

# The Reaction: 1954-1959

By Liza R. Rognas

## The Lesson

The fight and turmoil did not end with the decision in 1954. Students review some of the reactions to the Supreme Court decision to understand the continuum between the 1950s and today of the fight for civil rights.

1. What prompted Sandra Godbout to **write to President Eisenhower in 1954**? What does she ask of the president?
  - Investigate current debates on civil rights. Write a letter to the President about your feelings and ideas concerning a civil rights issue.
2. The *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision was handed down on May 17, 1954. On May 18, President Eisenhower **received the telegram reproduced here**. What are the opinions expressed by the sender?
  - How do they relate to the *Brown* decision, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence?
  - How are issues of race addressed in this telegram?
  - How do ideas of white supremacy function in a democracy?
3. Compare the telegram to the **article shown here**. What are the similarities between the two?
4. Find instances in current events that remind you of the ideas expressed in the telegram and the article. Write an essay comparing them.
5. During the school year 1957-58, nine African Americans students entered Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, under the protection of federal troops enforcing the *Brown* decision. These students were the first black students to integrate the Little Rock school. They did so against the wishes of most of the white community and against the wishes of Governor Orval Faubus. **Read the report**.
  - What events were reported?
  - What do they tell you about the climate in Little Rock?
6. Compare the **petition sent to Congress** and the President in 1959 with the other documents in this section.
  - How do they relate to the *Brown* decision, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence?
  - What ideas are conveyed?
  - Are there any similarities among the documents?

Read the list of names given at the top of the petition. Research one person on the list and write a brief biography for an oral presentation on that person.

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### Original Documents List

"To Secure These Rights," The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights (1947). Title.

"Discrimination Contributes to Poor Health." "To Secure These Rights," The Report of the Presidents Committee on Civil Rights (1947), 72.

"The Nations Capital: A Symbol of Freedom and Equality?" "To Secure These Rights," The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights (1947), 88.

*Sweatt v. Painter* (Case # 9684), Petition for Writ of Mandamus, Supreme Court of Texas (April 1948). Records of the Supreme Court of Texas. Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

### PART THREE: The Brown Cases, 1950-1952

*Briggs v. Elliott* (Civil Action No. 2657), Initial Complaint, 12. Record Group 21. Records of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of South Carolina, Charleston Division. National Archives--Southeastern Region, Eastpoint, Georgia.

*Briggs v. Elliott*, Initial Complaint, 13.

*Briggs v. Elliott*, Waring's Dissent (21 June 1951).

*Briggs v. Elliott*, Letter from Judge J. Waties Waring to Judge John J. Parker, dated February 11, 1952.

"Kenneth and Mamie Clark devised doll tests to determine the effects of discrimination on children attending segregated schools," Photo of Kenneth Clark and child holding doll. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.

*Davis, et al, v. Prince Edward County School Board* (Civil Action No. 1333), "Defense Attorney Moore's Opening Statements," Transcript of Testimony, Vold, Feb. 25, 1952. Record Group 21. Records of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, National Archives--Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia, PA

*Davis, et al, v. Prince Edward County School Board*, "Kenneth Clark's Testimony," Transcript of Testimony, Vol. 111, Feb. 27, 1952.

*Oliver Brown, et al, v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Civil Action No. T-316), Plaintiff's Amended Complaint (22 March 1951), Part 2. Record Group 21. Records of the U.S. District Court of Kansas, National Archives-Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri.

*Oliver Brown, et al, v. Board of Education of Topeka, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Defendant's Brief (23 July 1951),35.

*Oliver Brown, et al, v. Board of Education of Topeka*, "U.S. District Court Findings of Fact," (3 August 1951), \*especially VIII.

*Belton v. Gebhart* (Civil Action No. 258, *Ethel Louise Belton v. Francis B. Gebhart*, and Civil Action No. 265, *Shirley Barbara Bulah, v. Francis B. Gebhart*), "Defense Opening Statements," Transcripts (22 October 1951), 12. Record Group 1225. Records of the Court of the Chancery of the State of Delaware in and for New Castle County, Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, Department of State Hall of Records, Dover, Delaware

*Belton v. Gebhart*, Plaintiff's Exhibit I (October 1951).

*Belton v. Gebhart*, "Letter from the Delaware State Board of Education to Mr. Fred Bulah, dated 18 December 1950, 11 Plaintiff's Exhibit 3.

*Belton v. Gebhart*, "Judge Seitz's Opinion," Opinion (1 April 1952), 9. 81

"Four Plaintiff s: Linda Brown, Harry Briggs Jr., Ethel L. Belton Brown, Spottswood Boiling in 1964. New York World Telegraph & Sun Collection. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.

"Letter to President Eisenhower from Sandra Godbout," dated 23 February 1954. General File 124-A-1, Box 911, White House Central Files, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

"Telegram Sent to President Eisenhower, 18 May 1954. 1' General File 124-A-1, Box 911, White House Central Files, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

"The Physical Differences Between the Races are Great," article sent to President Eisenhower 1955. Official File 142-A, "Negro Matters-Colored Question" folder, Box 731, White House Central Files. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

"Situation Report: Arkansas," Events at Central High School, dated 7 March 1958. Official File 142-A, "Little Rock, Arkansas School Integration" folder, Box 732, White House Central Files. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

"A Petition to the President and the Congress of the United States," received 14 April 1959. Official File 142-A, "Negro Matters-Colored Question" folder, Box 731, White House Central Files. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

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