
SEPARATE IS NOT EQUAL

BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Supreme Court

The United States Supreme Court is the nation's highest court for all cases and controversies arising under the Constitution or the laws of the United States. As a guardian and interpreter of the Constitution, the Court has the power to invalidate legislation or presidential orders. When the Court rules on a constitutional issue, only a constitutional amendment or a new ruling of the Court can change that judgment.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a turning point in the history of race relations in the United States. On May 17, 1954, the Court ended constitutional segregation by race. Equal opportunity in education became the law of the land. In the fall of 1953, Chief Justice Fred Vinson, who doubted the Court's authority to overturn *Plessy v. Ferguson*, died. President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Earl Warren of California to Chief Justice. Under Warren's leadership, the Court unanimously overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1954. But to achieve unanimity, Warren assured some of the more cautious justices that the decision would not be implemented immediately. In 1955, the Court ordered, in what is now known as *Brown II*, that no timetable would be established for school desegregation. States, however, were to proceed with "all deliberate speed." Despite the fact that many civil rights advocates regarded this as a setback, the original 1954 decision was regarded then and now as a shining moment in American history.