

**GOVERNOR HERMAN TALMADGE'S STATEMENT
ON THE *BROWN* DECISION (1954)**

Beginning in the mid-1930s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began to challenge school segregation in the hopes of ending the Jim Crow laws of the South. Its efforts culminated in the unanimous Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), which ended the "separate but equal" doctrine of racial segregation in public schools. Positive and negative responses to this decision were immediate. Georgia Governor Herman E. Talmadge, Jr., was among the first Southern politicians to issue a public statement, which came the day after the *Brown* decision. Talmadge had deep political roots in Georgia: His father was elected governor three times, and Talmadge filled the remainder of his father's last term and then was elected governor. Talmadge was proud that he spent more on public education for blacks and whites in his six years as governor than in all previous administrations combined. In 1956, he was elected to the Senate and became a prominent opponent of the Civil Rights Act of 1957. His *Brown* decision statement, offered next, reflected the sentiments of many whites in the Deep South.

"Talmadge Text," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 18 May 1954, 3.

Questions to Consider: Herman Talmadge attacked the Court's decision on what grounds? What is Georgia's "accepted pattern of life"? Why did the NAACP choose public education to challenge existing segregation laws? How did the South respond to the *Brown* decision? Compare Talmadge's statement with the editorial in the *Pittsburgh Courier* (Document 75).

The U.S. Supreme Court by its decision today has reduced our Constitution to a mere scrap of paper. It has blatantly ignored all law and precedent and usurped from the Congress and the people the power to amend the Constitution and from the Congress the authority to make the laws of the land. Its action confirms the worst fears of the motives of the men who sit on its bench and raises a grave question as to the future course of the nation.

There is no constitutional provision, statute or precedent to support the position the court has taken. It has swept aside 88 years of sound judicial precedent, repudiated the greatest legal minds of our age and lowered itself to the level of common politics.

It has attempted in one stroke to strike the 10th Amendment from the Constitution and to set the stage for the development of an all-powerful federal bureaucracy in Washington which can regulate the lives of all the citizens in the minutest detail.

The people of Georgia believe in, adhere to and will fight for their rights under the United States and Georgia Constitutions to manage their own affairs. They cannot and they will not accept a bald political decree without basis in law or practicality which overturns their accepted pattern of life.

The court has thrown down the gauntlet before those who believe the Constitution means what it says when it reserves to the individual states the right to regulate their own internal affairs. Georgians accept the challenge and will not tolerate the mixing of the races in the public schools or any of its public tax-supported institutions. The fact that the high tribunal has seen fit to proclaim its views on sociology as law will not make any difference.

If adjustments in our laws and procedures are necessary, they will be made. In the meantime all Georgians will follow their pursuits by separate paths and in accepted fashion. The U.S. and Georgia Constitutions have not been changed. The Georgia Constitution provides for separation of the races. It will be upheld.

As governor and chairman of the State Commission on Education I am summoning that body into immediate session to map a program to insure continued and permanent segregation of the races. . . .

I urge all Georgians to remain calm and resist any attempt to arouse fear or hysteria. The full powers of my office are ready to see that the laws of our state are enforced impartially and without violence.

I was elected governor of Georgia on the solemn promise to maintain our accepted way of life. So long as I hold this office it shall be done.

75

AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL
ON THE *BROWN* DECISION (1954)

Many of the African-American newspapers reacted joyously, yet with caution, to the *Brown* decision. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, under founding editor Robert L. Vann's leadership, had become one of the most widely respected and circulated African-American weeklies. Until his death in 1940, Vann used the *Courier* to crusade against segregation, discrimination, and, in particular, the white press's refusal to recognize significant African-American leaders or issues. Subsequent editors, Percival L. Prattis and William G. Nunn, Sr., continued Vann's editorial posture. In 1953, they began the "Double E" campaign for educational equality and to raise funds for the NAACP's legal battle to end segregation in public schools. In June 1954, the *Courier* issued the editorial below on the *Brown* decision.

Questions to Consider: How does the *Pittsburgh Courier* view the decision? Why does it want immediate integration? What does it see as the implications of this decision? Will the *Pittsburgh Courier* get its wishes? Compare the *Pittsburgh Courier's* editorial position with Herman Talmadge's statement (Document 74).

The South is in ferment over the recent Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in public education, and this state of mind has been heightened by the Court's action last week in sending back three racial segregation cases in light of the historical ruling.

The cases not only covered three Universities but, significantly two public parks and a low-cost housing development, and the Court's action presages a full-scale outlawing of racial segregation all down the line, not only in schools.

If, as in the case of James Muir, a Louisville Negro, who must be admitted to a tax-supported, publicly operated park hitherto reserved for whites, what legal legs have the numerous other such parks in Dixie and elsewhere to stand on?

If, as in the case brought against the San Francisco Housing Authority, Negroes must be admitted to a housing project from which they had been barred under a "neighborhood pattern policy," then what happens to the scores and scores of such projects in the South and elsewhere from which Negroes have been barred?

If, as in Houston, Texas, A. W. Beal who was refused permission to play golf on a municipal course reserved for whites must now be accommodated, what happens on all other city-owned golf courses, tennis courts and amusement parks all over the South?

"The South in Ferment," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 June 1954, 6. (Copyright © 1954 by *The Pittsburgh Courier*; copyright renewed 1982 by the *New Pittsburgh Courier* Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission of GRM Associates, Inc., Agents for the *New Pittsburgh Courier*.)

If, now, Negro Citizens must be admitted to public schools, colleges, golf courses, swimming pools, tennis courts, housing projects, and so forth, how much longer can jim crow exist in airline depots, railroad passenger stations, hotels, restaurants and bars, especially with the negro vote growing yearly throughout the South?

This is what has the South in ferment, for it was quickly realized by everybody who has given the matter any thought (which all Southern whites and Negroes have) that the Supreme Court decision was revolutionary and its effects could not be confined to public education alone.

This ferment is a mixture of fear, joy, antagonism, jubilation, opposition and acceptance ranging from the bitterly expressed antagonism of Governor Talmadge of Georgia to immediate implementation in North Carolina and the District of Columbia.

When such a state of mind prevails it is the time for drastic and forthright action, so we believe a drive should be launched to INTEGRATE NOW!

We look with favor upon the local level strategy, announced by the NAACP at its Atlanta conference, of going directly to local school boards with appeals to end school segregation NOW, thus by-passing the state politicians, with their eyes on re-election rather than law obedience.

In this connection it is unfortunate that these school boards and local officials have not previously been wooed by the NAACP for the purpose of establishing good will and understanding instead of beings subjected to blanket denunciation as Kluxers, reactionaries and apologists for terror.

In the last analysis it is these officials who will obey or evade and circumvent the Supreme Court decision or any other reform.

However, this is by no means a cause of ferment in the South alone, but must be giving most of the West considerable concern, since color discrimination is rife in that area despite the absence of legal sanction.

We must press for complete destruction of the bi-racial system NOW before the opposition to this reform becomes solidified and before the counsel of calmness and "going slow" mobilize to corrupt public opinion into glacier-like inaction.