

Celebrate The Century 1950s - Desegregating Public Schools
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Designed by Howard Paine



Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas

During and after the Civil War, (1861-1865) laws were passed and amendments to the constitution were ratified with the intention of granting African Americans full citizenship and guaranteeing them the same rights and liberties enjoyed by all Americans.

In 1863 Lincoln enacted the Emancipation Proclamation which freed only the slaves in the states that were in active rebellion against the Union. In 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified ending slavery in the remaining states. The Fourteenth Amendment, passed in 1868, granted full citizenship rights and equal protection under the law to all persons born in the United States.

The Freedman's Bureau was established on March 3, 1865 to help protect African Americans from violence, establish schools, provide food, clothing and assistance, and resolve labor disputes.

In 1870 the **15th Amendment** was passed guaranteeing African Americans and other minorities the right to vote. It reads as follows:

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

During the reconstruction era, (1865-1877) northern troops occupied the South and enforced the new laws. African Americans established businesses, voted and were elected to public office. In 1877 reconstruction ended when all Federal troops were withdrawn after the compromise election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876.

With the withdrawal of northern troops, Southern States began to enact Black Laws (Jim Crow) imposing strict segregation of schools, restaurants, public transportation, hotels, churches, and hospitals.

In the case of Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896), Justice Billings Brown voided the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments and gave approval to legally enforced segregation, (Separate but Equal). Organizations such as the Klu Klux Klan terrorized, murdered and intimidated southern Blacks to prevent them from voting or advancing economically.

During the early 1900s Jim Crow laws became even more radical. In 1914, Louisiana passed a law that required separate entrances to circuses for Blacks and Whites. Kentucky passed a law that prohibited textbooks issued to Blacks from ever being used by a white child. Oklahoma even segregated it's telephone booths.

After World War II conditions remained the same for most Blacks, however African American leaders such as General Benjamin Davis were instrumental in beginning the desegregation process in our Nation's Military.

In 1951 after numerous unsuccessful attempts by civil rights organizations to obtain equal opportunities for African American children, the Topeka, Kansas Chapter of the NAACP challenged the Separate but Equal laws that governed public schools. The NAACP filed the Brown vs. the Topeka Kansas Board of Education suit on February 28, 1951. The District Court ruled in favor of the school board. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and Thurgood Marshal argued for the plaintiffs. On May 17, 1954 the United States Supreme court issued a unanimous decision that it was a violation of the 14th amendment to separate children in public schools for reasons of race or color.

Southern states continued to fight against integration and it took more long years, additional law suits, and eventually troops and Federal Marshals to begin integrating the public school system. The most famous of these cases involved the Little Rock, Arkansas Central High School.

Little Rock had a profound impact on America and led the way to the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties.