

# America struggles with race despite historic decision

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It might be coincidence that South Puget Sound Community College chose to make diversity the theme for its 2014 arts and lecture series, and that the news has been full of stories recently about a racist rancher and a racist NBA owner.

But that's the yin and yang of race in America: We've made enormous progress in the past 60 years, but race still is a central problem of American life.

To put an exclamation point on that fact, the college will conclude this year's series with a public reenactment of the U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. That decision, on May 17, 1954, kick-started the civil rights movement by declaring the doctrine of "separate but equal" unconstitutional.

Historian and commentator Juan Williams described the importance of that decision this way: "When you look at *Brown*, you are looking at a moment so powerful it is the equivalent of the Big Bang in our solar system. It led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It led to sit-ins and bus rides and freedom marches. And even today, as we argue about affirmative action in colleges and graduate schools, the power of *Brown* continues to stir the nation."

Next Friday, current members of the state Supreme Court will reenact the oral arguments of *Brown* at the college's Minnaert Center and, at a dinner later that day, the youngest daughter of the late Rev. Oliver Brown will deliver a keynote address.

Before the *Brown* decision, Cheryl Brown Henderson's two older sisters, Linda and Terry Lynn, made a dangerous journey every day through a railroad switchyard to hop a bus to a run-down all-black school. It took them an hour. They couldn't attend a white school that was just blocks from their home.

Aided by the NAACP, her father sued the Topeka, Kan., board of education, and in a unanimous 11-page decision written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, the court ruled that "separate education facilities are inherently unequal" and violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

That decision touched off the flowering of the African American civil rights movement, which led to integration at lunch counters, water fountains, swimming pools and other public facilities. And that movement paved the way for other civil rights movements, such as gay rights, feminism and rights for people with disabilities.

Young people may not know about or understand this critical event in American history. And all of us need to take time to reflect on both what came before, and what has followed it, because while it led to an explosion of hope and progress, we are still a long way from eradicating racism and its legacy

More than 70 percent of students of color today go to schools where they are the majority. About 80 percent of those black and Latino dominated schools are located in high poverty areas. The “white flight” of people from cities to suburbs has created another type of segregation in many urban areas.

Similarly, the recent Supreme Court decision gutting the Voting Rights Act reminds us that we are in peril of forgetting our history, and backsliding into legal discrimination.

The U.S. has made progress toward racial equality by the rule of law. Still, racism exists in many forms, and we can only continue our progress if we keep an open, candid conversation going.

Read more here: <http://www.theolympian.com/2014/05/18/3137591/america-struggles-with-race-despite.html?sp=/99/109/207/#storylink=cpy>