

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

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Facts

- Oliver Brown, an African-American, filed a class-action suit against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in 1951, after his daughter, Linda Brown, was denied entrance to Topeka's all-white elementary schools.
- Brown claimed that schools for black children were not equal to the white schools, and that segregation violated the so-called "Equal Protection Clause" of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution.
- The 14th Amendment holds that no state can "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Held

- The US Supreme Court unanimously held that the segregation laws were unconstitutional.
- The segregation of students in public schools violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, because separate facilities are inherently unequal.
- In determining its decision, the Supreme Court compared US society in 1896 with society in 1954:
 - The 1896 decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (which held that segregation was legal, provided the facilities and services were equal) was made when the South had very few public schools and, in some states, education of black children was illegal.
 - Contrast this with 1954 where public education was much more widespread.
- The Supreme Court held that state-mandated segregation, even if implemented in schools of otherwise equal quality, is unequal because "[t]o separate [black children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone."
- Footnotes in the judgment referred to psychological studies which proved that segregated children suffered long lasting psychological damage.

Quotes

"We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment."

Full Text

The full text is available here: <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/ll/usrep/usrep347/usrep347483/usrep347483.pdf>

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