Cost of Darkness: Institutions Sector

By Crystani Freeman

Institutions in this country are historically structured to shape some groups for success and put others at a disadvantage. Minority students get discriminated against from the color of their skin to their intellectual ability, in primary and secondary school, and even college if they can go.

School funding determines student success just as much as any other factor can impact them. The most [wealthy 10% of school districts](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/) spend ten times more than the less fortunate 10% of districts in the United States. Compared to the equal distribution in European and Asian nations, the differences between the countries are dramatic. Disenfranchised students in America attend schools without adequate funding for credentialed teachers, tutoring services, and more.

The [1896 Supreme Court decision](https://historyengine.richmond.edu/episodes/view/4854) of Plessy vs. Ferguson pulled from the educational advantages of African American children by segregating public schools. The ruling was later overturned by the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education court case, which found that separate but equal schools were unconstitutional and concluded that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

Despite these findings, there are still many schools in urban cities that have a [two-thirds minority population](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/). They are both underfunded and unequal to their suburban counterparts. Thus, there has been little to no enforcement of anti-economic segregation amid Brown v. Board.

Democratic President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) first coined the term affirmative action, which is now assumed to give people of color an [unfair advantage in higher education](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/). When a black student gets into the colleges/universities of their choice, others tell them they are “taking up spots for deserving applicants” instead of congratulating them for their accomplishment.

Nonetheless, even if they receive college acceptance, they may not be able to afford to go to school. In a 1991 report to Congress, William L. Taylor and Dianne Piche shared that minority and economically disadvantaged students are [centralized in southern states](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/) and have the lowest affordability for public education.So, even though affirmative action gave them a leg up, it did not eliminate every barrier, nor the challenges that students of color would encounter eventually.

The underlying issue is that there are still inherent inequalities in our institutions of education. The *Cost of Darkness documentary* further explores the differences in school conditions by area and how different students are treated based on the color of their skin.