



SCHOOLHOUSE BURNING BOOK DISCUSSION

Session 1 (March 10) -- Chapters 2-7 -- The Evolution of America's Understanding of the Right to Public Schooling from the Founding Through *Brown v. Board of Education*

Tonight we will be joined by Derek Black for the first 30 minutes! There will be a brief Q&A following his remarks. The rest of the evening will be spent in breakout rooms for small group discussion. Discussion will focus on the history of public education from the Revolutionary era to *Brown v Board of Education*.

Reading guide for Chapters 2-7

Derek Black begins: "Two hundred years ago our founding fathers gave us two gifts. Both were relatively unknown to the world at the time. The first was democracy--what they called a republican form of government. The second was public education. These gifts were inextricably intertwined." (p. 11)

Chapter Two: A Nation Founded on Education Black explains: "The (Northwest) Ordinances (of 1785 and 1787) earned a place next to the Declaration of Independence and Constitution because they represent the hopes and aspirations of what the nation was trying to become." (p. 70) What happened during the era of our nation's founding that has contributed to our understanding today of each child's right to a public education? What did Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe believe is the connection of a public system of education and democratic governance?

Chapter Three: Education as Freedom Black writes, "America's recommitment to the right to education is, in large part, the story of the freedman. ... Their unrelenting desires, commitment, and demands for education helped define the federal and state plans to reconstruct the nation into a republican form of government that finally approximated the one first envisioned a century earlier." (p. 74) What did freed slaves teach our society about the role of public education in a democratic society?

Chapter Four: Reconstruction: A National Recommitment to Education and Democracy and **Chapter Five: A Constitutional Chorus for the Right to Education** are the center of Black's history of the establishment of public schools and the constitutional protection of public education.

In the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 and 1868, Congress required--as a condition of their being readmitted to the union--that Confederate states ratify the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and also establish a system of public schools in their new state constitutions. The state constitutional conventions went into detail in providing for their schools: setting up school funding, establishing taxes, making attendance compulsory, requiring teacher training. Then Congress spread these requirements beyond the former Confederate states to any new states. How did these years expand the right to public schooling more broadly than in the founding documents? What is the significance today of the changes that happened during those constitutional conventions?

Chapter Six: The Fall What are some of the ways "separate and unequal" came to characterize the public schools in the former Confederacy? Review some of the ways legislators in the former Confederate states, in their new constitutional conventions, undid the work of Reconstruction and instituted Jim Crow segregation

of schools and the defunding of schools for African American children. How did inequitable school funding become a tool for establishing inequality?

Chapter Seven: The Second Reconstruction Derek Black traces the story of the NAACP's 20-year strategy to undo unequal, and especially unequally funded, K-12 public education and to end racial segregation. What did you learn about the NAACP's strategy, led by attorneys Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall, to achieve the gains finally protected in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education*? Were there surprises for you in this legal history?

Questions for Discussion for Chapters 2-7

1. Ice breaker: Were there any surprises for you personally or any particularly striking insights for you as you read this book?
2. What does Black believe our society learned or what did you learn about the deep connection of public education democracy from his stories of newly freed slaves?
3. When we consider the inclusion of education in state constitutions during Reconstruction, what are some ways those changes remain significant today? Conversely, in what ways did education/school funding policy in the former Confederate states work to institutionalize Jim Crow? What effects did that have?
4. What aspects of the NAACP's strategy, led by attorneys Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall, to achieve the gains finally protected in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education* were notable to you? Were there any surprises for you in this legal history?
5. Have someone read aloud the quote at the top of p. 164 from the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. What did the Warren Court recognize about the institution of public education in this 1954 decision and what rights did the decision protect that had been contested through our nation's history until then?

Ground Rules for Table Discussions

- We do not have to agree -- just gain a deeper understanding of the book and one another.
- Listen actively and make sure everyone has a chance to speak.
- Give people patience and the benefit of the doubt.
- Listen from your own experience and avoid generalizing. ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you.")

To Consider before Session 2

At our next session we will begin with brief reports from tonight's small groups. Several people named by our sponsors will reflect on the discussions they have been a part of.

In the meantime:

Think about what you have learned from others in tonight's session, from Derek Black's comments, from others in the chat and your small group.

- How have other people's thoughts or experiences given you something new to consider about the book or about your experience with public education?
- What has challenged you or furthered your own line of thought?