

Brown v. Board Of Education (Linda Carol Brown)

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People do not know who Linda Carol Brown is. They don't know her story. Close your eyes and imagine, the year is 1954. The news is alarmingly full of public outcry about some little girl and her family. This audacious family is going to the supreme court with 13 other people, to fight for their right to go to an all-white school.

Brown v. Board of Education was a pivotal event in our nation's history. Without Brown V Board of Education schools might still be segregated and unfair to all kids regardless of their race. Brown v. Board of Education was one of the most important moments in the civil rights movement because it ended segregated schools, made it easier for all kids to get a quality education, and it set the stage for other important court cases related to the civil rights movement.

The concept of a uniform system of public schools, supported by state and local taxation, had begun to emerge before the state of Kansas appeared in American history.<sup>1</sup> When the complaint in Case No. T-316 was filed, it contained the names of the thirteen Topeka parents who sued on their own behalf and as representatives of their twenty children, who were also appearing as plaintiffs. All of these individuals were black. All of the children were public school students who had been denied access to their neighborhood schools due to the color of their skin. Because the aggrieved students were minors and without legal capacity to sue, each was represented by his or her parents in the court filing.<sup>2</sup> You may wonder why the case is referred to by only the last name Brown when there were so many individuals represented by the suit. The answer to the question "why Brown?" comes in four steps, three of which are obvious and the fourth more obscure. First, "Brown" is the only name specifically mentioned in the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, Paul E. *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education*. University Press of Kansas, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, Paul E. *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education*. University Press of Kansas, 1995.

abbreviated caption of the official reports of the Supreme Court's opinion. Second, of the four school-segregation cases decided in the Supreme Court's consolidated opinion of May 17, 1954, the Brown case was the first to have been entered on the Supreme Court's docket; hence, the inclusive opinion bore its caption. Third, Oliver Brown's name appears first in the array of plaintiff in the caption of the district court case. The most important case leading up to Brown v. Board was Plessy v. Ferguson. At the end of that case, it was decided that there could still be separate schools because separate was equal. However this proved to be untrue. Even if the school administration claimed they were providing equality in education, white only schools could still have had a better school facility, more supplies, experienced teachers, and more funding. In contrast, the "colored" or non-white schools were often lesser in quality. Frequently they were small and dirty schools, staffed by poorly or under-educated teachers, and had a small budget. This lack of funding meant that many school activities were not available to the students. Activities and clubs were commonly available and easily accessible at "white" schools. This standard of accepted inequality was undone in Brown v. Board of Education. The case was not simple, at one point the court uncovered a factual error and had to re-interview individuals who had testified.

Finally, and critically, the court announced its Finding of Fact No. 8, which reads as follows: "Segregation of whites and colored children in public schools has a determining effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of

Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system".<sup>3</sup>

If the Brown family had stood alone in its challenges only to be rebuffed by Topeka schools officials, would they have had the will and the wealth to carry the issue to the federal courts and to press for a final determination? <sup>4</sup>This is a difficult question to answer, they would not some say but others think that they would have gone on. Linda Carol Brown would probably have a lot of coverage in the news because of her case in *Brown v Board of Education*. But they probably would not have the money to go as far as they did and probably not have gotten into the all white school. This courageous group of individuals presented a powerful team, they were stronger together but alone, weak as a single twig. The newspapers reported that Linda Carol Brown was a symbol lost in the crowd.

Many people do not know that there was more than just one student in this case. The Reverend Oliver Brown and his daughter Linda Carol Brown were the names the public identified with the court case. The other 13 students and their families were Mrs. Richard Lawton and daughters Victoria Jean Lawton and Carol Kay Lawton, Mrs. Lucinda Todd and daughter Nancy Jane Todd, Mrs. Andrew Henderson and daughter Vicki Ann Henderson and son Donald Andrew Henderson, Mrs. Vivian Scales and daughter Ruth Ann Scales, Mrs. Lena Carper and daughter Katherine Louise Carper, Mrs. Shirly Hodison and son Charels Hodison, Mrs. Marguerite Emmerson and son Claude Athur Emmerson and George Robert Emmerson, Mrs. Sadie Emmanuel and son James Meldon Emmanuel, Mrs. Iona Richardson and sons Ronald Douglas Richardson, Mrs Alma Lewis and sons Theron Lewis, Arthur Lewis and daughters Martha Jean Lewis and Frances Lewis, Mrs. Shirla Fleming and sons Duane Dean

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<sup>3</sup>Wilson, Paul E. *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education*. University Press of Kansas, 1995.

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Fleming and Silas Hadrick Fleming. These heroic individuals received no praise or media coverage for their commitment to equality because Linda Carol Brown was always in the spotlight with her father. Currently, in many of today's school history and civics curriculums, Oliver Brown and Linda Carol Brown are not named or mentioned for the amazing battle they fought or their contribution to equality in our educational system.

The Brown's case made it an expectation for all children to receive access to a good education. This new standard also had huge implications in the travel required for many minority children to even get to their school. Previously, many children had to walk several blocks to get to a school bus to be transported to a minority school. Frequently, there would be a "white" school in their neighborhood, a much shorter distance from home, that they were unable to attend. Linda was forced to walk 10 blocks just to arrive at the school bus which took her an even longer distance from home, to a school she was allowed to attend. She had to cross the busiest street in her city to get to the bus everyday, and then again on the way home. This was an unacceptable safety risk to a young girl who was simply trying to access a public school education, which was legally her right, even though there was an all-white school in her neighborhood! Even though it took a couple years, after *Brown V Board of Education* (after 30 years of hard work) every kid, black or white could go to the schools nearby their neighborhood. This exciting new precedent not only granted access to equal education for all children, but it also proved to be much safer due to the lessened travel requirements for many children.

The decision of the court, rendered on October 28, 1955, concluded as follows: "It is the conclusion of the court that whole complete segregation has not been accomplished in the Topeka School System, a good faith effort toward the end has been made and that, therefore, the plan adopted by the board of education of the city of Topeka be approved as a good faith beginning to bring about complete desegregation. Jurisdiction of the cause of the purpose of

entering the final decree is retained until the court finds that there has been full compliance with the mandate of the supreme court".<sup>5</sup> After *Brown V Board of Education*, our court system had a new and clearer mindset about true justice and equality in segregation cases. This landmark victory set the stage for future important court cases related to the civil rights movement.

Once again, *Brown V Board of Education* was one of the most important moments in ending segregation because it ended the unfair practice of separate schools, made it easier for all children to obtain access to a quality education, and it set the stage for other important court cases related to the civil rights movement. *Brown V Board of Education* may have been major headline news in 1954, but now most people have a very vague understanding of this landmark piece of legislation. Many people do not even recognize the name of the young girl, Linda Carol Brown, who fought for children's rights. In 1974 the war against segregation was still surging on, it was basically fighting an old war on the same front. Even though it took years, people still kept fighting until it ended. It's hard for me to know that one of the biggest and most conflicting changes in education goes unknown by more than half of the citizens of the United States. *Brown v. Board* is still a big deal even now, and it shows the world that you don't have to be the biggest person in the room to make a big change in the world.

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<sup>5</sup> Wilson, Paul E. *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education*. University Press of Kansas, 1995.

## Primary sources:

“Interview with Linda Brown Smith (Video).” *Interview with Linda Brown Smith*, OAD, repository.wustl.edu/concern/videos/1n79h614g.

This interview really helped me understand what it was like to be going through what she went through. It explained a different side of the story not just what the court said or their version.

“Text of Supreme Court Decision Outlawing Negro Segregation in the Public Schools .” *New York Times*, 18 May 1954

This article was very important for my report because it gave the decision of the court case. And was at the same time instead of 20 years later.

Wilson, Paul E. *A Time to Lose: Representing Kansas in Brown v. Board of Education*. University Press of Kansas, 1995.

This book was not on Brown v Board of Education but it had several parts that were on the Browns. The author was there at the time of the case and understood what they went through.

Browning, R. Stephen. *From Brown to Bradley; School Desegregation, 1954-1974*. Jefferson Law Book Co., 1975.

This book did not have alot but the small amount it did was quite helpful.

## Secondary sources:

History.com Editors, History.com Editors. "Brown v. Board of Education." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 27 Oct. 2009, [www.history.com/topics/black-history/brown-v-board-of-education-of-topeka](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/brown-v-board-of-education-of-topeka).

This website is what helped decide what my topic was. It did have good information but not deep enough and was missing a lot of details.

Carlson, Michael. "Linda Brown Obituary." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 28 Mar. 2018, [www.theguardian.com/education/2018/mar/28/linda-brown-obituary](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/mar/28/linda-brown-obituary).

This website helped me see Linda Brown's story, but it focused on her childhood and older adult years, not on the time of her case in court.

"Topeka Again Facing Desegregation ." 1974.

This article shows that still 20 years later that even though segregation was outlawed it was still a problem.

"Linda Brown: a Symbol Lost in the Crowd ." 1974.

To me this article was sad because only 20 years later that people did not know who Linda Brown was or what her role was.

"1954 Decision Altered Lives." 2004.

This article was not much help but it did give some good information.

"Fighting an Old War on the Same Front ." 1974.

This article shows that still 20 years later that even though segregation was outlawed it was still a problem.

Patterson, James T. *Brown v. Board of Education: a Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

This book was full of information and explained both sides of the story.