Mixed Reactions

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools are unconstitutional. The landmark decision triggered strong reactions around the country. The excerpts below are from newspaper editorials published the day after the ruling. Read the excerpts, then answer the questions.

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The Supreme Court’s resolution yesterday of the school segregation cases affords all Americans an occasion for pride and gratification. The decision will prove... a profoundly healthy and healing one. It will serve... to close an ancient wound too long allowed to fester. It will bring to an end a painful [gap] between American principles and American practices. It will help to [restore] American prestige in a world which looks to this land for moral inspiration and restore the faith of Americans themselves in their own great values and traditions.

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**Chicago Defender** (Chicago, Illinois): May 18, 1954

Neither the atom bomb nor the hydrogen bomb will ever be as meaningful to our democracy as the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that racial segregation violates the spirit and letter of our Constitution. This means the beginning of the end of the dual society in American life and the... segregation which supported it.

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**Jackson Daily News** (Jackson, Mississippi): May 18, 1954

Mississippi will never [agree] to placing white and Negro* children in the same public schools. The white people and the thinking Negro people did not want that to happen. Both look on the decision as a [disaster]. Every possible human effort will be made to prevent it from happening. Members of the nation’s highest tribunal may be learned in the law, but they are utterly lacking in common sense. . . . Human blood may stain Southern soil in many places because of this decision but the dark red stains of that blood will be on the marble steps of the United States Supreme Court building.

*Once a standard term for African Americans, Negro is now considered dated and offensive.

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**Questions**

1. Which newspapers’ editorials supported the decision? How can you tell?
2. Which newspaper did not support the decision? How can you tell?
3. How does the tone of the *Washington Post and Times Herald* excerpt differ from that of the *Jackson Daily News* excerpt?
4. The atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb are explosive devices powerful enough to devastate entire cities. The U.S. dropped two atom bombs on Japan to end World War II (1939-1945). Why might the *Chicago Defender* editorial have compared the *Brown* ruling to those weapons?
5. How do the *Washington Post and Times Herald*’s and the *Jackson Daily News*’s predictions for what will happen after the ruling compare?