

Name \_\_\_\_\_

The Road to Little Rock  
U.S. History II  
Mr. Raby

Fill out the chart below on *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*.

	<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>	<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>
Date		
Complaint		
Supreme Court Decision		

# Plessy v. Ferguson

**Plessy v. Ferguson** was a landmark decision of the Supreme Court of the United States concerning racial segregation. In this 1896 ruling, the court established the policy of "separate but equal" public facilities for blacks and whites. The decision formed the basis of widespread segregation in the South for over 50 years.

The case began in 1892, when Homer A. Plessy challenged a Louisiana law that required separate but equal facilities for blacks and whites in railroad cars. John H. Ferguson, a criminal district court judge, overruled Plessy's plea that the law was unconstitutional. Plessy then brought action against Ferguson. Plessy argued that the law violated a clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that guaranteed citizens equal protection of the laws. The Supreme Court ruled that the amendment did not seek to guarantee the social equality of all races. The court upheld the Louisiana law. Segregation of the races in the South continued, though facilities for blacks were nearly always inferior to those for whites.

See also BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA.

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## Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka** was a case decided in 1954 in which the Supreme Court of the United States declared racial segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional. The full name of the case is *Brown et al v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas*. The court decided the case together with several others that dealt with the same issue. The court applied its decision to all of the cases at the same time. But the name of the *Brown* case is almost always used in referring to the decision.

The Supreme Court's decision launched the legal movement to desegregate U.S. society. At that time, many areas of the United States, especially in the South, were racially segregated. In segregated areas, blacks and whites went to separate schools, lived in separate neighborhoods, rode in separate parts of buses, and drank from separate drinking fountains. State laws called *Jim Crow laws* required or permitted such separation. An 1896 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* had permitted separate railroad cars or trains as long as they were equal in nature. The 1896 decision established the "separate but equal" principle, which later was used to uphold other kinds of segregation in the United States.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, guided by its chief lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, decided to use the *Brown* case and its companion cases to challenge the "separate but equal" principle. In the *Brown* case itself, Oliver Brown, an African American railroad worker in Topeka, Kansas, sued the Topeka Board of Education for not allowing Linda Brown, his daughter, to attend Sumner Elementary School, an all-white school near her home. The other cases involved similar suits by black parents from other parts of the country. Marshall attacked the "separate but equal" rule by arguing that segregation harms minority students by making them feel inferior and thus interfering with their ability to learn.



In a unanimous decision, the court agreed with Marshall and declared that separate educational facilities could never be equal. Therefore, segregated schools violated the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which requires that all citizens be treated equally.

By 1960, however, several Southern states still had no black students enrolled in public schools with white students. Some progress was made in these states later in the 1960's, after a series of civil rights protests and the passage of federal laws desegregating other public facilities. In a number of cases, courts used the principles that have been established in the *Brown* decision to require or uphold the desegregation of public facilities other than schools.

In the 1970's, courts in the United States ordered many cities to begin busing students between neighborhoods to integrate public schools. Nevertheless, many black students still attend segregated schools.

See also EDUCATION (Education for whom?); MARSHALL, THURGOOD; SEGREGATION (The beginning of change).

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