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| While speaking at an annual luncheon of the National Committee for Rural Schools on 15 December 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr. reflected on the importance of *Brown v. Board of Education*: ‘‘To all men of good will, this decision came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of human captivity. It came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of colored people throughout the world who had had a dim vision of the promised land of freedom and justice … this decision came as a legal and sociological deathblow to an evil that had occupied the throne of American life for several decades’’ ([*Papers* 3:472](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol3/15-Dec-1956_DesegregationAndTheFuture.pdf)).  *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a consolidation of five school desegregation cases: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas; Briggs v. Elliot; Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia; Bolling v. Sharpe; and Belton v. Gebhart.* These cases were designed to challenge the ‘‘separate but equal’’ doctrine established in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, and because of their common legal challenge the Supreme Court combined the cases and decided them together. The [**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_national_association_for_the_advancement_of_colored_people_naacp1/) (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund’s chief counsel, [**Thurgood Marshall**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_marshall_thurgood_1908_1993/), managed the case. He was well aware that the Fund’s reputation and national racial progress was reliant on the outcome of *Brown*.  Social psychologist Kenneth Clark testified in the lower courts that segregation causes black children ‘‘to reject themselves and their color and accept whites as desirable’’ (Williams, 202). Clark had traveled to Clarendon County, South Carolina, to administer a test he and his wife, Mamie, had developed. In the test, black children were shown two dolls, a white doll and a black doll, and asked for their opinions of each. The Clarks’ findings indicated that feelings of inferiority existed at an early age, as children generally considered the white dolls prettier and smarter than the black dolls.  The Supreme Court’s unanimous *Brown* decision, handed down on 17 May 1954, determined that the *Plessy* doctrine of ‘‘separate but equal’’ had no place in education and violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote: ‘‘To separate [blacks] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone’’ (347 U.S. 483 [1954]). With this decision, racial segregation in schools became unconstitutional.  Initial excitement over the *Brown* victory dwindled, however, when desegregation of schools was not mandated as quickly as had been hoped. Marshall and his staff were disappointed that the Court did not impose a desegregation deadline on southern school districts. The NAACP prepared briefs suggesting that school desegregation transpire before fall 1956, and went to court again to argue for this relief. In *Brown v. Board II*, the Court focused on ways to quickly integrate school districts. The Court recognized that different districts would need to implement different techniques to end segregation, and Warren ruled on 31 May 1955 that school districts were required to desegregate only ‘‘with all deliberate speed’’ (349 U.S. 294 [1955]).  **Sources** *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, et al.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), 349 U.S. 294 (1955).  King, ‘‘Desegregation and the Future,’’ Address Delivered at the Annual Luncheon of the National Committee for Rural Schools, 15 December 1956, in [*Papers* 3:**471–479**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol3/15-Dec-1956_DesegregationAndTheFuture.pdf).  Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 1975.  Williams, *Thurgood Marshall*, 1998. |