

BLACK/WHITE & BROWN

(5-Part Radio Series)

Part One

(8:13)

Narrator (Bill Kurtis): The decision rendered by the Supreme Court in 1954 is often referred to simply as “Brown v Board.” The full title of the ruling cites Oliver L. Brown as the lead plaintiff. A lifelong resident of Topeka, Kansas, Oliver Brown was employed as a welder in the shops of the Santa Fe Railroad. He also served as an assistant pastor at a local church. He passed away in 1961, but his youngest daughter, Cheryl Brown Henderson, continues to play an active role in educating others about this case and her family's role in it.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: The neighborhood we lived in was an integrated neighborhood along First Street. And every morning, the African-American children that lived along that stretch – that block or two -- would head off in one direction and the white children, living next door, would head off in another direction. And for the children, I don't think it was problematic, you know kids are very accepting of how they live. The African-American schools were good schools. The facilities were built by the same person so we're not talking about substandard facilities with leaky roofs and outhouses like they were in the South. The teachers were well trained; many of them had advanced degrees so we weren't talking about a poor education. You know, we're not talking about having to walk miles because in South Carolina the children walked ten miles. In Topeka, they walked a few blocks and caught a bus. So we weren't talking about real hardships here. We were talking about the principle of the thing.

Narrator: In the 1940s and early '50s, there were eighteen elementary schools for Caucasian children in Topeka and four for African-Americans. The system of segregated schools was based upon a state law enacted in 1879 ... a law that had been challenged many times.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: And that law, in essence, was two tiered. It said that only cities of a certain size, 15,000 or more, could have segregated schools and then **only** elementary schools. So those early cases, many of them that were in small towns like Ottawa and Parsons and Galena, were successful in the State Supreme Court. Because according to state law, they were second-class cities and could not have segregated schools. So Topeka, Wichita, Kansas City, the larger communities had segregated elementary schools and that's what the Brown case in Kansas was challenging unlike its companion cases in the other states.

Narrator: In the other states that would become associated with the case known as Brown v Board, there were significant disparities between schools for whites and those for blacks. Such was **not** the case in Topeka, as those who attended the black schools will attest. A former chief of the Topeka fire department, Joe Douglas looks back upon his years in Monroe Elementary with great fondness and appreciation....

Joe Douglas: Well, it was one of the greatest experiences, looking back over my life, the greatest educational experiences that I could ever have. And I would wish that for every child that you have, could have the kind of nurturing and the kind of individual attention to the fact that you are learning and progressing that I had at that time. The teachers were excellent at that time.

VO: Merrill Ross served as a teacher, coach and principal in the Topeka school system for almost 30 years. A native of Kentucky, Merrill saw Kansas as a land of opportunity.

Merrill Ross: I came to Topeka in 1944 to teach at the intermediate level of the black schools.

VO: On a trip to Ohio to recruit new teachers for Topeka, Merrill met his future wife Barbara. She came to Topeka in 1947 and began teaching at Washington Elementary ... one of the four schools for blacks....

Barbara Ross: I feel they were good schools. They had qualified black teachers, very qualified. They had the same books and we've heard a lot of things about that. But they had the same books that the others had because so many of the black teachers were on the committees to select the books, the textbooks. So we know we had the same books as they did. It's true -- everything wasn't just right because the things in the community weren't just right. We couldn't go eat any place. We couldn't go to the theater and sit any place. We couldn't live in an apartment or go to a motel; we had to stay with a black family when we came here to teach.

Joe Douglas: Well, the theaters was segregated, restaurants were segregated. There was always somebody tellin' you could or you couldn't come in.

Barbara Ross: And the thing that is so strange, too, is just to have the elementary segregated, go in to junior high and high school integrated, however, their social activities were still separate. There were separate kings and queens and separate basketball teams like that ... because Merrill coached the Ramblers for about 4 years and Topeka High had the Trojans.

Jack Alexander: When I went to Topeka High School, I had no frame of reference about the Topeka Trojans ... I was gonna play for the Topeka Ramblers.

Narrator: In the early 1970s, Jack Alexander became the first African-American elected as a city official in Topeka, serving as water commissioner.

Jack Alexander: We only played against black teams. I guess the thing that I remember most is that we had to stay at people's houses rather than in a hotel. We had to eat ... if there was a black restaurant, we had to eat there. Otherwise, accommodations weren't that good. ... That system, I think, just kinda passed down. I guess for myself, I would have to say I followed what I saw in front of me. You know, I had parents who told me I could do anything, but I could watch them and also see that they couldn't.

[recording of Langston Hughes]

Langston Hughes: "I, too, sing America. I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes, but I laugh and eat well and grow strong. Tomorrow I'll be at the table when company comes. Nobody'll dare say to me 'eat in the kitchen' then. Besides, they'll see how beautiful we are and be ashamed. I, too, am America."

VO: The poet Langston Hughes spent his childhood years in Topeka and nearby Lawrence, Kansas. This leading figure of the Harlem renaissance drew upon the adversity he encountered as a youth to fuel his passion for a more civilized world. His prose and poetry was a harbinger of the change that was afoot in America.

Jack Alexander: One of the bigger things which started to affect it was also the change in the military that was happening at that time. We had guys going in and coming out and were experiencing other things. But yeah, I think from that point on, things started to change."

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Part Two

(7:53)

Newsreel Narrator: In a Lincoln's Day address to a gathering of ten thousand before the memorial to the Great Emancipator in Washington, President Truman strongly advocates freedom and equality for all United States citizens.

Pres. Harry Truman: Our immediate task is to remove the last remnants of the barriers which stand between millions of our citizens and their birthright. There is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry or religion or race or color.

Narrator: In 1948, President Truman issued executive orders desegregating the federal government and the armed forces. Many of those who first began to express a desire for change in the larger society were black veterans who felt it was high time that ALL Americans be afforded the same rights. It was apparent that one of the first things that could be changed was the system of segregated schooling. While many black families in Topeka may have been satisfied with their schools, a move got under way to challenge the system. It was led by the U.S. Army veteran McKinley Burnett. His daughter, Maurita Davis, recalls that her father's battle against segregation can be traced back to his years in the military.

Maurita Davis: He said when he was in the Army, he spent quite a bit of his time writing. He said he stayed in the guardhouse most of the time for writing presidents and congressmen. And Bilbo of Mississippi wrote and told him: "Mr. Burnett, what you're talking about don't make good nonsense ... trying to integrate the schools."

Narrator: McKinley Burnett was 52 years old when he took over the leadership of the Topeka chapter of the NAACP in 1948. He was employed as a stock clerk in the local Veterans Administration hospital.

Maurita Davis (Daughter of McKinley Burnett): I can remember he did not take a vacation. He saved his vacation time to go to the board meetings, board of education meetings because they would set them at a time when he had to be at work. So he couldn't come. But he, as I say, saved all of his leave, so he could come to the board meetings.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: So basically, McKinley Burnett who was the NAACP Chairperson really issued a rallying cry, if you will, for two years, 1948 –1950. Mr. Burnett attended every single school board meeting. He would take petitions with him on occasion but really trying to get on that public comment part of the agenda so that he could talk about this business of simply opting to integrate the public elementary schools in Topeka. Well, unfortunately, Mr. Burnett never had a chance to be heard out. He never had a chance to say his piece.

Narrator: After patiently enduring the continued snubbing by the Topeka school board, McKinley Burnett embarked on a lengthy crusade that would bring him into collaboration with John and Charles Scott and Charles Bledsoe-- local attorneys who also possessed strong conviction in the principle of racial equality, as Charles Scott, Jr. explains.

Charles Scott, Jr.: They were part of the legal redress committee of the local NAACP there in Topeka. They were exploring ways to mount a challenge to challenge segregation in the Topeka public school system.

Narrator: In addition to McKinley Burnett and the attorneys at the Scott law firm, another person played a key role in this effort to desegregate public schools – her name was Lucinda Todd. Michael Blevins remembers her as his fifth grade teacher in an integrated classroom of the late 1950s.

Michael Blevins: I knew at the time that she was an awesome teacher. I remember the first day of school, walking in to her class and being...I know my...I can still sense this, my jaw dropping open with her grace, with her beauty, with her dignity and her affection. She was truly committed all of her life to elementary age children.

Narrator: Mrs. Todd was unhappy with the status quo in Topeka for a number of reasons. Her primary reason for becoming involved with the NAACP related to her concern about the educational opportunities afforded her daughter.

Michael Blevins: They did not have music programs in the black elementary schools. And Nancy was very gifted musically -- Mrs. Todd's daughter. And it incensed Mrs. Todd that Nancy did not have access to basic music programs in school like white kids had.

Narrator: With a great deal of passion and enthusiasm, Lucinda Todd accepted a job as McKinley Burnett's assistant at the Topeka NAACP. She hosted visitors from out of town and often provided a meeting space in her own home.

Michael Blevins: They met once in a while somewhere else, but most of the time they met in the Todd home in the dining room around a dining room table.

Narrator: Although the local NAACP chapter wasn't large, its members included a number of well-educated professionals affiliated with the prominent psychiatric clinic established by C.F. Menninger and his sons, Will and Karl.

Maurita Davis: A lot of people don't know it but Menninger in Topeka was certainly a monetary help and they came out. And at that time, I think they were all psychiatrists. And I think there was only one black ... I can't recall his name ... psychiatrist, but they came to the meetings with their presence and their money. They certainly did.

Michael Blevins: In sort of a tremendously fortuitous coming together of resources with Menningers being in Topeka and Mrs. Todd's husband, Alvin, working for Karl Menninger. The decision was made: 'Now look, it's time to challenge segregation as segregation. Even if schools are the same, just the fact that the kids, by law, cannot co-mingle impacts education and development in a negative way.'

Narrator: In consultation with the national office of the NAACP, the local group in Topeka decided to proceed with a class action lawsuit.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: So they came up with an idea that they would spend the summer of 1950 recruiting people so that by the fall of 1950, when school was about to start, they would have their class of litigants, plaintiffs, petitioners ... whichever phrase you prefer. So at the end of that summer after talking to fellow church members, NAACP members, personal friends, knocking on doors, they had assembled a group of 13 people. Of course, Mrs. Todd, because she was at the strategy meeting, was able to say right at the meeting "Sign me up" that 'I will in fact be a volunteer,' which in many ways makes her the first plaintiff in the Topeka case. But in the fall of 1950 with this group of 13 families, a total of 20 children coming from these 13 families. They were instructed by the NAACP legal team to locate the nearest white school to your home, take your child or children and a witness and try to enroll and then come back and tell us what transpired.

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Part Three

(7:56)

Narrator: Most of those who signed on as plaintiffs in this case are no longer living, so it's up to their survivors to relay their stories. In the courtroom where the trial took place, they talk about what they know of the events that transpired half a century ago. Within this group, Zelma Henderson is the only surviving plaintiff.

Zelma Henderson: I had two children and we lived in North Topeka and the buses picked them up from the east side of North Topeka and carried them to the far west side to McKinley School.

Narrator: Having grown up in a small town in western Kansas, Mrs. Henderson had never attended a segregated school. From *her* experience, it seemed more natural that schools be integrated, and she was quite willing to sign on as a plaintiff when asked.

Zelma Henderson: I knew the attorneys. And when they came to North Topeka they needed someone to represent McKinley. And they knew that I had always gone to an integrated school and that I had could prove that the system worked.

Narrator: All of the plaintiffs who signed on were female except for Oliver Brown. They were angered by the fact that their children had to travel farther to school than they believed necessary, as was the case with Oliver Brown's daughter Linda.

Linda Brown Thompson: Yes, I lived four blocks from an all-white school but I had to, in fact, go up through the Rock Island railroad tracks and cross a busy avenue to wait on a school bus to carry me two miles across town to the all-black Monroe School.

Narrator: Linda Thompson still remembers the day that her father, Oliver Brown, attempted to enroll her at Sumner Elementary, a school that was a short walk from their home....

Linda Thompson: I remember going, well like I say we lived in an integrated neighborhood and I had all of these playmates of different nationalities. And so when I found out that day that I might be able to go to their school I was just thrilled, you know. And I remember walking over to Sumner School with my dad that day and going up the steps of the school and the school looked so big to a small child. And I remember going inside and my dad spoke with someone and then he went in to the inner office with the principal and they left me out to sit outside with the secretary. And while he was in the inner office, I could hear voices and hear his voice raised, you know, as the conversation went on. And then he immediately came out of the office, took me by the hand and we walked home from school. I just couldn't understand what was happening because I was so sure that I was going to go to school with Mona and Guinevere, Wanda, and all of my playmates.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: So at that point, the plaintiffs, after this test, pretty much got to go back to their everyday lives. It was left to the legal team to come up with all the legal strategy and do all the research to put together a case. But in February of 1951, February 28th I believe, it was actually filed. And it was at that point that the case became known for my dad, Oliver Brown. So the legal name of the case is 'Oliver L. Brown, et al', which in legal terms means "and others", vs. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas.

Narrator: Within a week after attorney Charles Bledsoe paid fifteen dollars to formally file the complaint, a three-judge panel was designated to hear the case. They scheduled the trial to commence on June 25, 1951. Robert Carter was one of two attorneys from the headquarters of the NAACP to become directly involved in this case. He and Jack Greenberg came to Kansas from New York after Lucinda Todd wrote a letter to the national office, apprising them of the situation in Topeka and requesting their assistance.

Robert Carter: We had no expectation that any of the courts ... lower courts ... would rule for us. Our only hope was that we would be able to build enough cases to get to the Supreme Court. That was the first thing we had to try to do.

Narrator: Now a federal judge in New York City, Robert Carter took a job with the NAACP in 1944, following his discharge from the Army. Having obtained law degrees from Howard University and Columbia University prior to the war, Carter became one of the chief architects of the NAACP's strategy to dismantle the existing system of racial segregation. Back in 1896, the Supreme Court had ruled -- in the case known as Plessy versus Ferguson -- that separate facilities for white and "colored people" were permissible so long as they were judged to be equal.

Robert Carter: The argument that I conceived was that the separate-but-equal doctrine was invalid; that it was not ... it had been conceived in transportation, had not been applied to education. And although the courts had assumed that it would apply to education, it had not really ever been. And my theory was ... or argument was that once it was applied to education, the courts would see that it had no application and overrule it.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: But that was part of the team that came out here. So Charles Scott together with Jack Greenberg and Robert Carter put together those final pieces, organized and recruited the expert witnesses and then moved the case forward. Louisa Holt who was a psychologist ... I believe she was working between Menninger's and the University of Kansas -- she was the one that really brought in this idea of the psychological harm done when you segregate children and the stigma it seems to carry when the segregation is done solely on the basis of race.

Robert Carter: That was the whole strategy this had been conceived of, which is the reason we had her and people like her to testify in these cases.

Narrator: The judges of the district court acknowledged the validity of the argument related to the psychological impact of segregation, but they could *not* issue a decision contrary to the Supreme Court and its ruling in the Plessy case of 1896. On August 3rd of 1951, the U.S. District Court in Kansas upheld the right of the Topeka school board to maintain segregated schools.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: The unique thing about the Kansas case, again ... and I guess because we lived this, living in Topeka. But the unique thing for us here in Kansas, the presiding judge of this three-judge panel that comprised of Federal District Court here in Topeka, Walter Huxman, had been the governor of Kansas before he became a federal

district court judge. And I think Judge Huxman, especially after hearing Louisa Holt, really thought long and hard about how he could craft his opinion in such a way that the Supreme Court would have to make a definitive decision about this notion of segregated public schools. So I think it was very politically savvy on his part -- not to go against custom or go against the current law but to still write it in such a way that left the question open.

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Part Four

(7:56)

Narrator: After the District Court ruled against the plaintiffs, an appeal was filed on their behalf. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to review the case, proceeding to combine it with four other cases of a similar nature -- a case from South Carolina, where a group of African-American families complained of substandard school buildings and inequitable resources; a case from Virginia, where more than one hundred students went on strike to protest overcrowded and inadequate facilities; a dual case from Delaware involving a black high school and a one-room elementary said to be of inferior quality; and a case from the District of Columbia, where a group of African-American junior high students had been refused admission to schools reserved for whites.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: So those four cases were all there on the docket and they were all seeking the same judicial remedy in many ways. So the court combined those cases and decided they would all be heard under the heading of one of the cases. It's our understanding that the court very purposely selected *Brown v. Board of Topeka* because Kansas was not a southern state ... wanted to take it out of that context of North and South. When you will remember the Civil War and all of the other battles between the southern customs versus north, and rightfully so in many ways. So *Brown versus the Board of Education* was not the only case -- part of that myth as well; it was one of a group of cases.

Narrator: As the case from Topeka was combined with those from the other states, the NAACP's legal team moved forward under the direction of Thurgood Marshall, who had been a student of Charles Houston, former dean of the law school at Howard University in Washington, D.C. They and their associates formed the core of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, which had been developing a case against segregation long before this particular case made it to the Supreme Court.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: Charles Houston died in 1950, so he really didn't see the fruits of his early labor, if you will. But he had mentored Thurgood Marshall. Thurgood Marshall then was hired as director counsel, in essence took his teacher and mentor's job and role and knew very well what the strategy needed to be and how to move this forward.

Narrator: As the Legal Defense Fund carried its appeal to the Supreme Court, the opposing arguments were presented by a group of lawyers representing each of the states involved as well as the District of Columbia. The state of South Carolina hired John W. Davis to present its case. Davis had been the Presidential nominee of the Democrats in

1924, and had argued numerous cases before the Supreme Court in a long and illustrious career. In contrast, the attorney appointed to represent the state of Kansas and the Topeka board of education, Paul Wilson, was young and relatively inexperienced. In his mid-thirties, he had been a county attorney in a small town before taking a job as an assistant to the attorney general for the state of Kansas. Although Wilson had never before been involved in such a momentous case, Kansas attorney general Harold Fatzer assigned him the task of preparing the legal argument and delivering it to the Supreme Court -- an assignment he was given just ten days before the court convened in December of 1952. Paul Wilson's widow, Harriet, explains why she thinks her husband was given this assignment....

Harriet Wilson: It was a political affair. Dick Fatzer was anxious to run for governor and he knew that if he took on this sticky segregation case that it would hurt his chances. At least this is what he told us. But Dick Fatzer told Paul that he would have to write a brief and go to Washington to defend this law. Paul, of course, was not very happy about defending a law that he didn't think was just.

Narrator: In an interview conducted in 1993, while he was still an emeritus professor of law at the University of Kansas, Paul Wilson commented upon the fundamental constitutional issue at the core of the Brown case -- the "separate, but equal" doctrine set forth in Plessy versus Ferguson.

Paul Wilson: The criteria at which we focus under Plessy is equality, because they said that if there is equality, the mere fact of separation is not a violation of the equal protection clause. And that, of course, had been the theory upon which Kansas and all of the other states that had separate schools had relied.

Narrator: Back at the Supreme Court, the U.S. Justice Department weighed in in favor of the plaintiffs as it submitted a friend-of-the-court brief stressing that the Constitution itself was color-blind and that matters of segregation merited close scrutiny...

Cheryl Brown Henderson: The United States really presented itself to the world as the moral voice of human rights, you know -- "Do as we say." But they couldn't really suggest "Do as we do". Because we had discrimination, we had segregation, we had nightriders and lynching and cross burnings and a form of terrorism, if you will. So it really did behoove the Supreme Court to render this decision as it did. In many ways, it did the country a favor with respect to its position globally -- to end this practice, legally, of segregating based solely on the basis of race.

Chief Justice Earl Warren (voiced by Walter Cronkite): We come then to the question presented.

Narrator: Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the opinion of the court.

Justice Warren: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive

the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.

Narrator: Warren then quoted the words of Judge Huxman from the district court in Kansas....

Judge Huxman (voiced by Jim Lehrer): Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental 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.

Judge Warren: Whatever may have been the extent of psychological knowledge at the time of *Plessy v Ferguson*, this finding is amply supported by modern authority. Any language in *Plessy v Ferguson* contrary to this finding is rejected. We conclude, unanimously, that in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

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Part Five

(7:59)

Narrator: Public reactions to the Court's ruling in the Brown case were mixed. The decision met with a defiant response in some parts of the country, but back in Topeka, things remained calm. It was noted that all fair-minded citizens would welcome the ruling as would the new school board, which had been elected since the initial complaint was filed. Oliver Brown's wife, Leola, recalls how she reacted when she first heard the news....

Leola Montgomery (Wife of Oliver Brown): I was waiting. I remember I was home doing the family ironing that day when the decision was handed down. I was home while all the kids were in school and my husband was gone to work. And I was home and doing' that. And when it came over and they said that it had been, segregation had been defeated, it was outlawed. Oh boy, I think I was doing the dancing all by myself. I was so elated. I could hardly wait until my kids and my husband got home to relate to them. And when they did get home and we talked about it, we just cried. We were thrilled.

Narrator: In 1955, a year after its initial ruling, the Supreme Court called all of the parties back before the court to review desegregation plans and how they would be implemented. The jubilation experienced by those who were pleased with the Court's ruling was tempered by the manner in which this pronouncement -- often referred to as "Brown Two" was phrased -- with no specific date for ending segregation and with words indicating that changes did not necessarily have to take place immediately.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: The court, in essence, said to the country ‘we want Brown versus the Board of Education decision implemented with all deliberate speed.’ Now I for one have looked up the word ‘deliberate’ in the dictionary. And it means, “slow”. But it doesn’t just mean ‘slow’; it means painstakingly slow. So in some ways, I think the court was still trying to be mindful of the South and southern customs. And they knew full well that it was going to be a really difficult pill for the South to swallow. And they were willing to say, ‘we’ve rendered this decision, it’s the law of the land but we recognize that for you all, it’s going to take some time.’

Robert Carter: It was done because they felt that there was some statesmanship, I suppose, and there was some fear that with segregation being ended in the South that this would ease the way and allow for the Southerners to get used to it. Instead, what it did was to allow them to galvanize opposition.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: Southern elected officials got together and wrote a document called “The Southern Manifesto”. ... And there were 81, I believe, all total -- House and Senate -- had signed this document. In essence it said that the Supreme Court had overstepped its bounds, the South was not unhappy with its custom and that they were going to use every legal means at their disposal to overturn this decision.

Excerpt from Southern Manifesto (Voiced by Bill Moyers): We regard the decision of the Supreme Court in the school cases as a clear abuse of power.

Narrator: A relatively brief document, the Southern Manifesto was made public in March of 1956.

Manifesto continues: We decry the Supreme Court's encroachments on rights reserved to the States and to the people, contrary to established law and to the Constitution. We pledge ourselves to use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision, which is contrary to the Constitution, and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: When you have a document like that coming out of the United States Congress – the legislative branch – public officials in the South had all the ammunition they needed to defy what the court was now suggesting was the law of the land ... and they did just that. Virginia, for example, public officials closed schools after Brown within two to three years ... closed schools for five years – all public schools.

Narrator: In some parts of the country, resistance continued. In 1957, President Eisenhower sent federal troops to assist with the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Two years later, approaching the fifth anniversary of the Brown decision, the president was asked to assess the progress made in the implementation of the ruling.

President Eisenhower (news conference comments): I think we ought to do -- all of us -- work at this, but I continue to say -- the real answer here is in the heart of the individual --

just law is not going to do it. We have never stopped sin by passing laws. And in the same way, we are not going to take a great moral ideal and achieve it merely by law.

Narrator: In Topeka, resistance to change wasn't seen to be as much of an issue as it was in other parts of the country. Cheryl Brown Henderson became the first member of her family to attend an integrated school as a result of the 1954 Supreme Court decision that carried her father's name.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: I've always attended integrated schools. I started a year later in the fall of 1955. So my experience of public education here in Topeka was always in an integrated setting, elementary, junior high, high school. Generally very much a minority. I went to Sumner Elementary School, which during the Brown era, had been the school, of the schools in Brown that my father attempted to enroll my sister in. And I think there were six or seven African-American students in school by the time I got there. But it wasn't an issue. It wasn't made an issue. I think the only concession that 501 -- Topeka Public Schools -- made was the business of calling white parents when there was an African-American educator. African-American children that did attend schools that were predominantly white at that point ... maybe some playground taunting ... kids will be kids. I'm sure that went on this past school year. But nothing major. No out and out resistance, if you will.

Narrator: Undeniably, Brown v Board has left a lasting impression on American society. In conjunction with the observance of the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision, the National Park Service has renovated Monroe School in Topeka and opened a new museum there, where visitors can learn about this case and its contribution to the struggle for civil rights in this nation.

Cheryl Brown Henderson: What the Brown decision did was -- it broke the silence. It made the country start talking about racism and segregation and discrimination and second class citizenship and all of those things. Because if you look at Brown and everything that came after -- the Civil Rights Act ten years later in 1964; the Voting Rights Act, one year later; even before that after the Montgomery bus boycott -- the Supreme Court decision that ended the practice of segregation in transportation; all of those things emanate from the Brown decision.

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