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EDITORIALS.

Brown at 40

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court issued its unanimous ruling insuring that 7-year-old Linda Brown of Topeka, Kansas, would attend an integrated school. Last month Linda Brown Thompson's name was back on a Topeka federal court docket. In 1979 she and other parents had sued Topeka on behalf of their children, claiming that Topeka's schools remain segregated;

the new *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case has already gone to the Supreme Court once and began a retrial on April 18.

That Topeka's schools are still segregated captures the frustrating paradox of *Brown*. On the one hand, this is the case that changed everything. A year after *Brown* came the Montgomery bus boycott; three years after, the integration of Little Rock; ten years after, the Civil Rights Act. *Brown* tore down the scaffolding that supported legal segregation throughout the South. Yet in terms of educational equality *Brown* changed

little. As U.S. District Judge Robert Carter, who worked on the case, noted in a recent speech, more black students attend "all- or virtually all-black schools" today than in 1954. And those schools are more than ever segregated by poverty as well as race. "The very powerful link between racial and poverty segregation is a central element in perpetuating the educational inequality of minority students," the National School Boards Association notes in a scathing new report.

It's easy to attribute today's segregation and inequality to the broad economic trends that over decades have devastated and isolated the nation's cities, especially in the Northeast and the Midwest. But that is to ignore the dimensions of politics and racism. Since 1980 the Justice Department's civil rights division has not brought a single new desegregation case, and the Education Department has phased out its own civil rights operation. The result, the N.S.B.A. notes, is the first resegregation of black students since *Brown*. The movement of minority families to middle-class suburbs proved no panacea: More than two-thirds of suburban black and Latino students now attend largely segregated schools. Resegregation is even rising in the South, where thanks to the civil rights movement African-American and white students have since the 1970s enjoyed far more integrated schooling than in any other region.

Against that backdrop it is radical to defend the goal of multi-ethnic and equitable (not just desegregated) schooling. All the more so when, to educators and communities of many ethnicities, the notion of "separate but equal" enjoys an understandable new appeal, rooted in the sensible and democratic desire for community control of education and culturally diverse curriculums. But white racism remains the engine driving much of American political life. For that reason, separate necessarily means unequal.

One glimmer of hope emanates from a new generation of school equity lawsuits, with some of the explosive potential of *Brown* in 1954. These cases challenge today's separate and unequal school systems, treating racial segregation and fiscal inequity as two sides of the same unconstitutional coin. In Connecticut the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the A.C.L.U. are taking on the vast educational disparity between black and Latino Hartford and its white suburbs; their lawsuit, *Sheff v. O'Neill*, has already pushed the state to begin a regional desegregation plan. In Alabama, in another A.C.L.U. case, Circuit Judge Eugene Reese last fall ordered the state to provide "equitable and adequate educational opportunities for all Alabama schoolchildren" through sweeping changes in funding, infrastructure and school governance. Such cases make it clear that school reform, desegregation and fiscal equity are necessary complements to one another. Moreover, if successful, these suits could end the crippling fiscal isolation of cities.

The sad thing is that such gains take place in a political vacuum; the great difference between 1954 and 1994 lies not in legal doctrine but in the absence of political activism. By 1954 African-Americans—citizens like Oliver and Leola Brown—had already "worn out many pairs of shoes" campaigning for civil rights, as Patricia J. Williams notes on page 694. Politically, the great genius of the *Brown* case was to locate racial injustice in public schools, thereby touching the lives of the vast majority of U.S. families, offering readily mobilized

constituencies of young people and parents. In 1994, as in 1954, public schools can be the flashpoint for challenging the nation's record on poverty and race. But to be effective any campaign for equity and against resegregation must once again begin to wear out shoes, not just legal pads.

Note: This special issue of The Nation was sponsored by funding from the Grass Roots Reporting Project of the Nation Institute.

Atomic Pile

The old Soviet aphorism "The past is more difficult to predict than the future" wryly made the point that in a Communist society history is not merely the study of the past. The recent publication by Little, Brown of former K.G.B. agent Pavel Sudoplatov's memoirs, *Special Tasks*, crudely makes the same point for commercially driven history.

In the chapter called "Atomic Spies" some of the Manhattan Project's most distinguished scientists—J. Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, Leo Szilard and Niels Bohr—are accused of collaborating with Soviet agents by passing along vital secrets that helped the Soviets build their first atomic bomb. Not a single document of proof is produced. Factual errors abound, and the names of the four accused are frequently linked to convicted spies such as Klaus Fuchs and Bruno Pontecorvo, implying conspiracy merely by juxtaposition. The publisher's endorsement of this classic disinformation is as scandalous as the charges themselves. However, Sudoplatov is only partially to blame. The book was written (with Sudoplatov and his son) by American journalists Jerrold and Leona Schecter.

The Schecters have been feeding at the post-cold war history trough for several years, digesting legitimate documents and oral garbage indiscriminately to produce such volumes as *The Spy Who Saved the World* and now the memoirs of a murderer turned character assassin. Little, Brown has a bottom line to feed as well. Under the Schecters' commercially motivated guidance, Sudoplatov's foggy recollections of the N.K.V.D.'s inept attempts to compromise Oppenheimer, Fermi, Szilard and Bohr become clear-cut cases of espionage.

Resting on the argument that Sudoplatov is a believable source, the Schecters have re-created a post-cold war Catch-22 that Milo Minderbinder (remember, "Everyone has a share") would have loved: While Sudoplatov's charges against Oppenheimer and company cannot be substantiated without documents, once the charges have been made they cannot be refuted without the documents on which they are allegedly based.

Why did an eminent scholar like Robert Conquest write a foreword endorsing baseless charges? Perhaps after decades of documenting the horrors of Stalinism, he wants to believe that what the Schecters wrote is what Sudoplatov said, and that what he said is true. Conquest explains away the lack of supporting evidence by old catches (documents disappear, and Stalin-era documents are often false in any case) and a new catch: "the highest category of secrecy," a Soviet "word of mouth only" (*sic!*) classification. This appears to be roughly

equivalent to my own favorite classification stamp: "Burn Before Reading. One Eye Only." Well, you can lead a historian to pseudoevidence, but you can't make him think.

The Schecters have ignored the most basic principle of historical scholarship: evidence. The result is that they have not enlightened us about the history of the nuclear arms race; they have added another chapter to *The Protocols of the Elders of the K.G.B.*

MARTIN J. SHERWIN

Martin J. Sherwin, director of the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College, is the author of A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arms Race (Vintage).

A Perfect Enemy

No one doubts that the multi-trillion-dollar economy of the United States in the years after World War II was financed by our fear of the great enemy, Communism.

In service to that fear we created the most potent industrial machine ever assembled, the sustenance of the nation's manufacturing sector, the stimulus to an immense growth of the Sunbelt and the source of several dozen new technologies and their resulting corporate offspring. We also created the largest and most complex government apparatus ever contrived—approved of even in the most conservative quarters, given its purpose—and a huge military establishment within it.

But now, in the past couple of years, we have discovered the enemy is no more. Communism is over. The fear—and what's worse, its economy—can no longer be sustained.

Quite clearly then, from an economic point of view, we need a new enemy, ideally one that would foster new technologies and industries, and sponsor increased armies and bureaucracies, like its predecessor. One that could be embraced by right and left alike, one rooted in a fear quite as powerful as xenophobia and patriotism and loss of markets.

It seems we have found one, a beast we as a nation are working mightily to fashion and feed. A perfect enemy, in many respects better than the last.

Death.

The national death-the-enemy attitude is just beginning to pervade the culture. The best-seller lists have two books on "near death" experiences and the authors' defiant return, a fictional ancient text on eternal life, a doctor on the long process of fighting death and a triumphant tale of overcoming heart disease. Broadway has a carousel barker who dies and returns to earth and a dying beast that is restored to vibrant princely life. Hollywood has hit comedies about a serial-murdering housewife and a funeral.

But it is in the debate about a national health policy that death and dying is most often and ardently presented as the new enemy, and it is in that debate that we can most clearly see the reasons it works so very well.

First, of course, is the fact that this enemy, unlike Communism, is unbeatable. This is something we can set our society against four-square, pour billions of dollars into fighting every

year—we will in fact reach the \$1 trillion mark this year—and *never* vanquish. Not like some puny ideology that crumbles after a few decades, this is the equivalent of economic perpetual motion, the permanent priming of the pump.

Then, too, the war on death has the merit that it requires a never-ending range of high technology and high medicology (if I may so call it), by which I mean the vast world of pharmaceuticals, hospital corporations, nursing homes, insurance companies, university departments, research laboratories and medical entrepreneurs of all stripes. It is not accidental that already half the increase in health outlays in recent years has gone into the creation of new technologies, and we've only just started.

Even better, the fear of death dovetails beautifully with our exquisite national belief that humans should not really have to die. This is why we have devoted so many resources to biotechnology, which is really the science devoted to the creation of eternal life, and to the myriad techniques of fertilization, now even including the cloning of human embryos. This is also why we have made a national obsession out of anything that suggests we have a power over deterioration and demise, hence the huge industries devoted to cosmetic surgery, organ replacements and artificial body parts to keep us vegetating.

And fundamentally, this is an obsession that meshes with the Great American Dream—not the one about suburban house and car, but the real one about the Conquest of Nature—inefficient, inconvenient, inadequate and ultimately disappointing Nature. "Why must we tolerate being subjected to the wild caprices of unstable air masses, including the ultimate obscenity called the tornado?" a letter to the editor in *The New York Times* put it a few years ago, advocating federal control of the winds. Indeed, why must we tolerate being subjected to the wild caprices of unstable life and the ultimate obscenity of death? Our dream has always been to control Nature—and what is more natural than death?

Already the government has started to spend more money on anti-Death than anti-Communism, for the first time—\$267 billion in the 1994 budget for health and medicine, against \$261 billion for the military. What might it be like if we had a medico-industrial complex five or ten times the size of the military-industrial complex that sustained the economy during the cold war? Would that not be an achievement of industrial civilization to which not merely the economy but the entire cultural edifice of this nation could effectively be devoted?

Death, truly, is the last frontier. And are we not a nation that conquers frontiers?

KIRKPATRICK SALE

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Koresh's Children



It's another hotel chicken luncheon, with a few hundred liberal Washington lawyers gathered to hear Attorney General Janet Reno pay tribute to retiring Representative Don Edwards, who is a Washington oddity: a legislator known for his fierce devotion to civil liberties. "No one can exceed what Don Edwards has meant to me," Reno says. She warns that citizens

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