

Dedication Ceremony - Norton Remarks

Grand Opening Dedication Ceremony

May 17, 2004

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site

*Remarks by The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior*



Preserving Our Heritage and Cultural Diversity

There was a white elementary school only four blocks away. But a third-grader named Linda Brown had to cross a railroad yard and busy boulevard to wait for a rickety and frequently-delayed bus that would take her 20 blocks to her black elementary school.

She had no idea her journey would mean so much to history and to the reshaping of America.

Today we dedicate a National Park site that focuses on an important event in our nation's history. By highlighting the plight of innocent school children constrained by racial segregation, we commemorate the struggle of all people for equality, civil and human rights.

When you think of National Parks, you may think of glaciers, geysers and grizzlies. But beyond the Yellowstone and Yosemite, the Park Service has a mission to preserve our history.

More than one-half of our 388 national park units interpret our American heritage.

These special places allow people from all over the world to explore and learn about America's heritage and diversity.

Sometimes our history is of painful conflict and struggle.

Our parks accordingly recall everything from battles between Indian tribes and cavalry or the harrowing journeys of the Underground Railroad to the World War II Japanese internment camps.

Our national parks also celebrate the diversity of accomplishment. From the homes of abolitionist Frederick Douglass or businesswoman Maggie L. Walker to the Tuskegee National Historic Site, we are telling the story of outstanding African Americans.

Our historical parks serve as a unifying force in our nation-since all of these experiences and all of these fascinating people are part of our shared national heritage.

We welcome everyone, from every walk of life, to visit our parks to better understand how others overcame adversity, and how our Constitution joins our diversity into the nation that makes us proud to be Americans.

Our hope and our vision is that this Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site will help inform all those who visit-- that peace ... justice ... and equality ... are indivisibly one. Thank you.