

# School Desegregation in New Orleans

## **Objectives:**

Students will use primary source materials to learn about the response to *Brown v. Board of Education* in Louisiana.

- Students will examine the legal reasoning behind the *Brown* decision.
- Students will analyze the popular response to school integration in New Orleans.
- Students will evaluate the constitutionality of attempts by the state to evade the *Brown* decision.
- Students will evaluate the long-term impact of school desegregation.

## **Grade-Level Expectations:**

- Analyze the causes, effects, or impact of a given historical event in Louisiana (H-1A-M3).
- Analyze given source material to identify opinion, propaganda, or bias (H-1A-M4).
- Identify the powers of state government as defined in the Louisiana Constitution and compare/contrast those powers to the powers of the federal government (C-1A-M3).
- Describe ways by which citizens can organize, monitor, or influence government and politics at the local, state, and national levels (C-1D-M4).

## **Explanation of Lesson:**

The lesson allows students to explore how an important aspect of the Civil Rights Movement unfolded in Louisiana. The primary sources challenge students to question why many whites engaged in a campaign of massive resistance to prevent school desegregation. The assessment questions require students to examine states' rights versus federal power to explain why attempts to nullify the *Brown* decision were ultimately unsuccessful. The lesson also prompts students to consider the long-term effects of the *Brown* decision.

## **Essential Questions:**

How and why did the state of Louisiana attempt to disobey the *Brown* decision?

How did the people of New Orleans respond to school integration?

How did politicians, business leaders and the media contribute to the school crisis?

What were the long-term effects of the *Brown* decision?

### **Documents:**

- *Oliver L. Brown et.al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (KS) et.al.* (Syllabus)
- Interposition legislation passed by the Louisiana legislature in November of 1960 (excerpt)
- Photographs, “Seven women picketing against desegregation of schools” and “Parents removing children from school”
- Letter to Judge J. Skelley Wright

### **Teaching Suggestion:**

Read *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges aloud to class before discussing documents.

### **Directions:**

Use the background information, class notes and personal research to answer the questions from the 5 (five) documents which follow.

### **Background information:**

The **landmark** *Oliver L. Brown et.al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (KS) et.al.* Supreme Court decision of 1954 **mandated** the integration of public schools. The first *Brown* decision did not **stipulate** a timeline or process for integrating schools, and the second ruling issued the next year vaguely called for desegregation to occur with “all deliberate speed” (Wall and Cummins 356-357). Southern states, including Louisiana, used a variety of tactics to avoid integration. Some proponents of the *Brown* decision mistakenly believed integration would be easier to accomplish in New Orleans than in other areas of the “deep South.” Louisiana already had the largest number of registered African American voters in the South, and Archbishop Rummel also expressed his support for integration and called on his Catholic parishioners to accept the *Brown* decision. Six years after *Brown*, however, none of the public schools in Louisiana had been integrated. Despite the promises of the archbishop, Catholic schools also remained segregated because of the strong white opposition to integration.

In other Southern states, governors had closed down schools rather than integrate them. A poll released in 1960 found that a slight majority of parents favored keeping public schools open in the event of integration. African American students made up 60% of the public school population, and their parents overwhelmingly supported integration. White parents, on the other hand, strongly opposed desegregation; 12,229 white parents surveyed voted for closure, while only 2,707 voted for desegregation. The Orleans Parish School Board announced that it would only consider the opinions of the white parents (*New Orleans School Crisis* 6).

Citizens’ groups organized on both sides of the issue. Save Our Schools (SOS) warned of the serious consequences of closing public schools and called for the school board to obey federal court orders. The Citizens’ Council of Greater New Orleans organized a campaign of massive resistance to school integration. The Citizens’ Council intentionally fueled the fears of white parents and accused SOS of being influenced by Communists. The local media also contributed to the resistance. The most important newspaper, *The Times-Picayune*, would not take a firm position and did not attempt to persuade its readers to accept the *Brown* decision. WDSU was the only news station that actively supported keeping the schools open (Fairclough 240).

Under order from the US District Court, two schools in Orleans Parish integrated on November 14, 1960. While 137 first grade students applied to the Orleans Parish School Board to transfer to an

integrated school, only four girls were selected. Accompanied by federal marshals, three students went to McDonogh No. 19, and one student went to William Frantz Elementary. Both schools were located in the Ninth Ward, a low-income neighborhood with little political influence. The next day, the Citizens' Council held a meeting in the Municipal Auditorium attended by over 5,000 people. The leaders of the meeting called for protests and boycotts to resist integration. Leander Perez, political boss of Plaquemines Parish, was quoted as saying, "Don't wait for your daughters to be raped by these Congolese. Do something about it now" (*New Orleans School Crisis* 14). On November 16<sup>th</sup>, crowds marched to the school board building shouting, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate" (*New Orleans School Crisis* 14). The mayor, DeLesseps Morrison, went on television that night to urge an end to the violence, but he also announced that the New Orleans Police Department was not enforcing the federal court order for school integration. Riots broke out after the announcement, and several people were injured. The police arrested 250 people, but almost none of the white rioters were arrested (Wall and Cummins 377).

Perez opened schools in neighboring St. Bernard Parish to the white students in the Ninth Ward, but through the duration of the school crisis, almost 300 white students were not re-enrolled in any school. Yet the state legislature urged white parents to continue the school boycott. The state also forbade banks to lend the Orleans Parish School Board money, and they refused to pay teacher salaries. (*New Orleans School Crisis* 15)

Every morning a group of 40-200 women, known as the "cheerleaders", shouted obscene, racist threats at parents and children as they entered Frantz and McDonogh 19. By the end of the month, all of the white parents except two had removed their children from the schools. In response, Save Our Schools organized a carpooling campaign in an attempt to increase white enrollment. In addition, the police finally **cordoned** off the areas around the two schools, and at Frantz the number of white pupils increased to twenty-three. The extreme segregationists then resorted to threatening phone calls and **vandalism**, and enrollment dropped sharply again (Fairclough 249).

The school crisis was covered extensively by the national media, and much of the publicity was negative. Over time business leaders began to worry about the economic impact on the city. Eventually many of the **elites** of New Orleans signed a declaration in support of preserving public education and obeying the federal courts. The declaration was printed in the newspaper one week before the opening of school in September 1961. A new mayor, Victor Schiro, had also been appointed by the city council after Mayor Morrison took a position as a US ambassador. Mayor Schiro pledged to preserve order, and he assigned 60 police officers to each school undergoing integration. The plan was successful and integration occurred without any major incidents. That being said, the **token** integration consisted of only twelve African Americans in six schools. McDonough 19 was still able to enroll only four white students (Fairclough 255). The pupil placement law ensured that only a handful of African American students would make it through the screening procedure used for transfers. Eventually the Orleans Parish School Board was forced to abolish the pupil placement law and expand integration to the upper grades, but they did so slowly and **reluctantly**. By 1964, only 809 African Americans had entered formerly white schools (Fairclough 263).

#### **Works Cited**

- Fairclough, Adam. *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1995. Print.
- The New Orleans School Crisis/ Report of the Louisiana State Advisory Committee on Civil Rights*. 1961. Print.
- Wall, Bennett H., and Light Townsend Cummins. *Louisiana: A History*. 5th ed. Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2008. Print.

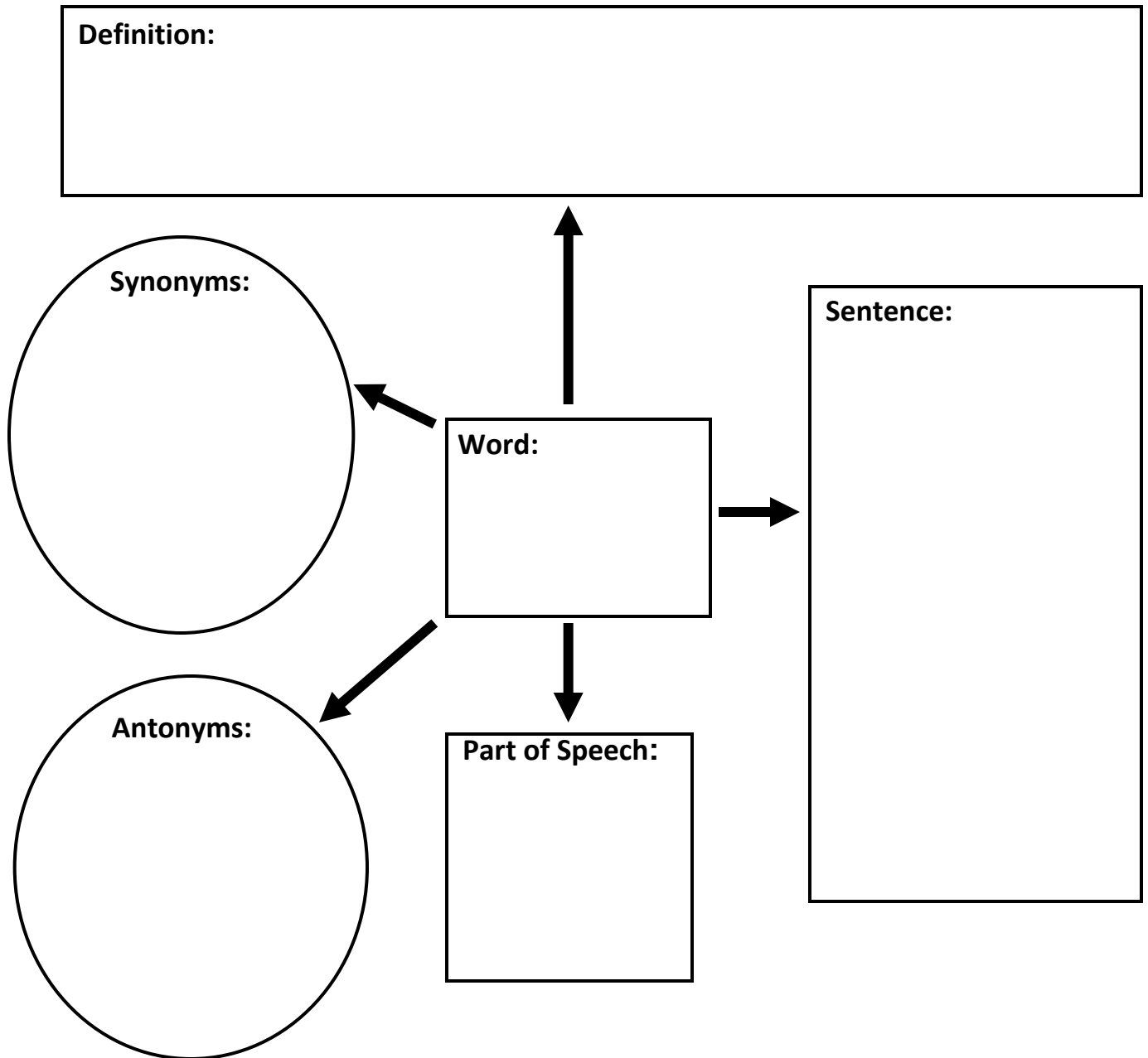
 **Vocabulary:**

WORD	+	√	?	EXAMPLE	DEFINITION
landmark					
mandated					
stipulate					
cordoned					
vandalism					
elites					
token					
reluctantly					

**Directions**

1. Examine the list of words you have written in the first column.
2. Put a “+” next to each word you know well, and give an accurate example and definition of the word. Your definition and example must relate to the unit of study.
3. Place a “√” next to any words for which you can write only a definition or an example, but not both.
4. Place a “?” next to words that are new to you.

## Vocabulary Map



## **DOCUMENT 1: Primary Source interpretation**

BROWN ET AL. v. BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA ET AL.

No. 1. APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF KANSAS. <sup>[\*]</sup>

Argued December 9, 1952. -- Reargued December 8, 1953. --  
Decided May 17, 1954.

### Syllabus.

Segregation of white and Negro children in the public schools of a State solely on the basis of race, pursuant to state laws permitting or requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment -- even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors of white and Negro schools may be equal. Pp. 486-496.

(a) The history of the Fourteenth Amendment is inconclusive as to its intended effect on public education. Pp. 489-490.

(b) The question presented in these cases must be determined, not on the basis of conditions existing when the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted, but in the light of the full development of public education and its present place in American life throughout the Nation. Pp. 492-493.

(c) Where a State has undertaken to provide an opportunity for an education in its public schools, such an opportunity is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. P. 493.

(d) Segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal. Pp. 493-494.

(e) The "separate but equal" doctrine adopted in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, has no place in the field of public education. P. 495.

Source: <http://brownvboard.org/research/opinions/347us483.htm>

### **Document Based Questions:**



1. When did the Supreme Court issue the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling?



2. Briefly summarize the decision made by the Supreme Court.



3. The *Brown* decision overturned the precedent of “separate but equal” established by the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. Explain the reasoning provided in the decision for overturning *Plessy*.



Extended Response:

Though *Brown v. Board of Education* required the integration of public schools, the Orleans Parish School Board did not even begin the process of desegregation for over six years. Why was there such a long delay between the Supreme Court decision and its implementation?



**DOCUMENT 2: Primary Source interpretation**

**Excerpt from Interposition Legislation (November 1960)**

Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana: ...

Section 2. That the decision of the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, on May 17, 1954, constitutes a deliberate, palpable and dangerous attempt to change the true intent and meaning of the Constitution, and said decision itself is unconstitutional and in violation of the 14th Amendment, and it thereby establishes a judicial precedent, if allowed to stand, for the ultimate destruction of constitutional government. . . .

Section 4. That the decisions of the Federal District Courts in the State of Louisiana, prohibiting the maintenance of separate schools for whites and negroes and ordering said schools to be racially integrated . . . all based solely and entirely on the pronouncements of *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*, are null, void and of no effect as to the State of Louisiana, its subdivisions and School Boards and the duly elected or appointed officials, agents and employees thereof. . . .

Source: Race Relations Law Reporter 5 (Winter 1960): 1177–82

<http://www.fjc.gov/history/docs/bush.pdf>

**Document Based Questions:**



1. What was occurring in New Orleans when the Louisiana legislature passed this law?



2. Summarize the legislature’s position on the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.



3. The law declares the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision “null and void” in Louisiana. Was this law constitutional? Explain.



Extended Response:

Every legislator except for two voted in favor of the bill above, and the governor signed it into law. Analyze the legislators’ motivations in resisting integration.



**DOCUMENT 3: Picture interpretation**



Seven women picketing against desegregation: Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, acc. no 1974.25.25.113



Parents removing children from school: Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, acc. no 1974.25.25.165

### Document Based Questions:



1. What are the women in the picture protesting about?



2. Explain the meaning of the text, "It's not an old fashioned idea to fight for states' sovereignty."



3. Why were the parents removing their children from the school? What happened to white families who kept their children in integrated schools?



Extended Response:

Considering the massive voter opposition to integration, how should the political and business leaders of New Orleans have responded to the school crisis?

**DOCUMENT 4: Primary Source interpretation**

**Letter to Judge J. Skelley Wright**

[No salutation]:

This is a note to let you know as a teacher of Caddo Parish, I will teach my classes that you are the sole cause of integration in Louisiana. You should have heard them discuss you today. Lots of them called you a Castro in America and I agreed with them. Only one child seemed to think you were doing the only thing you could do and she was almost laughed out of the room.

In talking to one of our local attorneys, he said he knew you personally and you would sell your mother's birthright if it would further your own financial security and so far as character you had none. I am indeed sorry Louisiana has such a man as its federal judge. From what we can learn you have always loved Negroes and have associated with them even more than whites during the past few years.

This is to let you know I will continue teaching my classes how un-American you are and how you hate the white school children of this State.

A teacher that hates you  
Shreveport  
November 16, 1960

Source: J. Skelly Wright Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Box 12  
<http://www.fjc.gov/history/docs/bush.pdf>

**Document Based Questions:**



1. Who wrote the letter above? Why is it unsigned?



2. Who was Judge J. Skelley Wright? Was he “the sole cause of integration in Louisiana”?







3. Why do the students allegedly call Judge Wright a “Castro in America”?



Extended Response:

Nearly everyone in the class considers Judge Wright to be a villain. If you disagreed, would you have voiced your opinion? What would the consequences have been?

**Directions:** Read the selected PPIE information and write a short response to each in the right column.

GLE Strands/Themes	PPIE (People, Places, Ideas, Events)	Long term effect/result
 <p><b>Civics</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The Louisiana legislature nullified the <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> decision and used various tactics to prevent or delay integration.</li> <li>*Federal courts struck down all of the laws and resolutions passed by the state legislature to maintain segregation in schools.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>Economics</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The New Orleans Chamber of Commerce and the business community were reluctant to take a stand during the school crisis.</li> <li>* As the protests against school integration continued, national media coverage increased.</li> <li>*Slowly business leaders recognized the negative economic impact.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>Geography</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The school board chose two schools for token integration in 1960, William Frantz and McDonogh No. 19.</li> <li>*Both schools were located in the Ninth Ward, which was one of the poorest areas of the city with the least political influence.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>History</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*On November 14, 1960, four African American girls integrated two public schools in Louisiana.</li> <li>*Parents withdrew their children from the schools, and the White Citizens' Council led a campaign of massive resistance.</li> <li>*By 1961 the violence had ended, but many parents still did not want to send their children to integrated schools.</li> </ul>	

**Summative Evaluation/Assessment Directions:**

Using notes from class discussions, answers to questions, and all documents and sources, write a well-organized essay. The essay must include an introduction, supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. (See the outline provided below.)



**Option 1:**

Discuss the benefits of school integration. What should Louisiana do today to ensure that students of different races, religions and ethnicities attend school together?

**OR**



**Option 2:**

Analyze the response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in Louisiana between 1954 and 1961. Focus your essay on TWO of the following:

- State and local government
- Voters and citizens' groups
- Local and national media
- Business community

**Research & Writing Organizer:**

**I. Introduction**

- A. Opening Remarks
- B. Thesis Statement

**II. Support Paragraph**

- A. Topic Sentence
  - 1. Sub-point
    - a. Detail
    - b. Detail

2. Sub-point
  - a. Detail
  - b. Detail

### **III. Support Paragraph**

#### A. Topic Sentence

1. Sub-point
  - a. Detail
  - b. Detail
2. Sub-point
  - a. Detail
  - b. Detail

### **IV. Support Paragraph**

#### A. Topic Sentence

1. Sub-point
  - a. Detail
  - b. Detail
2. Sub-point
  - a. Detail
  - b. Detail

### **V. Conclusion**

- A. Review main points (Do not use exact repetition)
- B. Present conclusion, solution, and/or personal statement

Source: <http://uwf.edu/writelab/handouts/EssayFormatMultipleParagraph2/>