FOREWORD

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In 1855, a century before *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided, a group of Black and white Bostonians gathered to mark the enactment earlier that year of a statute intended to end racial segregation in the Massachusetts public schools. William C. Nell was honored by the group as the man most responsible for the campaign's success. Nell recalled his own scarring experience as a student in the colored schools, and his vow that "I would do my best to hasten the day when the color of the skin would be no barrier to equal school rights."

William Nell and his friends were celebrating what they believed was the end of a 15-year-long effort to desegregate the state's public schools. Subsequent events, including the current crisis over efforts to desegregate Boston schools, indicate that the celebration was premature.

Thus, both recorded history and personal experience require caution as we mark the twentieth anniversary of *Brown,* a decision which has managed in two decades to become the best known and perhaps the most controversial Supreme Court opinion in American legal history. Initially, *Brown* was applauded by the North and condemned by the South. Today, the public schools of the South are in general — if rather reluctant — compliance with its basic requirements. In the North, a greater percentage of non-white children now attend racially-isolated schools than in 1954, and opposition, particularly where desegregation will require the transportation of students, has never been greater.

Moreover, even those who support *Brown's* concept of "equal educational opportunity" are divided as to how this goal may most effectively be achieved. The writing in this *Journal* accurately reflects those different viewpoints.

The current commemoration then is a time of reassessment. An opportunity to determine what has been achieved as a result of the *Brown* decision, what is left to be done, and how much of the unfinished burden may realistically be apportioned to a judicial precedent grown old before its time in the service of a worthy but still unfulfilled cause.

The mass of Black people are more aware than their lawyers of the limits of civil rights laws and judicial decrees. A judicial decree, couched in legal terms, cannot resolve issues founded on concern for social and economic self-interest. The essence of resistance to *Brown,* which the South understood immediately and which came more slowly to the North, is the recognition that meaningful compliance would require surrender of those status benefits bestowed by the society on all who are born white. Future school strategies should perhaps place greater emphasis on this unhappy but very real fact.

The writings in this *Journal* contain no definitive formula for achieving the educational opportunity which should be the heritage of every child. But they may increase our knowledge, sharpen our techniques and broaden our insight. All such assistance will be welcomed by each of us who, like William C. Nell, solemnly vow to "do my best to hasten the day when the color of the skin would be no barrier to equal school rights."