing the possible reasons for a lack of response from APA to the *Brown* decision, we have sought to understand APA and psychology in the 1950s in terms of the perception of the significance of the court case, psychologists’ beliefs about race, APA’s position on issuance of public resolutions, the perception of SPSSI as a leftist organization, and the controversy over the scientific evidence presented in the desegregation trials.

The Perceived Magnitude of *Brown v. Board of Education*

Today, there seems little doubt about the significance of the 1954 Court decision as a defining event in American history. Editors at Oxford University Press have labeled it as such by making a book on *Brown* the initial title in a new series of books called “Pivotal Moments in American History” (see Patterson, 2001). Legal scholar Michael Klarman (1994) has written, “Constitutional lawyers and historians generally deem *Brown v. Board of Education* to be the most important United States Supreme Court decision of the twentieth century, and possibly of all time” (p. 81). Still, there is debate today about its role in the history of civil rights and racial equality in the second half of the 20th century and, of greater importance to our questions, about how important the decision was perceived to be when it was rendered in 1954.

Was the *Brown* decision viewed as an important decision in 1954? Could APA’s lack of response have been because the association did not consider the decision to be of critical importance? The newspaper coverage of the decision suggests that the press viewed it as important. Of course, the issue of school desegregation was an ongoing one because the 1954 decision called for a further Supreme Court decision on a timetable and suggested procedures for the actual desegregation to begin. That second decision (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1955, which also involved a brief prepared by Kenneth Clark and other social scientists recommending strongly against gradualness of desegregation), rendered on May 31, 1955, is usually referred to as *Brown II*; it ordered that the desegregation of public schools should proceed “with all deliberate speed” (quoted in Kluger, 1975, p. 745), a wording that had been adopted as a compromise between those who favored immediacy and those who argued for a more gradual transition. The wording, which Tucker (1994) labeled oxymoronic, proved to favor the gradualists as many school districts in the deep South did not begin to comply with the law until the 1970s.

The first *Brown* decision had been awaited for many months; thus, there was much anticipation built up in America’s Black community. Patterson (2001) described

how many African Americans vividly recalled their excitement over the news of 1954 in the way that their ancestors had recalled the events of the day on which they heard the news of President Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Kluger (1975), on the other hand, described a more subdued response from African Americans, stating that they had witnessed the good intentions of the American government before and were taking a wait-and-see attitude regarding the ultimate impact of the decision. Legal scholars in 1954 recognized the case as one of the most important of all time, and some argued that the decision was the most important in the history of the Court (Kluger, 1975). *Time* magazine declared the decision to be the landmark decision of the Court; no other decision had “directly affected so many American families” (Kluger, 1975, p. 709).

Historian Ben Keppel (1995) has written, “From the moment of its announcement, the *Brown* decision became a sacred and redemptive chapter in the history of American democracy” (p. 115). In the 1950s, segregation in America had been used in Communist rhetoric to point to the hypocrisy of the nation. *Time* magazine called the Court decision a “timely reassertion of the basic American principle that ‘all men are created equal’ ” (quoted in Keppel, 1995, p. 116). As Keppel (1995) noted, the message that the decision sent abroad was “that America was as good as its creed” (p. 116).

The comments offered here (and many more of similar vein could be included) suggest that the *Brown* decision’s importance was recognized by various publics in 1954. Surely, psychologists would have been as aware as any other group of citizens of the meaning and significance of the Court’s decision. Moreover, APA leadership was aware of its members’ work on behalf of the plaintiffs in the various lower court cases and in preparation of the social science brief for the Supreme Court. Thus, it seems unlikely that APA’s lack of response was based on a view of the Court decision as being of marginal importance.

A Divided Psychology

In 1954, racially segregated schools existed by law in 17 states and the District of Columbia and were permitted in 4 other states at the discretion of local school districts. Other forms of racial segregation prevalent at the time could be found in churches, theaters, trains, buses, restaurants, housing, work settings, mental institutions, prisons, restrooms, and drinking fountains. In the 1950s, racism was visible in most American institutions, including polling booths, and it was no less present in psychology as an integral part of American society. Graham Richards (1997) has written, “Psychology is never separate from its host culture, the psychological concerns of which it shares, articulates, and reflects” (p. 153). Thus, for many psychologists, the *Brown* decision would not have been a cause for celebration, a point that Stuart Cook (1957) recognized in writing in the *American Psychologist* in 1957 about desegregation: “As citizens we may consider the Court’s rulings wise or unwise, we may applaud or condemn specific actions taken in the South” (p. 1, emphasis in original). Cook was willing to

concede differences of opinion as citizens, but regardless of those differences, he argued that as psychologists, there was an obligation to bring the objective methods of the field to bear on the questions dividing the country. Of course, many psychologists opposed to a social action agenda for their science would take strong issue with the claim for such an obligation.

The division within American psychology was evident in the lower court cases leading to *Brown*. In a 1952 Virginia case (*Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*), the attorneys for the state of Virginia, who were aware of the psychological testimony from the earlier cases in South Carolina, Kansas, and Delaware, were determined to counteract that testimony. They brought in a Richmond, Virginia, child psychiatrist (William H. Kelly) and two psychologists (John Nelson Buck, a clinical psychologist, and Henry E. Garrett, chair of the Psychology Department at Columbia University and formerly president of APA in 1946) to testify as expert witnesses on behalf of the state.

Buck, who for more than 20 years had administered personality tests to patients entering the state mental hospital in Lynchburg, Virginia, was presented as an expert on psychological testing. He attacked the survey research of Isidor Chein and the doll studies and interviews of Kenneth and Mamie Clark as methodologically flawed and thus open to other interpretations. Garrett, the state of Virginia's star witness, had been the doctoral advisor for Mamie Clark and a member of the doctoral committees of Chein and Kenneth Clark. He viewed his assignment as "the role of teacher whose sad duty it was to report that his pupils had let their good intentions get in the way of objective science. . . . [They] were pushing their own political and moral agenda, dressed in scientific garb" (Jackson, 2000b, p. 241). In his testimony, Garrett characterized Brewster Smith's statements about the psychological damage of segregation as idealistic and lacking in common sense. He attacked Chein's surveys on segregation as yielding results that were dictated solely by the ways the questions were asked. He disparaged the work of the Clarks, arguing that their results were caused by disruptions in the schools that had preceded the student interviews (Kluger, 1975). Referring to Kenneth Clark's days as a student at Columbia University, Garrett said that he was "none too bright. . . . he was about a C student, but he'd rank pretty high for a Negro" (quoted in Kluger, 1975, p. 502).

Garrett argued that "the principle of separation in education . . . is long and well established in American life" (Kluger, 1975, p. 502); he supported separate schools for Whites and African Americans, he said, as long as the schools were truly equal. Indeed, Garrett advocated strongly for his segregationist beliefs, as described by historian of psychology Andrew Winston (1998): "In the 1950s Garrett helped organize an international group of scholars [the International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics (IAAEE)] dedicated to preventing race mixing, preserving segregation, and promoting the principles of early 20th century eugenics and

'race hygiene' " (p. 179). Clearly, in his court testimony, Garrett was pushing his own political agenda.

Undoubtedly, Garrett was not alone in his views on segregation, and at least one source has suggested that his views might have been commonplace among American psychologists in the 1950s. Richards (1997) wrote:

Within American psychology's institutional structures, notably the APA, the anti-racist camp had relatively little power. . . . SPSSI could be little more than a specific lobby or interest group. With figures such as Garrett and [Stanley David] Porteus remaining eminent and respected within the APA, there was little hope of engineering any unambiguous, formal anti-racist commitment from the organisation on behalf of U.S. Psychology as a whole. (p. 254)

Although the antiracist group in psychology may have had little political power, its membership likely exceeded Richards' (1997) claim of "camp" size. Samelson (1978), in an article on the history of the psychology of race, documented the rather dramatic change of American psychological opinion from studies of the so-called race problem at the beginning of the 20th century to studies of prejudice by the 1930s. He noted that the Great Depression gave "many psychologists a powerful push toward the left" (Samelson, 1978, p. 273). Supporting Samelson's claim are two surveys: The first was of psychologist opinions taken from members attending the 1939 APA meeting and showed their responses to be "liberal, progressive, democratic" (Gundlach, 1940, p. 620), and the second was a survey of social psychologists (and other social scientists) that showed 90% believed that "segregation has detrimental psychological effects on members of racial and religious groups which are segregated, even if equal facilities are provided" (Deutscher & Chein, 1948, p. 261). It was this latter survey that Chein had presented in his Virginia court testimony and that Garrett had attacked based on the wording of the questions. In actuality, the questionnaire was a sound one, and the Deutscher and Chein (1948) survey was one of the studies the Supreme Court chose to list in footnote 11 of the *Brown* decision.

The experiences of World War II and Adolf Hitler's vision of a master race also made many Americans, psychologists included, reexamine their views on race. Made aware of the fact that African American members of APA were being discriminated against in convention hotels, APA's Council of Representatives adopted a policy in 1950 of not meeting at any hotels or other venues where minority members would face discrimination. That policy led to the cancellation of a planned meeting in Miami Beach, Florida, in 1957 when it was determined that some hotels and restaurants would not accommodate Black psychologists. The meeting was moved to New York City instead (Smith, 1992). Still, although both psychology and racial attitudes in America were undergoing change in the 1950s, racial questions continued to divide psychology's house. Such a division made it difficult for APA to speak on political and social issues without offending many members. (Note that a 1954 survey of "social attitudes of leading psychologists," avoided race altogether, focusing instead on atti-

tudes about divorce, the death penalty, euthanasia, and religion; Keehn, 1955, p. 208.)

APA and Public Statements

Today, APA issues occasional resolutions that address social and political issues. These resolutions are approved by the Council of Representatives, APA's policy-making body. When the resolutions are approved by council, they are usually accompanied by a plan of dissemination. In its history of making such public statements by means of these resolutions, APA has typically come under attack each time from at least some members who resign because of the resolution or threaten to do so if APA will not cease making such pronouncements. The varied concerns of these members include failing to put the issue to the vote of the entire membership, making claims that may not be well supported by psychological science, or just venturing into political domains where the aggrieved members believe APA has no business being.

Psychologists' aversions to political or social pronouncements have a long history in American psychology, grounded in part in the belief that science and application are separate activities and in the long-standing prejudices held against applied work. These forces were part of what stimulated the founding of SPSSI in the 1930s.

In the midst of the Depression and a host of social ills that had become more evident during America's economic crisis, a group of psychologists had the apparently radical idea of using psychology to solve some of the problems facing society. In 1936, they founded SPSSI to promote such social action. Whereas 333 of APA's nearly 2,000 members joined the new organization in its initial year, there were many other APA members who worried about its intent. George H. Estabrooks, a psychologist at Colgate University, wrote to Isadore Krechevsky (David Krech), expressing a complaint that was echoed by other psychologists who responded to Krech's invitation to join the new society:

With regard to your mimeographed sheets concerning the participation of psychologists in the contemporary political world, allow me to register my hearty dissent with approximately everything contained therein. If psychologists, as individuals, wish to make themselves politically vocal on any topic—white, red, or pink—it seems to me that is wholly up to them. . . . If any group of us wish to organize as a “Committee for the Propagation of Mild Pinkism”, for goodness sakes let us organize ourselves as such and not in camouflage under the protecting skirts of the American Psychological Association. (Estabrooks, 1936, p. 1)

SPSSI, which joined a reorganized APA in 1945 as Division 9, was founded in part to use psychological science to address social and political issues. In the 1930s, SPSSI had issued policy statements as a scientific organization, but the society evidently changed its policy in the 1940s and 1950s (Jackson, 1998). Perhaps the change came because of its official ties to APA.

APA was reluctant to pursue such pronouncements as a regular part of its agenda, but it did approve and distribute occasional resolutions such as one in the 1920s on psycho-

logical testing and several in the 1930s on academic freedom. According to Richards (1997), within APA in the 1950s, “a policy of explicit avoidance of political issues was adopted and adhered to” (p. 254). However, no formal statement of such a policy could be found in the (incomplete) records of the APA Council of Representatives or Board of Directors. Evidence of this policy does exist in several letters in the APA Archives and other sources, for example, a letter from Roger Russell (APA's executive secretary, who succeeded Sanford in 1956) to Stuart Cook concerning requests for comments on a magazine article (McGurk, 1956) asserting the intellectual inferiority of African Americans: “We were approached by the Associated Press but in line with APA policy referred them to experts on matters of this kind, including yourself” (Russell, 1956).

Yet APA did take some political stands. In 1949, in the midst of McCarthyism, APA's Board of Directors sent a letter to President Harry Truman arguing that loyalty investigations should be made fairer by allowing accused persons knowledge of the charges and evidence against them (Wolfe, 1949). In that same year, APA founded a committee—the Committee of the Association on Academic Freedom and Civil Liberties—to deal with complaints about violations of academic freedom. Perhaps someone thought the committee name was too broad or too controversial. For unknown reasons, it was changed in 1951 to the Committee on Academic Freedom and Conditions of Employment, the committee that Kenneth Clark expressed interest in joining in 1954 (Smith, 1992). Moreover, APA approved resolutions in the 1950s, for example, notifying California Governor Earl Warren in 1950 that because of the loyalty oath required by the state, APA was encouraging its members not to accept teaching or research positions there until conditions of academic freedom improved (Sargent & Harris, 1986). That resolution brought objections from the membership, who wondered, “By what statistical formula does a sample of 10 (Board of Directors) represent a population of 8,500 (APA membership)” (Sell, 1951, p. 179)?

In 1952, APA wrote to the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau that because of the McCarran-Walter Act (which continued restrictions on immigration to the United States on the basis of country of origin), the association would not invite the International Congress of Psychology to meet in New York City in 1954 (Sanford, 1952). Moreover, in 1953, the APA Board of Directors passed a resolution opposed to “legislation restricting to any one profession the application of psychological techniques and knowledge” (Sanford, 1953b, p. 208).

In summary, it is difficult to argue that APA's lack of response to *Brown* was due to a policy of no official responses on political matters. Such a policy may have been in the official rules that governed APA operations, or the policy may have been only an unwritten, informal one. Clearly, APA endorsed resolutions in the 1950s. Did the organization do so inconsistently? It can be argued that the resolutions that were passed dealt principally with issues of academic freedom, freedom of scientific interchange, and

the rights of psychologists in professional practice. APA did not respond officially to the claims in the 1950s about inferiority of intelligence in Blacks even when asked to do so. Perhaps APA avoided comment in the belief that the issue was political or social rather than scientific. The inferiority claims being made, however, were based on allegedly scientific evidence. It seems likely the topic was avoided largely because of its controversial nature. If so, then APA would have wanted to avoid noting psychology's involvement in *Brown v. Board of Education* as well. Moreover, if the left-leaning SPSSI was reluctant to issue official resolutions on issues such as race, it is not surprising that APA would show a similar reluctance.

SPSSI as a "Communist-Inspired" Organization

We have already indicated that when SPSSI was formed, there were psychologists who refused to join because they viewed the new society as pink, that is, as having Communist leanings or a Communist-inspired agenda (see the Estabrooks [1936] letter quoted earlier). In the SPSSI Papers at the University of Akron, there are several other letters expressing this concern. One of SPSSI's founders, Ross Stagner (1986), acknowledged that the initial membership of the society included "Norman Thomas socialists[,] some sympathizers with the Communist party, some disciples of Leon Trotsky" (p. 38). Also, as Ben Harris (1980) has reported, the FBI established a file on SPSSI in the 1930s because of its perceived leftist agenda. Andrew Winston (personal communication, March 4, 2001), in noting the juxtaposition of McCarthyism and the work of psychologists on the *Brown* cases, has suggested that because the psychologists who were involved in battling segregation were prominent in SPSSI, "the whole enterprise was viewed by some psychologists as politically suspect." Thus, APA's silence on the issues of *Brown* may have had to do with fears about the possible fallout from supporting the activities of what was perceived as a leftist organization or perhaps with the belief of some (many?) psychologists that desegregation efforts were Communist inspired.

Evaluations of the Scientific Evidence

The social science evidence presented in the lower court trials and included in the "Appendix to Appellants' Briefs" (1975) filed with the suit by the NAACP was attacked from its very beginnings. The inconsistencies in the Clarks' doll studies were particularly criticized by attorneys testifying for the defendants at the lower courts and before the Supreme Court (Newby, 1969; Tucker, 1994). Members of the Supreme Court shared some of the concerns about the status of psychology as an objective science. In a memorandum to his fellow justices dated three months before the *Brown* decision, Justice Robert Jackson wrote:

I do not think we should import into the concept of equal protection of the law these elusive psychological and subjective factors. They are not determinable with satisfactory objectivity or measurable with reasonable certainty. If we adhere to objective cri-

teria the judicial process will still be capricious enough. (quoted in Kluger, 1975, p. 689)

After the Court's decision was announced, Raymond Moley was one of scores of writers to denigrate psychology as a science. In his column in *Newsweek* magazine, he noted, "The assumption by the court that these psychological writings constitute firm and lasting facts determined by scientific methods is nonsense" (Moley, 1956, p. 104).

Many opponents of the *Brown* decision criticized the psychologists for acting as social reformers and not as dispassionate scientists (see Jackson, 1998, for a refutation of these charges). Garrett, in particular, had opened the door to attacks on the social science cited in *Brown*, and there was no shortage of such published accounts, particularly criticizing the doll studies of the Clarks that had actually begun as Mamie Clark's master's thesis research (see Clark, 1986a; Guthrie, 1990) at Howard University in the late 1930s (see Jackson, 2000b, for an excellent treatment of these arguments).

The decision started a new debate over race differences in intelligence (Guthrie, 1998), for example, an article by Villanova University psychologist and founding member of IAAEE Frank McGurk (1956), in the then pro-segregationist magazine *U.S. News & World Report*, that asserted the intellectual inferiority of African Americans and their limited capacity for education. This article elicited many published replies, both pro and con, with respect to McGurk's data and his interpretations, but none of the replies carried an APA endorsement.

Perhaps the attacks on the specific sources cited in footnote 11 of *Brown* made APA reluctant to respond as an organization in defense of psychology. Instead, the strategy was to identify psychologists who seemed best suited as experts to respond and to ask them to write something for publication.

Summary and Conclusion

We began this article by arguing that the inclusion of citations to psychological publications and comments about psychological research in the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision of 1954 represented one of American psychology's greatest triumphs, arguably its greatest. That outcome was the result of individual psychologists working with the NAACP with the support of SPSSI. It was never an APA action.

We have described APA's response to the *Brown* decision and the psychologists involved or, more accurately, APA's lack of response. Finally, we have offered some explanations for why no official recognition was forthcoming.

In the years that followed the Court's decision, African American psychologists pressed APA for actions important to minority psychologists such as better training opportunities for minority graduate students, more involvement of minority psychologists on the boards and committees of APA, hiring of minority staffers to work in the APA central office, and greater attention to issues of concern for minority psychologists. When it was clear that APA would

not provide the needed support, 200 Black psychologists met at the 1968 annual APA convention in San Francisco. By the end of that meeting, they had founded the Association of Black Psychologists, or ABPsi, as it came to be known (Guthrie, 1998).

The rise of the American civil rights movement in the 1960s gave new attention to Kenneth Clark's work. He had served as president of SPSSI in 1960. A new edition of his book (Clark, 1963) on raising children without prejudice appeared in 1963, and his *Dark Ghetto* (Clark, 1965) was published in 1965. The following year, he edited a book with Talcott Parsons entitled *The Negro American*, for which President Lyndon Johnson wrote a foreword (Clark & Parsons, 1966). These publications, plus his advocacy in the 1950s and 1960s and his prominent role in *Brown*, "launched him on a path that would culminate in his becoming the 'reigning academic' of the civil rights movement" (Keppel, 1995, p. 128).

In 1970, Kenneth Clark served as president of APA, the first ethnic minority psychologist to hold that position and the only African American to have held it to date. For APA, part of the legacy of his presidency was the establishment in 1971 of the Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility for Psychology (BSERP), which gave social and ethical concerns a major position for advocacy within APA (see Pickren & Tomes, 2002, this issue). Eventually, BSERP had oversight for APA's offices of women's programs, ethnic minority affairs, and ethics.

In 1994, at the 102nd annual meeting of APA and exactly 40 years after the *Brown* decision, Clark was presented with the APA Award for Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to Psychology. He was only the sixth psychologist to receive that prestigious award. The citation read in part:

Your contributions to the Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Board of Education* were instrumental in having the Court find that racial segregation in the schools is psychologically damaging to children and, therefore, unconstitutional. Your contributions also marked the first time the Supreme Court considered social science research in its deliberations, blazing the trail for future contributions and further social action. . . . (quoted by Judy A. Strassburger, personal communication, September 1, 1999)

Kenneth Clark's life has been one of scientific advocacy on racial issues, especially prejudice and discrimination (see Keppel, 1995; Phillips, 2000, for descriptions of that work). Although he has written several books that have contributed importantly to the debates on civil rights and to an understanding of the Black experience in America, he is clearly best known—as Richard Kluger (1975) has named him—as "the doll man" for his pivotal role in *Brown v. Board of Education*. It was the defining moment of his life. The elation of that moment in 1954 eventually gave way to despair over the lack of progress in the subsequent decades. Thirty years later, a year after the death of his wife, Clark (1986a), speaking at a conference reflecting on the fate of the *Brown* decision, said:

Thirty years after *Brown*, I must accept the fact that my wife left this earth despondent at seeing that damage to children is being

knowingly and silently accepted by a nation that claims to be democratic. Thirty years after *Brown*, I feel a sense of hopelessness, rather than optimism, because the underlying theme of *Plessy* and the explicit statements of *Dred Scott* persist. The majority of Americans still believe in and vote on the assumption that Blacks are not worthy of the respect, and the acceptance of their humanity, which our democracy provides to others. (p. 21)

It is a sad fact that the legal decisions on race set in motion by *Brown v. Board of Education* did not bring about the equality dreamed of by many ethnic minorities (see Keppel, 2002, this issue). Yet, as a scientist, Kenneth Clark did his part to advance toward that hoped-for equality. In doing so, he has enjoyed a moment that few people will ever experience—the knowledge that his and Mamie's psychological research and work with the NAACP helped to change the course of American history.

There has been much debate among historians and other scholars in the past 30 years regarding the legacy of the *Brown* decision in affecting racial equality in America. Some have argued that the desegregation of the 1950s and 1960s was already underway before the Court decision and would have progressed better without the bitterness and backlash aroused by the federal mandate (Klarman, 1994). Others have acknowledged that, although the Court was not able to legislate social change with the *Brown* decision, the clear legal declaration against segregated schools was the watershed event stimulating the eventual collapse of many forms of discrimination (Patterson, 2001). That the task has yet to be completed almost 50 years later is still "the sobering meaning of the hour" (Gallagher, 1954, p. 1).

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