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Separate But *Not* Equal--AGAIN

by [Christian Savage](#)

The year 1954 heralded the *Brown vs. the Board of Education at Topeka* decision in which the United States ruled: "Segregated facilities in America are inherently unequal." That decision was, without a doubt, the biggest victory for Black Americans for nearly 58 years. However, it seems as though the decision that initially allowed segregation, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, has been making an invisible comeback in 2001.

Ms. Peggy Simpson, an experienced teacher working for the last 12 years at P.S. 175 in Harlem, was good enough to allow herself to be interviewed concerning this phenomenon and other educational issues, such as the perceived gap in educational standards of suburban and inner-city districts.

Harlemlive: *What is your age and experience in the public education system?*



Ms. Simpson: *I am fifty-five years old, and I have been a public school teacher for twelve years at P.S. 175 in Harlem. I taught 8th grade for eight years, and I have been teaching pre-K through the 5th grade for the past four years.*

Harlemlive: *Having the experience in the public education system for 12 years, have you noticed any academic problems, specifically, in inner-city schools where most Black and Latino students attend?*

Ms. Simpson: *Yes!*

Harlemlive: *If yes, what are they, and how did they come about?*

Ms. Simpson: *The problems are overcrowding, lack of school materials, and no funding for after school programs. The schools in inner-city communities are heavily overcrowded due to the lack of housing, which causes the school to take a lot of combined families that are in shelters. There is a lack of school materials and after school programs because there just isn't any funding.*

Harlemlive: From your observations, has the government taken an active role in solving these problems?

Ms. Simpson: No! However, in the last 4 to 5 years, the government has been putting more certified teachers in schools and providing more after school clubs, but there is still no improvement in resource funding.

Harlemlive: Would you say that these same problems exist in suburban public schools?

Ms. Simpson: No. First of all, they have better funding, and they have a cap on the number of students in the class.

Harlemlive: And finally Ms. Simpson, based on your answers, would you say that segregation is repeating itself in the Black community? If so, how?

Ms. Simpson: YES! The reactionary system of the 1940s and 1950s are definitely coming back because the school boards are intently under funding inner-city schools in order to hinder the progress of African-Americans.

In an effort to find a solution to this apparently racist situation, I interviewed Professor Andrew J. Ryan of George Mason University, a 25 year old who has been teaching mathematics and multi-media for the past three years.

Harlemlive: Professor Ryan, what is your experience in the struggle of the Black community?

Professor Ryan: I have been working at George Mason University for 3 years, teaching courses in math, multimedia, and I will soon be teaching a course in hip-hop. In my occupation, I try to introduce new things to the majority. For instance, I am an adjunct professor who always dresses well in class, but often wears items by Triple Five Soul in an attempt to show that urban clothes can be intelligent, too. Just because I am working on a PhD, doesn't mean that I have to dress like the masses. In terms of the struggle, I feel that my generation has become complacent, as overt racism is no longer seen. Instead, covert racism now operates in secrecy. My role is to educate myself and be able to play a pivotal role in the next movement.



Harlemlive: Do you believe in the statement, "Segregation is back in America?" If so, how and why?

Professor Ryan: Yes, I live in North Washington, D.C., about a quarter mile from the White House. It is a fairly affluent neighborhood with many shops, cafes, and eateries. However, less than half a mile from my apartment is Howard University, which is a

completely different world. Even the streets are paved differently. I attended Fordham Preparatory School in the Bronx, but if I had attended public school, I would have gone to James Monroe or Adelei Stevenson, neither on the same level as Fordham Prep. Not surprisingly, the two public schools have a large minority student body and Fordham does not. That is how segregation lives on.

Harlemlive: *Has the government taken an active role in dismantling this problem?*

Professor Ryan: *NO! It can be done only from the inside. We must make our neighborhoods and communities better and safer. We must invest on our own and create community centers and skill development programs to habilitate that investment. Since the late 1930s, we have looked to the government for answers. Let us create our own solution.*

Harlemlive: *Based on your experience as a scholar in "Black Activism," how can the government solve the problem or upgrade it?*

Professor Ryan: *As I stated before, it must come from within. The words of Huey Newton fit perfectly, "One of the problems is that the community does not have a structured organization or vehicle which serves its needs and represents the people's interests."*

Harlemlive: *Do you know a quotation from someone in history that could substantiate your views?*

Professor Ryan: *You mean to prove? No, but I will leave you with the words of my man, Malcolm X: "I have no mercy or compassion for a society that will crush people, and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight."*

Segregation and all of its attendant ugliness seems to be back in America, and, tragically, Blacks and Latinos are paying the price for overcrowding, under funding, and covertly racist bureaucratic politics. As Professor Ryan said: IT HAS TO COME FROM WITHIN. However, if people in our community cannot afford access to private independent education, states like New York, have to uphold their obligations to provide equal funding, equal access, and support to all schools. One way to accomplish this is to cut property taxes across the board in which people with higher incomes will be affected, thus it will drain more money away from the suburban public schools. Once the Suburban districts lose the extra funding, the property tax revenues generated in the urban districts should be put directly in the hands of Black and Latino parents so that they can have more control over how their children get educated, whether it is private tutoring, or attendance at a Catholic, charter, or home school.

Blacks and Latinos need to organize and mobilize, forming their own community centers and schools, and the government must stimulate this process to fulfill the Supreme Court's mandate to "remedy the effects of past discrimination." This solution is not

reverse discrimination, or a quota as some would call it, but is what I like to call: AFFIRMATIVE ACCESS. "Affirmative access" programs have narrowed the gap between affluent and deprived districts. Now, how can I prove that? Well, I'll let you be the judge of that: In 1994 George W. Bush ran for governor of Texas and only received 8% of the Black vote. However, after four strong years of leadership and education reform [tax-funded vouchers of \$4,000 given to each student in the urban districts], he, being the only re-elected governor in the history of his state [1998], received a whopping 27% of the Black vote and 33% of the Latino vote—that is nearly a 240% jump [in the Black community]. Moreover, about 63% of the 2,800,000 Blacks that voted for him in the 2000 Election were from Texas. It was this voting bloc, as well, that stimulated him to take a strong stance against the dehumanization of racial profiling in our communities. Though ironic, he is considered a fascist pig.

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