

Name: _____

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Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)

One of the most historical court cases especially in terms of education was *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*. This case took on segregation within school systems, or the separation of white and black students within public schools. Up until this case, many states had laws establishing separate schools for white students and another for black students. This landmark case made those laws unconstitutional. The decision was handed down on May 17, 1954. It overturned the *Plessy v Ferguson* decision of 1896, which had allowed segregation within schools. The chief justice in the case was Justice Earl Warren. His court's decision was a unanimous 9-0 decision that said, "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." The ruling essentially led the way for the civil rights movement and essentially integration across the United States.



How do you think the *Brown* ruling was received in the South?

History: A class action suit was filed against the Board of Education of the city of Topeka, Kansas in the United States District Court for the District of Kansas in 1951. The plaintiffs consisted of thirteen parents of twenty children who attended the Topeka School District. They filed the suit hoping that the school district would change its policy of racial segregation. In the fall of 1951, the parents of the twenty children attempted to enroll them in the closest school to their homes, but each were denied enrollment and told they had to enroll in the segregated school. This prompted the class action suit to be filed. At the district level the court ruled in favor of the Topeka Board of Education saying that both schools were equal in regards to transportation, buildings, curriculum, and highly qualified teachers. The case then went on to the Supreme Court and was combined with four other similar suits from across the country.

Significance: *Brown v Board* set the foundation for the civil rights movement and gave African American's hope that "separate, but equal" on all fronts would be changed. The fight that followed after this ruling is not a pretty one. Many people lost their lives fighting for their rights and opportunities to live free in a completely equal and blended society. It was not an easy transition and tension ran extremely high during these times. Schools now days are said to be "melting pots". This landmark case opened the doors of all schools to all people across the United States. It allowed people of all colors to have an equal opportunity to a free and public education.

Why is the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision still important today?
