

50 Years after Brown v. the Board of Education: An Interview with Cheryl Brown Henderson

By Nancy E. Carriuolo

Access for students of color has brought the possibility of higher education to a new population, many of whom...have been underprepared.

This spring marks the 50th anniversary (May 17, 1954-2004) of the Supreme Courts' decision to



outlaw segregation by ruling unanimously in favor of the plaintiffs in Brown v. the Board of Education. Of course, segregation never really ended, as will be explained in the following interview with Cheryl Brown Henderson, daughter of Oliver Brown, the 10th of 13 plaintiffs in Brown v. the

Board and the namesake for the case. Reverend Oliver Brown passed away only 7 years after the ruling, so he never witnessed the full series of upheavals and ripples caused by the decision. However, his youngest daughter Cheryl, a former teacher and administrator and also an expert on Brown v. the Board and its effects, now carries on the decision's promise of fostering equal educational opportunities through her work as president of the Brown Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. The foundation makes financial aid awards to minority students (book scholarships to high school seniors and tuition scholarships to college juniors and seniors pursuing teaching as a career). As Cheryl says, "Diversity in the classroom needs to start with the teacher at the front of the classroom." The foundation decided to grow its own minority teachers after surveying teacher preparation programs and realizing that many minority teachers are nearing retirement with far too few minority students preparing to replace them. Information about the foundation can be found at <http://Brownvboard.org>.

In the following interview, Cheryl Brown Henderson provides an historical context for the landmark Supreme Court decision named after her father. She then discusses the decision's intended effect on education, particularly on underprepared students from under-resourced schools, the very students developmental educators work so hard to prepare for college study. She also speaks of the difficulty of desegregating schools and colleges/universities, which—unlike, for example, relatively impersonal settings such as public transportation—are highly social settings.

Nancy Carriuolo (N.C.): Cheryl, thank you for your interest in developmental educators. Although the need for remediation is traceable

back to the earliest years of American higher education, developmental education only became highly visible to the public after Brown v. the Board of Education slowly pried open the doors of segregated schools, colleges, and universities. Access for students of color has brought the possibility of higher education to a new population, many of whom—as you know so well—have been underprepared, requiring remediation after studying in less-than-adequate segregated schools.

I would like to discuss Brown v. the Board's original intentions and its ultimate effects on K-16 education. Everyone needs to understand that Brown v. the Board increased access for students of color to all levels of education and later, as one of its many consequences, sparked our government's understanding (albeit sometimes grudging) that the new, underprepared students entering higher education often needed the financial, counseling, and academic support provided by developmental educators. Brown promised students of color access to college, and developmental educators added the promise of success.

Cheryl Brown Henderson (C.B.H.): Yes, developmental educators have been our partners, and I am pleased that the 50th anniversary of the decision has provided me with an opportunity to talk about the Supreme Court's decision.

N.C.: Surely, Brown v. the Board would make everyone's short list of legal decisions that most influenced American education in the 20th century. Did the decision, though, grow from a long list of significant earlier decisions?

C.B.H.: Yes, the struggle toward equal rights was long and arduous. Sometimes African-Americans are chastised for being too sensitive. I wonder, though, how many average Americans have read the U.S. Constitution and know that enslaved people were counted as 3/5 of a person for the purposes of establishing representation in the House of Representatives? (See Sidebar 1.)

Americans know that, following the Civil War, people formerly held in slavery were freed. Probably fewer Americans have ever thoughtfully studied the resulting amendments to the

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U.S. Constitution that provided for human rights. The amendments were enacted by Congress in 1865, 1868, and 1870 but not implemented until nearly 100 years later when *Brown v. the Board* (1954) forced our country to keep the constitutional promises (such as equal protection and rights not to be denied on account of race) that are inherent in those amendments (see Sidebar 2).

Many years of various court cases also took place before and after the amendments. People are probably most familiar with the *Dred Scott* case (1857, Supreme Court decision), in which *Dred Scott*, a 50-year-old man, and his wife Harriett filed suit for their freedom from slavery in federal court in St. Louis.

N.C.: Also, the case of *Heman Sweatt* (1946), a man denied admission to the University of Texas at Austin, joined similar cases filed in

Sidebar 1: For the Purpose of Determining State Population, U.S. Constitution Counts an Enslaved Person as 3/5 of a Person

U.S. Constitution

“Article I, Section 2 (Determination of the number of representatives per state on the basis of population): Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons” (Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, 2003d).

Missouri and Oklahoma, all of which are particularly relevant for us in higher education. The case was argued by Thurgood Marshall, who later argued *Brown v. the Board* before the Supreme Court. The Texas court ruled against, but the Supreme Court (1950) ruled in favor of *Heman Sweatt*'s admission to the University of Texas Law School (Eaton & Orfield, 2003).

C.B.H.: Many people contributed to the effort to make the promises of the constitutional amendments a reality. In fact, the NAACP legal campaign to desegregate schools began with higher education. (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded in 1909.) The organization was, and is still today, well aware of the socio-economic benefits associated with a college degree.

N.C.: Did *Brown v. the Board*'s national scope distinguish it from earlier cases?

C.B.H.: Yes, *Brown v. the Board* involved five states, some in the North but others in the heavily segregated South. The Supreme Court decision eventually uprooted state laws that supported segregated schools in 21 states. The driving force behind the decision was the NAACP.

N.C.: Please tell us some specifics about the case, your father, and what he and the other plaintiffs hoped to accomplish.

C.B.H.: First, everyone needs to understand that the NAACP organized groups of plaintiffs from Delaware, Kansas, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and South Carolina into individual class action suits, eventually combined by the U.S. Supreme Court.

I will explain the NAACP's method of organizing the case by using my hometown of Topeka, Kansas as an example. In Spring 1950, among all the schools in our public system, only four were segregated. Those schools were elementary schools, so the NAACP sought only parents of elementary school children. The NAACP recruited 13 families, and my father was initially just #10, not the icon he has become over the years.

The NAACP instructed parents—who served as the plaintiffs on behalf of their 20 children—to try to enroll the youngsters in a white school nearest to their home and then record the results as documentation for the suit named *Oliver L. Brown et al. vs. the Board of Education of Topeka*, filed in 1951. People often assume my father was the lead plaintiff because his name must have been first in the alphabetical list of 13 plaintiffs.

N.C.: How was the selection made?

C.B.H.: (With a smile in her voice): If the lead plaintiff were selected alphabetically, you would be interviewing the daughter of Darlene Brown, another plaintiff whose name certainly came first in the alphabet. My father never sought out the role of lead plaintiff. His selection was just a matter of gender politics: He was the only male plaintiff.

N.C.: How did your father become involved, and what motivated him to carry through with lengthy legal proceedings?

C.B.H.: He was asked to participate by attorney Charles Scott, a childhood friend with links to the NAACP. One longstanding myth is that my father began the case on behalf of my older sister. My father has also been glamorized by some as a WWI veteran. The truth is, his health prohibited any military service. However, he was very much like other African-American men of

his day who were seeking ways to become a part of mainstream society rather than be marginalized by it. Dad recognized athletics could be a means to mainstream success, so he became a boxer, who was good enough to compete in the Golden Gloves. He wanted to find a place in life where he could be in control and play a leadership role. Boxing, though, wasn't that place. Our family joke is that after Dad's first knockout, he decided to go into the seminary. Actually, he had always been active in church. In 1953 he became an African Methodist Episcopal minister and pastor of St. Mark AME Church in Topeka, Kansas. By 1954, when *Brown v. the Board* was decided, my father had spent a year as a minister and was assigned to his first church.

Dad was already a community leader by the time he was recruited by the NAACP to participate in *Brown v. the Board*, but, most of all, he was a man with common sense. My older sisters and other African-American children

Sidebar 2: Amendments XIII, XIV, and XVI

Amendment XIII (Abolition of Slavery, 1865):

“Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

“Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation” (Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, 2003a).

Amendment XIV (Privileges and Immunities, Due Process, Equal Protection, Apportionment of Representatives, Civil War Disqualification and Debt, 1868):

“Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, 2003b).

Amendment XV (Rights Not to Be Denied on Account of Race, 1870):

“Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, 2003c).

were bussed to black schools when white elementary schools were often as close by as three or four blocks. When asked to join the NAACP's initiative, he knew firsthand that segregated schools didn't make sense for his child or anyone else's. As one of our country's most valued and influential social systems, the U.S. public education (K-16) system has represented a key component to realizing the American dream.

Dad died in 1961, so he only lived 7 years after the Supreme Court's decision. He didn't live to see the impact or to know that every Civil Rights discussion begins with our family name.

N.C.: You—and your mother—speak modestly of your father as being representative of many other earnest young African-American family men in the 1950s rather than as a national icon. Were there heroes?

C.B.H.: Yes, I could give a long list of heroes and sheroes who placed themselves in real danger. I'll give a few examples. Charles Huston, the dean of Howard University's Law school and first African-American editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, was Thurgood Marshall's mentor and teacher. Huston hired Thurgood at the NAACP. When his former students graduated from Howard Law School, Huston hired them and created outstanding teams of civil rights attorneys. Huston died in 1950, so he never saw *Brown v. the Board* unfold, but he worked every day of his adult life toward creation of equal rights under the law. A list of heroes would also include Robert Carter, a forceful NAACP attorney active in the *Brown* case and, of course, Thurgood Marshall, who valiantly argued the combined cases at the Supreme Court level.

I want to mention a shero too. Barbara Johns was a brave teenager who faced not just emotional and verbal abuse but also the very real threat of physical violence. In Virginia, Barbara delivered a passionate speech to her teenaged classmates about not tolerating their separate but so-called equal educational opportunities. Then she organized an orderly strike and wrote compelling letters to the NAACP, asking for help.

The threat of verbal and physical brutality was very real in all the southern states. In South Carolina, the home and church of Rev. Joseph Delaine were burned as retribution for his lead role in organizing the case in South Carolina. Community activists in each of the five states that participated in

Brown v. the Board bravely galvanized people around the issue of desegregation of schools.

N.C.: What was the reaction of the African-American community when the decision was announced?

C.B.H.: In Kansas, strident segregation and brutality didn't exist. Most neighborhoods and work places were integrated, and friendships were not color-bound. Consequently, Kansas was a perfect testing ground for statewide desegregation of elementary schools.

N.C.: I remember your mother saying that she just kept ironing when she heard the decision on the radio.

C.B.H.: Yes, but the decision evoked stronger responses in other states. The cases that comprise *Brown v. the Board* came to the Supreme Court not only from Kansas but also from the District of Columbia, South Carolina, Virginia,

The media is the purveyor of history in our culture, and the media sometimes offers a distorted view.

and Delaware. Particularly in the Deep South, where Jim Crow (segregation) laws were firmly rooted in the culture, the *Brown* decision was met with a much more jubilant response than in Kansas. People often remember where they were and what they were doing when they first heard the decision, and they recall the conversations that took place that evening in homes and churches. For example, Secretary of Education Rod Paige can recall speaking excitedly about the decision with his classmates. The de-

cision had varying degrees of impact, depending on the harshness of the existing circumstances that the law promised to change.

N.C.: Many of today's Americans never experienced segregation. Are there any misconceptions about the Jim Crow era about which you would like to speak?

C.B.H.: Yes, when I made a speech recently in Texas, a young person in the audience asked if the African-American community lost its focus and unity by desegregating. I become so sad when I hear segregation romanticized. No one who lived through segregation romanticizes that period in our history, but youngsters sometimes do. I point out to them that, prior to the Civil Rights laws, African-Americans may have been able to own businesses, but they could not live their lives free of white retaliation. Freedom and safety surely outweigh any loss associated with being a closely knit African-American community when Jim Crow is holding the knitting needles. People forget that prior to *Brown*, African-Americans could be maimed, brutalized, and lynched with no repercussions to their attackers. After 105 years of cases brought with some degree of personal risk to various courts, the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* finally took a clear and pervasive stand regarding equal rights and allowed African-Americans to move inside the protection of the law.

N.C.: The average American is aware of *Brown v. the Board* and the outlawing of segregation in 1954, but then most people's minds fast forward to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Is it true that nothing significant happened in the intervening years?

C.B.H.: No, significant activity was ongoing. However, not all the events were prominently brought to the public's attention and recorded in our history books. The media is the pur-

veyor of history in our culture, and the media sometimes offers a distorted view. In the 1950s, the media was especially unsophisticated; Topeka didn't even have a television station until after the *Brown* decision. Word spread from the radio and newspapers.

N.C.: What significant events followed the decision? Did the opponents to desegregation score some successes of their own?

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C.B.H.: Unrest occurred from 1954 to 1964. Beneficiaries of the decision were elated, but the opposition did everything possible either to reverse the decision or to slow the pace of its implementation. In 1955, Brown II specified how to implement the decision, “with all deliberate speed.” In 1956, the courts acted on transportation desegregation (as a result of the Montgomery bus boycott). Then the opposition landed a significant blow. In 1957, in the U.S. Congress, nearly 100 Southern elected officials, including Strom Thurman, issued the Southern Manifesto, stating that the Supreme Court had overstepped its bounds. Inflammatory rhetoric about the dangers of desegregation led to the closing of Little Rock’s public schools. If members of Congress could suggest that the Supreme Court had overstepped its bounds, then some states, such as Virginia—where school closings occurred for 5 years—felt justified in closing public schools until policies could be put in place to prevent forcible, bloody integration. From 1959 to the early 1960s, opposing groups were working to either counter or implement the Brown decision.

N.C.: Was Brown v. the Board a landmark case inside and outside of our country?

C.B.H.: Never before Brown v. the Board had the Supreme Court boldly defended the 14th amendment. The court upheld the sovereign power of citizens’ rights. Brown v. the Board is not about white children and black children sitting next to each other in America’s schools and colleges. The decision is about equal rights for all American citizens. For the first time, the court made clear what “equal” means.

The case was also important internationally because America was in the midst of a cold war. At the end of President Truman’s term, he issued a friends-of-the-court brief, indicating he hoped the Supreme Court would find in favor of the Brown plaintiffs. Truman realized America couldn’t continue to portray itself as the moral voice of the world while engaging in moral abuses at home. After the Brown decision was issued, Voice of America used the decision to counter Soviet propaganda. No other Supreme Court decision had such an impact on foreign and domestic policy. Many fail to realize that the decision was applied broadly to higher education and to other aspects of life such as housing and transportation, not just narrowly to schools.

N.C.: The decision clearly had a great impact, but how has it failed?

C.B.H.: When people break laws, they can be punished for their impulses. For example,

lynch parties continued until perpetrators began to suffer legal consequences. The courts and laws can change behaviors with the threat and reality of punishment to back them up. The courts, though, do not have the power to change attitudes. Laws cannot end racism, which continues to mold people’s social interactions. Racism has not gone anywhere. Bigotry is very much alive.

N.C.: In 1962, when James Meredith attempted to enroll in Mississippi’s flagship university, “Ole Miss,” and campus riots required dispatching the federal troops, President Kennedy broadcast a message to the American people, saying, “Americans are free, in short, to disagree with the law but not to disobey it” (Kennedy, 2003).

C.B.H.: Yes, President Kennedy’s public statement is a good example of what a law can and cannot do. Kennedy reminded the American people that they were not above the law, so they couldn’t openly and actively defy desegregation.

Sidebar 3: An Excerpt from Brown v. the Board of Education with a Reference to Plessy v. Ferguson

Supreme Court of the U.S.: Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) (USSC+)

“Segregation of white and Negro children in the public schools of a State solely on the basis of race, pursuant to state laws permitting or requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment—even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors of white and Negro schools may be equal. . . . The ‘separate but equal doctrine’ adopted in Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537, has no place in the field of public education” (National Center for Public Policy Research, 2003).

However, he knew racist attitudes were ingrained. The legal decision couldn’t change attitudes.

The legal decision also failed to create truly equal educational opportunities. Ironically, the decision focused on education, but the decision was more successful in providing equal rights in regard to other types of access such as integrated public transportation. Schools were much more difficult to integrate. After Brown, neighborhoods and their schools underwent tremendous upheavals, some of which were unanticipated. So-called white flight was probably the most pronounced and unanticipated consequence of the Brown decision. In essence, as whites sold their homes in newly integrated neighborhoods, the neighborhoods gradually became segregated again; when white parents

moved, they took their white school-aged children with them.

Most importantly, people found new and creative ways to withhold resources from schools with pronounced minority populations. Equal resources were the essence of the Brown decision: The government needed to take responsibility for ensuring that all children had access to the equitable resources—such as good teachers and current textbooks—necessary to a successful public education.

N.C.: So the issue for your father and others was not so much social mingling of the races as access to equally good public facilities?

C.B.H.: If separate had been equal, as promised by Plessy v. Ferguson (Supreme Court decision of 1896), I wonder if the NAACP would have launched into these Civil Rights cases? Most white elected officials never intended to implement the promise of equal resources guaranteed by the Plessy decision. Disappointment after that false promise led to Brown v. the Board (see Sidebar 3).

N.C.: America’s public schools are still unequal; the most under-resourced are still located in tax-poor urban areas. As long as educational opportunity continues to be denied to students due to inferior facilities, low-quality materials, and inexperienced teachers in such K-12 schools, developmental educators will continue to have a steady stream of underprepared students crossing the thresholds of their college classrooms.

C.B.H.: Yes, integration in public education has never really been achieved. Brown v. the Board resonates every time a person of color checks into a hotel or is served in a restaurant, but the Brown decision does not resonate as loudly now in public education, where it was intended to have the greatest impact. Integration was never totally a reality. Right after the Brown decision, school boundaries were redrawn and then children of all colors began to be bussed away from their homes. Certainly, this situation was not the ideal scenario everyone had in mind.

America continues—perhaps intentionally—to miss the point that public schools are unevenly resourced. It is so frightening to me that minority youngsters are viewed by some as innately unable to succeed academically. The real conversation should not be about the ability of children of different races. The conversation should be about withholding resources, thereby creating failing schools. Our public education system guarantees students will be either “haves” or “have-nots.” Developmental education in postsecondary institutions can offer resources previously denied to “have not” students.

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N.C.: Educators fret over the “digital divide” that separates children with at-home computers from children with only occasional computer access in school or at the public library. Great numbers of our young people are locked out of academic success by grade three if they have not mastered basic print and computer literacy.

C.B.H.: Yes, our nation’s youth are the ones who suffer from unequal resources, and young people have played a powerful role in fighting the inequities. *Brown v. the Board* and the later Civil Rights movement of the Kennedy-Johnson eras in the 1960s were youth movements: young adults and teens idealistically standing up for themselves and their rights as citizens. Their valor led to the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Acts (1965), signed by President Lyndon Johnson. Youth possess idealism and a powerful belief in right and wrong that can drive change.

N.C.: Yes, youth of the 1960s captured the attention of our government. In particular, the federal government recognized that low-income students needed not only access to college but also resources for support. For example, the Economic Opportunity Act (1964) created the Work-Study Program that provides part-time students with employment on campuses. The next year, the Higher Education Act (1965) was even more important because it became the basis of current law that authorizes federal student aid. Title IV of the act established federal scholarships for needy undergraduates and provided government insurance on private student loans (Center for Higher Education Support Services, Inc., 2003). Of course, students need more than just tuition in their pockets to be successful. TRIO programs—first authorized by Congress under the Higher Education Act in 1965—also help primarily low-income and first-generation college students to overcome educational and social barriers, to obtain completion of higher education, and then to move into a significant role in society. Sixty-three percent of current TRIO participants are students of color (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2003).

C.B.H.: Yes, support through such programs has been vital to the success of students from under-resourced schools.

N.C.: Despite these programs meant to support low-income and first-generation college students, though, Tom Mortensen (2003) has brought the increasing absence of male college students to the public’s attention. “A majority of bachelor’s degrees are now awarded to fe-

males in every racial/ethnic group of the population: whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians” (pp. 1-2). The opportunity for education doesn’t seem to be valued as much by males as it was in the 1950s when parents like Oliver Brown were willing to risk their lives to ensure educational opportunities for their children, especially sons.

C.B.H.: African-Americans have traditionally placed a high value on education. During slavery, education was a down payment on freedom; after the Civil War, education was a down payment on opportunity.

However, popular culture does not reward academic achievement. Pop culture flaunts the success of athletes and entertainers but neglects to send the message to youngsters that success in these areas is not attainable for the average person. Access to success is still coveted by African-Americans but not necessarily through education.

Developmental educators have shouldered responsibility for underprepared students as a result of society’s failure to keep Brown v. the Board’s promise.

N.C.: Added to the poor PR that higher education receives from pop culture is the problem that African-American parents may not be sending their children as clear a message about the value of education as they did in the 1950s. I understand from a recent article in *Ebony* that fewer youngsters have the benefit of the strong, traditional black family unit: “In 1963 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his ‘I have a dream’ speech, more than 70 percent of all Black families were headed by married couples. In 2002 that number was 48 percent” (Kinnon, 2003, p. 192). Black women are attending college in greater numbers, but an increasing number of them seem to face the prospect of single parenting.

C.B.H.: Yes, parents today, especially single parents, have a tough job. Look at the messages they receive from schools and from society in general: Make children feel good, support them at all costs, and be careful about disciplining. Parents are told to be supportive, not directive. As to single, working parents, they may not even have the time to offer the strong ongoing oversight of their children’s lives and

support for education that my parents’ generation could provide.

N.C.: Developmental educators work with students who come to college from the public schools and home situations we have described. What is your message to developmental educators?

C.B.H.: Developmental education isn’t doing an adequate job of conveying its value to the public. Public education is not doing a good job, and society has chosen to ignore or at least tolerate this situation. As a result, developmental educators are a necessary second tier of educators who are vital to the success of generations of students who would otherwise be educational throw-aways.

Inadequate resources in public schools have led to the development of a population of students who graduate from high school but are unprepared for college. Commercial entities such as Sylvan Learning Centers would not have sprung up if public schools were succeeding in providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary for college. Developmental educators need to launch their own internal campaigns on campus and external campaigns with the public. The American public doesn’t realize that they are the educators who make a difference, save students, and present the students with an opportunity through education to become major players in our society. That opportunity is what my father and others like him wanted for all children.

N.C.: Ironically, on many campuses, developmental educators have been relegated to the bottom rung of the higher education career ladder. They are all too often viewed as inadequate because their students are viewed as inadequate.

C.B.H.: Denigration as a result of association is also true in the public school system. If a teacher is assigned to an urban school, the assignment is viewed as a punishment, and the teacher’s credibility sinks. Urban schools, though, need the best and brightest faculty. We point fingers at students and say, “Something is wrong with you.” Instead, we should be pointing a finger at the school and saying, “Something is wrong with that school’s resources, and we are going to fix that situation.” Developmental educators play a very important role in our society because they have shouldered responsibility for underprepared students as a result of society’s failure to keep *Brown v. the Board’s* promise of equal resources in public schools.

N.C.: The failed promise is, at least, spotlighted due to the 50th anniversary of the decision.

C.B.H.: Yes, the anniversary is finally providing an opportunity for the remaining participants in *Brown v. the Board* to speak about the decision. They can explain the ongoing importance of the decision with an authenticity unique to them.

The kickoff of the anniversary year began in May 2003 when we invited plaintiffs from the five combined cases to speak at a forum in Washington, D.C. Of the nearly 300 original plaintiffs, 48 were able to attend. Prior to the event, Mrs. Bush welcomed our group to the White House. When leaving, two plaintiffs from Virginia and North Carolina thanked Mrs. Bush for her invitation and noted that it was the first time in nearly 50 years that they had ever been asked to speak publicly about their experience. Many are still angry, shamed, resentful, and disappointed in our country. Mrs. Bush was right to acknowledge their historic role.

I have developed a roster of speakers who were either plaintiffs or part of the legal team. The youngest are in their early 60s, but they were vigorous, fearless teens in Virginia when they went on strike over separate and unequal schools. We are still fortunate to be able to speak with them about their thoughts and the dangers they faced. Unlike the media, they can give us first-hand reports. They provide history, not revisionist history. (The roster of speakers is available through the Brown Foundation.)

N.C.: Isn't the opening of a national historic site in Topeka also commemorating the decision this year?

C.B.H.: Yes, in October 1992, Congress passed a law establishing the *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site in commemoration of the decision. Our foundation fought to save Monroe Elementary School, one of the four segregated elementary schools in Topeka back in the early 1950s. The school and its grounds are now the historic site, and a grand opening is scheduled for May 17, 2004, exactly 50 years after the Supreme Court handed down the *Brown* decision (National Park Service, 2003). The site will be used to educate the public regarding the decision and its effect on human rights around the world.

N.C.: Cheryl, thank you for sharing with us information about an historic decision that has affected American schools and colleges profoundly. We at the *JDE* offer your family and all others associated with the original case our best wishes for a well-deserved anniversary celebration.

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