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The Case and the Landmark Decision (BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION)

In 1951, a group of African American parents in Topeka, Kansas, led by Oliver Brown, filed a lawsuit against the local Board of Education. Their children were forced to attend all-Black schools that were far from their homes, even though there were better-equipped white schools nearby. The parents argued that this separation was harmful to their children and violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

The case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, was actually a combination of five cases from different states all challenging school segregation. The NAACP helped organize the cases and argued them in court. Thurgood Marshall, a skilled lawyer who later became the first African American Supreme Court Justice, led the legal team. Their main argument was that segregated schools were inherently unequal, and that separating children by race made Black students feel inferior.

The case reached the United States Supreme Court in 1952. After two years of hearings and debates, the Court issued a unanimous decision in 1954. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote the opinion of the Court, stating that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." The decision overturned the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* and declared that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

This landmark ruling was a major victory for the civil rights movement. Although it did not immediately end segregation across the country, it paved the way for further legal and social changes. Many schools in the South resisted integration, and it took years of additional court cases and activism to enforce the decision.

Comprehension Questions

1. Who led the lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education?

- a) Earl Warren b) Oliver Brown c) Thurgood Marshall d) Linda Brown

2. Why was the case called *Brown v. Board of Education* if there were multiple cases involved? (Short answer)

3. What legal argument did Thurgood Marshall and his team use to challenge segregation in schools? (Short answer – 1–2 sentences)

4. What part of the U.S. Constitution was central to the case?

- a) First Amendment b) Fifth Amendment
c) Fourteenth Amendment d) Tenth Amendment

5. What does the phrase “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” mean in your own words? (Short response – 2-3 sentences)

6. What was one limitation of the Brown ruling, even though it was a big legal victory? (Short answer)

7. Do you think the Court’s unanimous decision was important? Why or why not? (Longer written response – 4-5 sentences)