When 13 Topeka parents joined together to challenge school segregation in Kansas, Brown was the only male. He became the lead plaintiff in a legal case filed in U.S. District Court in 1951.

Born in Topeka, Brown served as assistant minister at St. Mark’s African Methodist Episcopal Church and was also a welder at the Santa Fe Railway shops.

Oliver and Leola Brown, like the other plaintiffs, wanted to enroll their daughter in the local school, Sumner Elementary. Instead, she had to attend the all-black Monroe Elementary, two miles away.

*Portrait courtesy Brown v. Board National Historic Site*
McKinley Burnett
1897 – 1968

As president of the Topeka NAACP Burnett worked for several years to change school segregation policy. He persuaded 13 Topeka families to be plaintiffs in a legal case filed in U.S. District Court in 1951.

Born in Oskaloosa, Burnett faced discrimination in school and work. He served in the army and was a supply clerk with the veterans administration.

He became president of the Topeka NAACP in 1948. He wrote letters and held meetings trying to convince the school board to integrate schools.

*Portrait courtesy Topeka Public Schools USD 501*
Elisha Scott, Sr.
1890 – 1963

An experienced civil rights attorney, Scott was joined by his sons, attorneys Charles Scott and John Scott, and by attorney Charles Bledsoe, in the U.S. District Court case filed in 1951, *Oliver L. Brown et. al. v. The Board of Education of Topeka*.

Born in Topeka, Scott was raised in the city’s Tennessee Town, an African American community. He earned a university law degree from Washburn in 1916.

During his long career he represented plaintiffs in discrimination and civil rights lawsuits from the local level to the Kansas Supreme Court. He gained a reputation for winning difficult cases.
Mamie Williams
1894 – 1986

Over a span of 42 years Mamie Williams was an educator in Topeka elementary schools. Her career was spent in the classroom, as a principal, and as a summer college professor.

Born in South Carolina, Williams grew up in Topeka. Like other school teachers in the district, she was well educated. After earning a degree from Washburn University with honors, in mathematics and German in 1915, she began her career in Jackson, Mississippi.

Three years later she returned to Topeka to teach in the public schools. Before her retirement she served as principal at Washington and Monroe elementary schools.
Lucinda Todd
1903 – 1996

As secretary of the Topeka NAACP, Todd worked to change segregated schools in the city. She hosted planning meetings in her home and joined 12 other plaintiffs in challenging state laws.

Born in Crawford County, Todd earned a bachelor’s degree from Pittsburg State University. She worked as an elementary school teacher in Topeka before she married.

Like the other plaintiffs, she and her husband, Alvin Todd, wanted their daughter to attend the neighborhood school.
Katherine Louise Carper Sawyer

Of the 20 Topeka students represented in the *Brown v. Board of Education* class-action lawsuit, 10-year-old Katherine Louise Carper was the only one to testify.

Saundria Dorstella Brown
Linda Carol Brown
Katherine Louise Carper
Claude Arthur Emmerson
George Robert Emmerson
James Meldon Emmanuel
Duane Dean Fleming
Silas Hardrick Fleming
Donald Andrew Henderson
Vicki Ann Henderson

Charles Hodison
Carol Kay Lawton
Victoria Jean Lawton
Arthur Lewis
Frances Lewis
Martha Jean Lewis
Theron Lewis
Ronald Douglas Richardson
Ruth Ann Scales
Nancy Jane Todd
Honoring the legacy of the landmark case with roots in Kansas, the mural was placed on the third floor, south wing of the Kansas State Capitol. Created by Kansas artist Michael Young, it was dedicated in 2018. The mural is located outside the Old State Supreme Court where earlier civil rights cases were fought.
On Behalf of Kansas Students
On Behalf of Kansas Students

The 13 Topeka families, representing their 20 students, joined together to challenge the state’s school segregation laws. These plaintiffs filed their case in U.S. District Court in 1951.

- Darlene Brown
- Oliver Leon Brown
- Lena M. Carper
- Sadie Emmanuel
- Marguerite Emerson
- Shirla Fleming
- Mrs. Andrew (Zelma) Henderson
- Shirley Hodison
- Mrs. Richard (Maude) Lawton
- Alma Lewis
- Iona Richardson
- Vivian Scales
- Lucinda Todd

Monroe Elementary, Topeka, 1949
Early School Civil Rights Cases in Kansas
Early School Civil Rights Cases in Kansas

African American parents in Kansas challenged equal access to public schools through these legal cases.

1881 – Elijah Tinnon v. The Board of Education of Ottawa
1891 – Knox v. The Board of Education of Independence
1903 – Reynolds v. The Board of Education of Topeka
1905 – Special Legislation for Kansas City, Kansas
1906 – Cartwright v. The Board of Education of Coffeyville
1907 – Rowles v. The Board of Education of Wichita
1908 – Williams v. The Board of Education of Parsons
1916 – Woolridge v. The Board of Education of Galena
1924 – Thurman-Watts v. The Board of Education of Coffeyville
1929 – Wright v. The Board of Education of Topeka
1941 – Graham v. The Board of Education of Topeka
1949 – Webb v. School District No. 90, South Park Johnson County
1951 – Oliver L. Brown et. al. v. The Board of Education of Topeka

Class photo courtesy Johnson County Museum
Five Cases Become One
Five Cases Become One

The U.S. Supreme Court case combined separate segregation cases in four states and Washington, D.C. None of these cases had succeeded in district courts. They became known jointly as *Oliver L. Brown et. al. v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

- Delaware – *Belton v. Gebhart (Bulah v. Gebhart)*
- Kansas – *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Washington, D.C. – *Bolling v. Sharp*
- South Carolina – *Briggs v. Elliot*
- Virginia – *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*

*Photo courtesy Architect of the Capitol*
Separate But Equal is Unequal
The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board of Education* in favor of the plaintiffs in 1954.

We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

Implementation of the ruling stalled in some parts of the nation. The process of integration came to a head when President Dwight Eisenhower ordered the military to protect nine African American students to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957.