

Brown v. the Board of Education: The Desegregation of America's Schools

Homer Plessy, an African American who was seven-eighths white, symbolized a turning point in American History. Protected on paper by the Fourteenth Amendment, African Americans had not enjoyed their constitutional rights since segregation limited their liberties. In 1896 seven justices voted segregation is allowed if the facilities were "separate but equal."

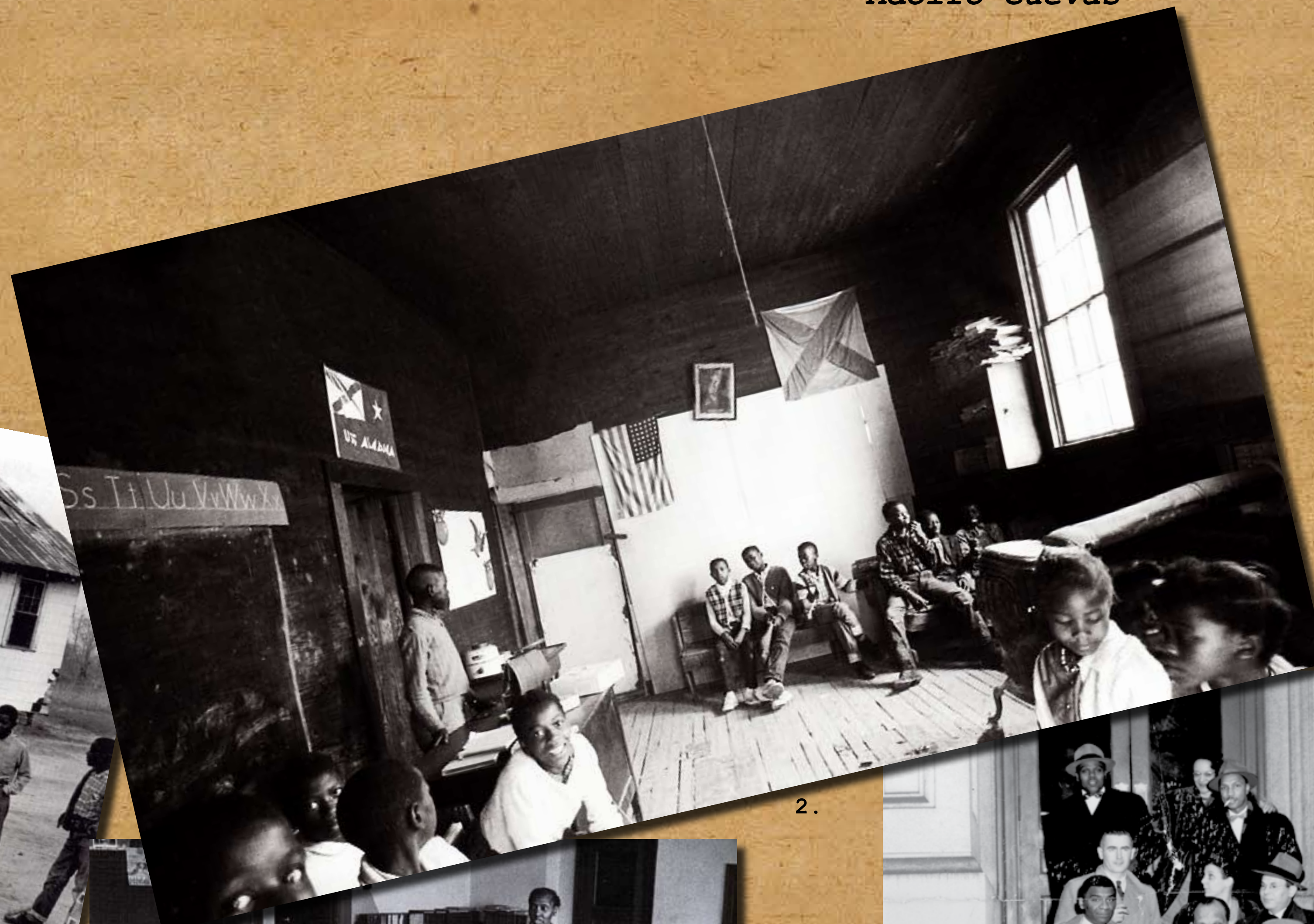
Fifty-eight years later, argued effectively by NAACP legal counsel Thurgood Marshall, the "separate but equal" doctrine was overturned unanimously in *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The plaintiffs in the class action suit were thirteen Topeka parents on behalf of their twenty children who were demanding that the school district reverse its policy of racial segregation.

Demonstrating that African American children have negative perceptions of themselves causing inferiority and self-hatred due to segregation, Drs. Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark testified as expert witnesses in several school desegregation cases using the "Doll Study." For the first time in U.S. history, social science research was used in a Supreme Court decision. Chief Justice Earl Warren drew heavily on the psychological studies led by Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, ordering the desegregation of schools "with all deliberate speed."

Adolfo Cuevas



Linda Brown (age ten) and her sister, Terry Lynn (age six) walking to school, Topeka, Kansas, 1953. Under segregation laws they were not allowed to attend nearby New Summer School but had to walk six blocks through the dangerous Rock Island Switchyard in order to catch a bus to all-black Monroe School. (Kasbar, *The Civil Rights Movement*; photo courtesy of Carl Twaski)



2.



Linda Brown (front row, right), the child at the center of the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, sits in her Topeka, Kansas, classroom in 1953, the year before the court case went before the Supreme Court. (Sharp, *Separate but Equal*; photo courtesy of the Associated Press)



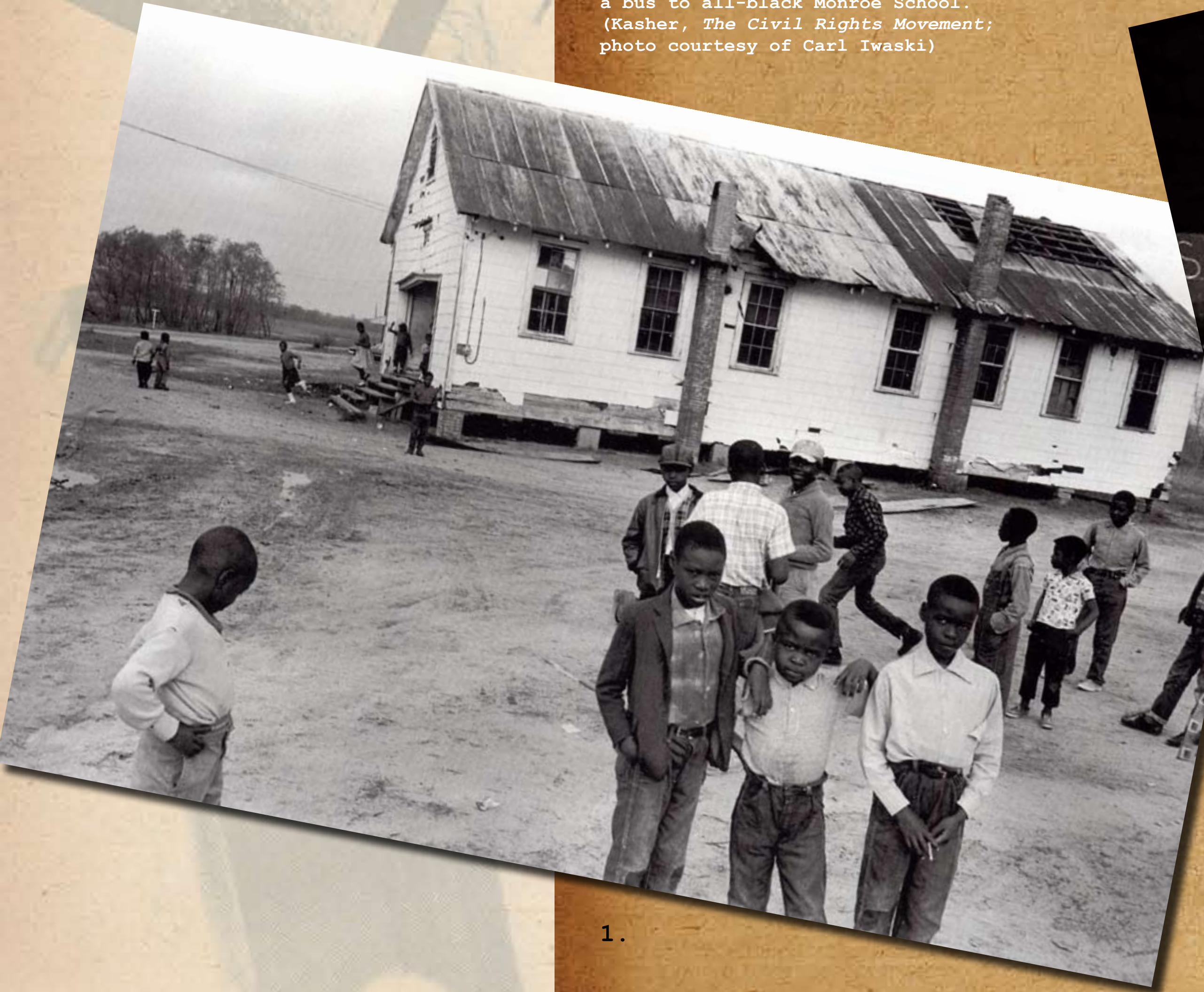
NAACP Lawyers and expert witnesses on the steps of the Court House in Richmond, Virginia, February 1952. In front are Spottswood Robinson and Oliver Hill, the NAACP principal lawyers; Dr. Clark is standing between them. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)



The United States Supreme Court justices who ruled unanimously on May 17, 1954, that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. Front Row (Left to Right): Felix Frankfurter, Hugo Black, Chief Justice Earl Warren, Stanley Reed and William O. Douglas. Back row (Left to Right): Tom Clark, Robert H. Jackson, Harold Burton, and Sherman Minton, 1953. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)



Left to right: George E.C. Hayes, Thurgood Marshall, and James M. Nabrit congratulate each other following the Supreme Court decision declaring segregation unconstitutional. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)



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1. Exterior of decrepit one-room schoolhouse which describes eloquently the doctrine of separate but equal facilities. (Davidson, *Time of Change*; photo courtesy of Bruce Davidson)

2. Interior of a one-room schoolhouse. (Davidson, *Time of Change*; photo courtesy of Bruce Davidson)