

Dedication Ceremony - Henderson

Remarks

Grand Opening Dedication Ceremony

May 17, 2004

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site



Remarks by Cheryl Brown Henderson

President, The Brown Foundation

Welcome on behalf of the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research and on behalf of the *Brown v. Board of Education* 50th Anniversary Coalition.

We've all heard tell of a dream deferred, behind me today is a dream realized. Fourteen years ago five people, Dr. Harry Butowsky with the National Park Service, Mark Stueve former owner of SS Builders, Jerry Jones a Brown Foundation Board Member, Bob DeForrest with the Institute for African American Historic Preservation and me, had a dream of saving an old school which was part of our history to become a permanent commemorative place to those who sacrificed for the rights we now enjoy.

Over the past fifty years we have witnessed the passing of attorneys, community activists and plaintiffs involved in the five cases that comprise the Brown decision. The loss of Thurgood Marshall seemed to signal the end of an era. With the passing of this living history the Brown Foundation understood the urgent need to research and preserve their contributions. We are grateful for individuals from this community and representatives in Congress who supported our mission to resurrect and share the Brown story with all of you.

It is an amazing day to be a U.S. citizen it is an amazing day to be a Kansan. I am so proud.

The campaign to establish a permanent interpretative site led us on a journey of discovery. We gained an awareness that African Americans fought for equal educational opportunity as early as 1849 in Massachusetts. Kansas and Kansans have been central to the movements for desegregating public schools.

The case known as *Oliver L. Brown, et. al. vs. the Board of Education of Topeka (KS) et.al.* was filed in 1951, seventy years after the first case in Kansas in 1881, *Tinnon vs. Ottawa School Board*, which would be followed by eleven such challenges in Kansas all prior to Brown.

In this state of all places we must remember the tenacity of McKinley Burnett, Lucinda Todd, Charles Scott, John Scott, and Charles Bledsoe. They were the NAACP team that

spent countless hours recruiting parents to become part of the NAACP case in Topeka. Thirteen courageous families stood with them. Another Kansan in his capacity as federal court judge. The former Governor of Kansas, Walter Huxman, presided over their case.

Ultimately these pioneers would see their efforts reach the United States Supreme Court and there joined with people from Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia and Washington, D.C. courageous each and every one of them.

On May 17, 1954 a long awaited ruling was handed down. Let us not be seduced by the media myth that Brown was only about one family who stood alone. Let us not be seduced by any sense that the work has been done. Brown remains unfinished business.

I am proud that this case bears my father's name, however it is the legacy of the collective effort on the part of African Americans that this building will interpret.

The Brown Foundation is honored to have played a role in the creation of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site an important educational legacy, a testament to the triumph of the human spirit that it now represents.