

# Civil rights movement

Law



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Without question one of the most significant events of the Civil Rights era was the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Odyssey 5), handed down by the court in 1954 (5). The case, which originated in Charleston, South Carolina, was heard by the Supreme Court grouped together with like cases from other states under the single title, thus, *Topeka* as opposed to *Charleston* (5). The Supreme Court ruling established that segregation was not legal, and set into motion a series of subsequent events, many manipulated by the participants of the Civil Rights movement, that caused states to rescind segregation both in law and in practice (6-12).

One of the most prominent figures in the Civil Rights movement, and one of the most prominent men in history, was to emerge from *Brown v. Board*; Thurgood Marshall, who, with other NAACP lawyers, argued and won the case of *Brown v. Board*. Marshall was later appointed by President John F. Kennedy to the bench of the Supreme Court as the first black Supreme Court Justice of the United States (5).

Long before *Brown*, however, and long before Marshall would sit on the Supreme Court, in 1930; Marshall applied to the University of Maryland Law School (Marshall 1). Because Marshall was black, his application to the law school was rejected (1). Marshall was accepted into Howard University's law school, which was and continues to be one of the finest institutions of higher education serving a student body of mostly African Americans (1). It's easy to understand the passion with which Marshall must have pursued his victory in *Brown v. Board of Topeka*.

*Brown v. Board* opened the door to African Americans seeking admissions into what had traditionally been white schools and colleges. It was a long

road, but sweeping changes began taking place throughout the south. Arkansas, in 1957 saw its National Guard force federalized by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in order to prevent the state's, Governor Orval Faubus, from utilizing the Guard to prevent black students from entering white schools (Odyssey 7). In 1962, the University of Mississippi was mandated by a federal court to admit its first black student, James Meredith (8). Meredith, having accumulated credit from another university prior to his admission, graduated from the University of Mississippi the following year (8).

Having delivered the Court's decision in 1954, Chief Justice Warren read, "We conclude that, in the field of education, 'separate but equal' has no place" (Supreme Court 1).

In 1960, in an appearance before the National Urban League, Dr. Martin Luther King said, "'For all men of good will May 17, 1954, came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of enforced segregation [...]. It served to transform the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope.'" (Howard 1)." King recognized that education meant hope for black Americans, just as it did for white Americans.

Today, as we look around us, we see that colleges and universities across America invite students from every culture, every race into their student body and community. We have learned, perhaps the hard way, that education is something to which all individuals are not only entitled, but should be encouraged in. In today's world community, it is more important than ever to educate ourselves so that we can participate in an ever evolving world.

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