

Brown v. Board of Education



MYTH VS TRUTH

While *Brown v. Board of Education* is one of the most important milestones in U.S. history, it is often misunderstood. Below are commonly held myths about the case, and the realities of what actually transpired.

MYTHS

Brown v. Board of Education was the first legal challenge to racially segregated schools in the United States.

The *Brown* case in Kansas came about because Linda Brown was denied access to her neighborhood school and had to walk dozens of blocks to attend an African American school.

The only plaintiff in the *Brown* case was Oliver Brown on behalf of his daughter.

Oliver Brown's name led the roster in the Topeka case because it was the first alphabetically of the 13 NAACP plaintiffs.

Oliver Brown initiated the suit against the Topeka Board of Education.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was based on the Topeka case.

Thurgood Marshall was the NAACP attorney for the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The objective of the NAACP's legal challenge in the *Brown v. Board of Education* was to eliminate segregation in public education.

TRUTHS

African American parents began to challenge racial segregation in public education as early as 1849 in the case of *Roberts v. City of Boston, Massachusetts*. Kansas was the site of eleven such cases spanning from 1881 to 1949.

The *Brown* case was initiated and organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leadership who recruited African American parents in Topeka for a class action suit against the local school board. Although school buses were provided for African American children, they were only allowed to attend designated public schools based on race.

In 1952, *Brown v. Board* was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court as a combination of five cases from various parts of the country, representing nearly 200 hundred plaintiffs.

The Kansas case was named after Oliver Brown as a legal strategy to have a man at the head of the roster. There actually were two plaintiffs with the surname of Brown: Darlene Brown and Oliver Brown. The only male plaintiff was Oliver Brown, for whom the Topeka case was named.

Oliver Brown was asked to join the class action suit by Charles Scott, one of three serving as legal counsel for the Topeka NAACP.

The Supreme Court combined five cases under the heading of *Brown v. Board of Education* from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Those individual cases were:

- *Belton v. Gebhardt (Bulah v. Gebhardt) (Delaware)*
- *Brown v. Board of Education (Kansas)*
- *Briggs v. Elliott (South Carolina)*
- *Davis v. Prince Edwards County School Board (Virginia)*
- *Bolling v. Sharpe (District of Columbia)*

The strategy to use the courts to challenge segregation in public education began with the NAACP under the leadership of Attorney Charles Hamilton Houston during the 1930's. Houston was the former Dean of Howard University Law School. Thurgood Marshall was hired into the NAACP by Houston, and worked on *Brown* with a team of attorneys.

Ultimately, the NAACP sought to end the practice of "separate but equal" throughout every segment of society, including public transportation, dining facilities, public schools and all forms of public accommodation.