

Name: _____ Class: _____

PLESSY NEARS ITS END

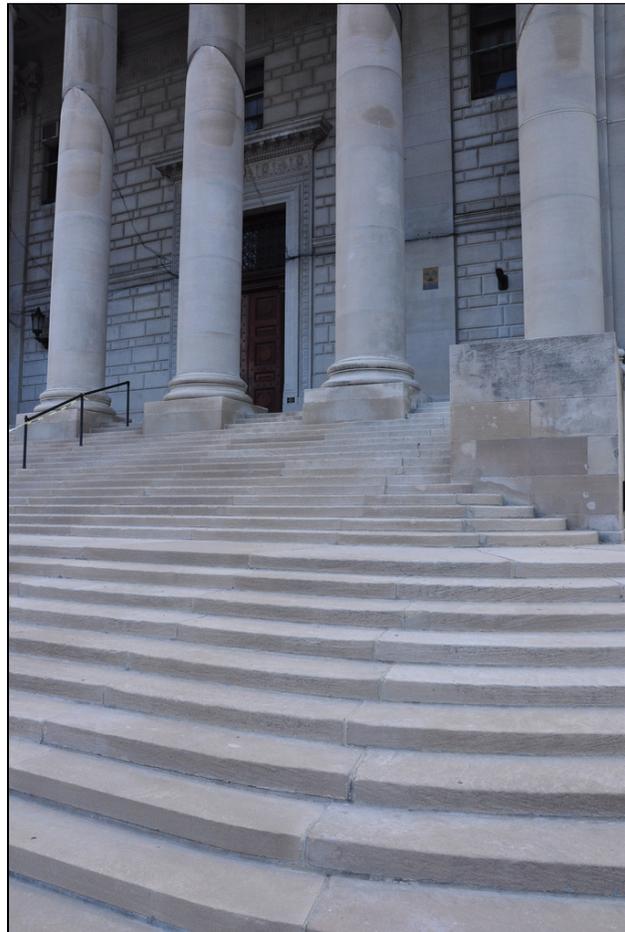
By The New York Times
1956

Plessy v. Ferguson was a constitutional law case that took place in 1896. When brought to the Supreme Court, the decision determined that racial segregation laws were constitutional by the “separate but equal” clause. In this New York Times article, sixty years following Plessy v. Ferguson, an author discusses the state of segregation in the United States and the changing social climate. As you read, take notes on what is contributing to the social change in the United States.

[1] Just sixty years ago the United States Supreme Court affirmed in the famous case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that separation of the races in Instate¹ railroad cars did “not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other” and was generally recognized “as within the competency of the State Legislatures in the exercise of their police power.” The court went on to point out that “the most common instance of this is connected with the establishment of separate schools for white and colored children... ”

In the six decades that have passed there has been a revolution in the thinking and the customs of a large part — though by no means all — of the population of the United States, and a corresponding revolution in the thinking and the decisions of the Supreme Court. A succession of cases dealing with both transportation and education in recent years has brought the judicial doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* to its grave. Burial took place on May 17, 1954, when the decisions rejecting the constitutionality of “separate but equal” school facilities were handed down.² The tombstone was set when the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond last July ruled against enforced segregation even on city buses, asserting that — in the light of the school decision — “we do not think the separate but equal doctrine... can any longer be regarded as a correct

statement of law.” An appeal from this decision was rejected this week by the Supreme Court, though on technical grounds only. Nevertheless, it now appears that if every form of public transport as well as every form of publicly supported education is not yet legally freed from segregation, it soon will be.



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1. existing or occurring within the boundaries of a state
2. referring to the desegregation of schools in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case

This conclusion will come hard to some states and cities where segregation of public transport has been practiced for generations. "I hereby defy the ruling handed down by the U. S. Supreme Court," grandiloquently³ declared the president of the Alabama Public Service Commission, in whose state capital, Montgomery, a Negro boycott of segregated bus lines has been going on since December. Some officials in Alabama and doubtless in other states may try to take temporary refuge⁴ in the fact that the most recent case refers specifically to a South Carolina bus line only, although it is obvious that if it means that segregation on buses will end there, it will apply to every state and city where segregated public transportation is in effect.

This is not to say that compliance⁵ will be easy. Too much must not be demanded too soon. Friends of the Negro in the North will do him no service in the South by exacerbating⁶ what is already an extremely difficult situation. In a social upheaval of this magnitude it is neither wise nor just to issue hot-headed statements quivering with self-righteousness, as so many of us in this part of the world are wont to do when it comes to segregation. But the law must and will be enforced, though the process can be expected to take time.

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3. extravagant in language, style, or manner
 4. **Refuge** (*noun*): protection from danger or distress
 5. **Compliance** (*noun*): the act of yielding to a desire or demand
 6. **Exacerbate** (*verb*): to make worse

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the central idea in the text?
 - A. The decision of Plessy v. Ferguson was finally overturned due to the constant boycotting of black and white citizens throughout the South.
 - B. While segregation in the South had largely ended, negating the Plessy v. Ferguson doctrine made the end of racial segregation official.
 - C. The overturning of Plessy v. Ferguson ended racial segregation on transportation, but allowed other forms of segregation to continue.
 - D. Plessy was brought to an end through cases challenging the validity that racially segregated institutions and services were equal.

2. PART B: Which two details from the text best support the answer to Part A?
 - A. "The court went on to point out that 'the most common instance of this is connected with the establishment of separate schools for white and colored children...' " (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "A succession of cases dealing with both transportation and education in recent years has brought the judicial doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson to its grave." (Paragraph 2)
 - C. "the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals... ruled against enforced segregation even on city buses, asserting... 'we do not think the separate but equal doctrine... can any longer be regarded as a correct statement of law.'" (Paragraph 2)
 - D. "Nevertheless, it now appears that if every form of public transport as well as every form of publicly supported education is not yet legally freed from segregation, it soon will be." (Paragraph 2)
 - E. "Some officials in Alabama and doubtless in other states may try to take temporary refuge in the fact that the most recent case refers specifically to a South Carolina bus line only," (Paragraph 3)
 - F. "Friends of the Negro in the North will do him no service in the South by exacerbating what is already an extremely difficult situation." (Paragraph 4)

3. PART A: Which statement best describes how the author explains the public's likely response to the end of Plessy?
 - A. The author depicts the end of Plessy as most likely evoking controversy from the public.
 - B. The author predicts that the public will be in overwhelming support for the end of Plessy.
 - C. The author believes people in both the North and South will be against the end of Plessy.
 - D. The author thinks that the public will be fearful of the social change that the end of Plessy will bring.

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "This conclusion will come hard to some states and cities where segregation of public transport has been practiced for generations." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Some officials in Alabama and doubtless in other states may try to take temporary refuge in the fact that the most recent case refers specifically to a South Carolina bus" (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "In a social upheaval of this magnitude it is neither wise nor just to issue hot-headed statements quivering with self-righteousness," (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "But the law must and will be enforced, though the process can be expected to take time." (Paragraph 4)
5. Explain the effect of comparing the end of Plessy v. Ferguson to a death (Paragraph 2)? Cite evidence from the text in your response.
