

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

No. 8.—OCTOBER TERM, 1953.

Spottswood Thomas Bolling, }
et al., Petitioners, }
v. }
C. Melvin Sharpe, et al. } On Writ of Certiorari to
the United States Court
of Appeals for the Dis-
trict of Columbia Cir-
cuit.

[May 17, 1954.]

MR. CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN delivered the opinion of the Court.

This case challenges the validity of segregation in the public schools of the District of Columbia. The petitioners, minors of the Negro race, allege that such segregation deprives them of due process of law under the Fifth Amendment. They were refused admission to a public school attended by white children solely because of their race. They sought the aid of the District Court for the District of Columbia in obtaining admission. That court dismissed their complaint. We granted a writ of certiorari before judgment in the Court of Appeals because of the importance of the constitutional question presented. 344 U. S. 873.

We have this day held that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits the states from maintaining racially segregated public schools.¹ The legal problem in the District of Columbia is somewhat different, however. The Fifth Amendment, which is applicable in the District of Columbia, does not contain an equal protection clause as does the Fourteenth Amendment which applies only to the states. But the concepts of equal protection and due process, both stemming from our American ideal of fairness, are not mutually exclu-

¹ *Brown v. Board of Education*, — U. S. —.

sive. The "equal protection of the laws" is a more explicit safeguard of prohibited unfairness than "due process of law," and, therefore, we do not imply that the two are always interchangeable phrases. But, as this Court has recognized, discrimination may be so unjustifiable as to be violative of due process.²

Classifications based solely upon race must be scrutinized with particular care, since they are contrary to our traditions and hence constitutionally suspect.³ As long ago as 1896, this Court declared the principle "that the Constitution of the United States, in its present form, forbids, so far as civil and political rights are concerned, discrimination by the General Government, or by the States, against any citizen because of his race."⁴ And in *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U. S. 60, the Court held that a statute which limited the right of a property owner to convey his property to a person of another race was, as an unreasonable discrimination, a denial of due process of law.

Although the Court has not assumed to define "liberty" with any great precision, that term is not confined to mere freedom from bodily restraint. Liberty under law extends to the full range of conduct which the individual is free to pursue, and it cannot be restricted except for a proper governmental objective. Segregation in public education is not reasonably related to any proper governmental objective, and thus it imposes on Negro children of the District of Columbia a burden that constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of their liberty in violation of the Due Process Clause.

² *Detroit Bank v. United States*, 317 U. S. 329; *Currin v. Wallace*, 306 U. S. 1, 13-14; *Steward Machine Co. v. Davis*, 301 U. S. 548, 585.

³ *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U. S. 214, 216; *Hirabayashi v. United States*, 320 U. S. 81, 100.

⁴ *Gibson v. Mississippi*, 162 U. S. 565, 591. Cf. *Steele v. Louisville & Nashville R. Co.*, 323 U. S. 192, 198-199.

In view of our decision that the Constitution prohibits the states from maintaining racially segregated public schools, it would be unthinkable that the same Constitution would impose a lesser duty on the Federal Government.⁵ We hold that racial segregation in the public schools of the District of Columbia is a denial of the due process of law guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution.

For the reasons set out in *Brown v. Board of Education*, this case will be restored to the docket for reargument on Questions 4 and 5 previously propounded by the Court. 345 U. S. 972.

It is so ordered.

⁵ Cf. *Hurd v. Hodge*, 334 U. S. 24.