

# SEPARATE IS NOT EQUAL

## BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION

### Charles Hamilton Houston

One of the most influential figures in African American life between the two world wars was Charles Hamilton Houston. A scholar and lawyer, he dedicated his life to freeing his people from the bonds of racism.

Houston grew up in a middle-class family in Washington, D.C. His father, William Le Pre Houston, was an attorney, and his mother, Mary Hamilton Houston, a seamstress. Houston earned an undergraduate degree at Amherst College.

During World War I, Houston was an artillery officer in France. He witnessed and endured the racial prejudice inflicted on black soldiers. These encounters fueled his determination to use the law as an instrument of social change. After returning from the war, Houston earned a law degree at Harvard University.

In 1924, after graduating from Harvard, Houston joined his father's law firm in Washington, D.C., and began taking on civil rights cases. Charles often took on clients who were unable to pay for his services. In 1929 Mordecai Johnson, the first African American president of Howard University, named Houston to head the law school. At Howard, Houston created an accredited, full-time program with an intensified civil rights curriculum. His determination to train world-class lawyers who would lead the fight against racial injustice gave African Americans an invaluable weapon in the civil rights struggle. In 1934 Houston left the Howard University School of Law to head the Legal Defense Committee of the NAACP in New York City.