

Raymond Wolters. *Race and Education, 1954-2007*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008. xi + 313 pp. \$44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-1828-5.

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Blasphemer or Voice of Loyal Opposition: Raymond Wolters on Race and Education

The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision is a, if not the, sacred cow of education. Its societal impact cannot be understated, as it gave impetus to the civil rights movement. Its legal impact cannot be minimized, as it has become one of the most often-cited U.S. Supreme Court cases of all time. Its educational outcome is substantial, as it became the basis for cases concerning not only race, but also language, giving rise to the bilingual education movement; disability, giving rise to P. L. 94-142 which became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; and sex, used to help justify Title IX of the Higher Education Act. While equality and social justice remains on the U.S. horizon, *Brown* represents an important and powerful step in that direction, which is why *Race and Education, 1954-2007* is so troubling. It is not that Wolters's writing is off-putting, his research faulty, or his conclusions unmerited; it is that he rather blasphemously reminds scholars, specifically scholars affiliated with educational foundations who are most apt to worship at the altar of *Brown*, that they may be worshipping a false idol.

Wolters has long reminded us that the implementation of *Brown* was troublesome at best. Admitting that his work "differs from the conventional wisdom," Wolters argues "that *Brown* was based on dubious understanding of Constitutional history and social science" and that it ultimately made desegregation problematic "in terms of educational benefits ... and integration" (p. vii). Throughout the book, Wolters uses a combination of "narration, evocation, and explanation within a descriptive chronology" to examine *Brown* through a variety of lenses (p. ix). In chapter 1, "Constitutional History and Social Science: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *Stell v. Savannah Chatham* (1963)," he argues that the reversal of *Brown*, which resulted from the Savannah case, proves the ineffectiveness of using social science to decide a constitutional challenge. The second chapter, "School Reform of

the 1950's: The Road Not Taken," has Wolters using his historian's lens but he actually only looks at two reformers: Hyman Rickover and James Conant, all but ignoring the work of many other educational reformers of the period.[1]

Chapters 3 and 4 examine the outcome of *Brown* on the districts involved. The third chapter continues in this historic vein: "Desegregation Begins: Topeka, Washington, Wilmington, and the Border States" provides anecdotal evidence of the harsh, sometimes violent, resistance that arose with implementation of the *Brown* decision. In the fourth chapter, "In the Deep South: Massive Resistance and Grudging Compliance," Wolters summarizes two main oppositional forces to *Brown*: James Kilpatrick's constitutional refutations and Carleton Putnam's arguments. He uses these two individuals to examine the remaining locales involved in the decision (Prince Edward County, VA and Summerton, SC) as well as Atlanta, GA and Memphis, TN, citing these as examples of the supposed failures of *Brown*. In Wolters's view, the challenges faced by each of these districts in implementing desegregation is proof positive that the entire process has been a failure, not merely a form of growing pains.

Wolters uses both legal and historical lenses in chapters 5 and 6, which lay the groundwork for explaining how desegregation came to be reinterpreted as integration. In chapter 5, "Desegregation Transformed," Wolters shows abuses heaped upon the pioneers of desegregation, particularly in the Deep South, and how they led to the change from not using race as a basis for school entrance to using it as a means to achieve balance in school enrollments. The changes came as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court rulings in *Green v. New Kent County* (1968) and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (1971), both of which transformed the goal from desegregation—simply opening schools to all students—to integration—forced mixing by race. Wolters also includes a bit more

national focus, discussing the Nixon administration's effects on the issue and how it played out in the northern states.

Chapter 6, "Educational Reform of the 1960's," focuses on three main reform movements: a return to a discussion of Conant's work, a drive for increased local control, and the 1966 Coleman Report. In each, the move to integrate rather than desegregate found more grounds for its case. Still considered controversial, the 1966 report entitled "Equality of Educational Opportunity" raised several controversial arguments, such as that school funding has little effect on student achievement; that student background and socioeconomic status are the most important factors in learning; that funding for black schools was nearly equal to that for white schools by the 1960s; and that black students benefited from racially mixed classrooms.

In the ensuing chapters, Wolters shifts more clearly from dispassionate narrator to editorialist, as evidenced by the title of chapter 7, "The Travails of Integration." Working from the flawed perspective that segregation "resulted primarily from personal choices and socioeconomic factors—because some individuals preferred to live near others of their race," among other reasons, Wolters cites cases where integration was forced upon the public (p. 190). Using Syracuse, NY, New Castle County, DE, Dallas, TX, and Portland, OR as examples and critiquing works that favor integration, Wolters proposes that integration has, in fact, been harmful to schooling in the United States.

Chapter 8 turns to a real problem of integration often overlooked by scholars of education: "Controversy over White Flight and the Effects of Racially Balanced Integration" presents a detailed examination of the problem from 1958 through the busing controversies of the 1970s. These controversies started with a pair of U.S. Supreme Court cases, the 1971 *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* ruling, which upheld the constitutionality of busing to end school segregation in dual school systems, and the 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* decision, which limited the reach of busing across district lines only when evidence of *de jure* segregation across multiple school districts existed. In addition to resistance within the African American community, Wolters cites scholars and activists, such as James Coleman, Nancy St. John, and David Armor, who argued against such busing from the early 1970s through to the 1990s. In addition, in this chapter, Wolters identifies present efforts against integration, such as the change of mind of former pro-integrationist Derrick Bell. Wolters also explores

the "acting white" controversy—the notion that African American students have not performed well in school since, "[b]ecause of the past history of racial discrimination in employment[,] ... black students did not expect to benefit from doing well in school." This lack of expectations led to the development of "a peer group culture that discouraged academic effort as 'acting white'" (p. 247). Wolters also details the heated resistance scholars such as Bell have encountered, including academic censure, demonization in the popular press, *ad hominem* attacks during professional presentations, boycotts of colleagues' courses, and activist protests against their ranks.

In chapter 9, "From Brown to Green and Back," Wolters once again assumes the legal lens, presenting an overview of U.S. Supreme Court cases in the 1980s and 1990s overturning integration. Focusing on the city of Charlotte, NC in the *Swann* case, Wolters presents evidence of educational and public resistance to integration efforts, up through lawsuits resolved in 2002 that ultimately ended the practice.[2] This argument is furthered in chapter 10, "The Diversity Rationale," in which the author examines contemporary arguments in favor of integration that cite the beneficial effects of diversity, yet supplies evidence to the contrary, ultimately ending with the 2007 case of Seattle and Louisville that overturned integration, an outcome Wolters favors.

While not the intent of the author, there is a real danger that some readers may take Wolters's work as a defense of segregation, if not an open call for its return. While it is necessary to represent history in its proper context, regardless of contemporary opinions, Wolters may be critiqued for not presenting any of the widely accepted counters against racist arguments.[3] However, the reader should refrain from simply dismissing this work: the arguments Wolters raises are too compelling for such dismissal.

Many of the points that Wolters raises are valid criticisms of the implementation of *Brown*, most significantly, the shift from desegregation to integration—and the concomitant problems that ensued. However, in his almost offhand dismissal of integration simply because the majority of U.S. citizens never came to accept it, Wolters misses the forest for the trees: by so narrowly focusing on integration, he misses completely the larger social gains that arose from the movements. One point Wolters hints at throughout the book but never explicitly explores is the fact that *Brown* and subsequent integration movements required public schools to do something that no other aspect of U.S. society has ever been forced to do.

No other aspect of U.S. society has been legally forced to desegregate, let alone integrate. As long as desegregation remains the exclusive purview of the schools, it will never fully be successful.

Another issue to take umbrage at is Wolters's total dismissal of the democratic purpose behind education in the United States. He understands the purpose of school simply as academic preparation. However, it was not Progressive educators such as John Dewey and William Kilpatrick who first called for a democratic purpose to schools. From the days of Noah Webster to the time Horace Mann called for the creation of a common school system, preparing students to become good citizens of the republic has been completely entwined with the overall purposes of schooling. It is easy for those not immediately involved in the public schools to believe that such efforts should be reserved for other institutions such as families or churches. However, the reality is that if good citizenship and other democratic values are not taught in the public schools, then likely such lessons will not be taught anywhere. In addition to these broad criticisms of the book, there are a variety of flaws that, while none too major, tend to distract from the strength of the work overall. In the interest of readability and expedience, as well as bolstering his argument, Wolters tends to oversimplify matters. This is evidenced when he equates Albert Lynd's 1950 article, "Quackery in the Public Schools," with Arthur Bestor's 1953 book *Educational Wastelands* and when he claims that the nation's focus on standards in the wake of Sputnik was "more important at that time than achieving racially balanced integration" (p. 45). His third and fourth chapters essentially repeat his 1992 book, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of Desegregation*, with some minor additions; anyone who has read that previous work will find this chapter redundant.

Whether one considers Wolters a blasphemer, a teller of a counternarrative or cautionary tale, or the voice of loyal opposition, those who engage in research regarding race and education or focusing around *Brown* should include his work among their collection. His contribu-

tion may not stand up to other counternarratives, such as Lino Graglia's 1976 *Disaster by Decree* or David Armor's 1995 *Forced Justice* (a work to which Wolters refers liberally throughout his book), nor does it necessarily explore much new territory when compared to his previous book, but his well-researched narrative does provide a necessary counterpoint to the dominant view, and a reminder of the arguments against such efforts. It is a glimpse into the minds of those who believe the counternarrative of *Brown*, a glimpse that current activists in social justice should heed.

Notes

[1]. Many anti-progressive education reformers of the period were similar to Rickover and Conant, who advocated a "back-to-basics" approach, including the University of Illinois Committee on School Mathematics and the Physical Science Study Committee. However, the 1950s also saw radical social reconstructionists such as Theodore Brameld and progressive curriculum reformers such as Hilda Taba, continuing their work. In addition, the curriculum theorist Ralph Tyler directly advised three presidents (Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson), demonstrating progressive influence at the federal level.

[2]. In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed lower court findings that busing in Charlotte was a "pretext" for "continuing 'race conscious, diversity-enhancing policies in perpetuity.'" Wolters argues this case is significant because "the school system that pioneered busing for integration" was forced to "halt its affirmative admissions policies" (p. 277).

[3]. A handful of counters to such arguments may be found in scholarly works such as the excellent collection edited by Ashley Montagu, *Race and IQ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Also, with respect to why race matters in schooling, see Joel Spring, *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009).

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