

# Introduction to Civil Rights - The 50's

By Jane Runyon



<sup>1</sup> People in the United States followed the 1896 Supreme Court ruling of "separate but equal" facilities for over sixty years. Restaurants, restrooms, schools, even drinking fountains were designated for the use of "Whites Only" or "Blacks Only." This concept started to be tested again in the 1950's. The disagreements over this idea all started to boil over with the story of one little girl in Kansas.



<sup>2</sup> Linda Brown was a third grader in Topeka, Kansas. The year was 1951. The schools in Topeka were **segregated**. In other words, there were schools for the black children and separate schools for the white children. The shortest way for Linda to reach her school was to walk over a mile through a railroad switchyard. What made this daily trip even harder for Linda to endure was the fact that there was a perfectly good elementary school just seven blocks from her home. The problem was that this school was for white children and Linda was black. Linda's father tried to enroll her in the school closer to her home, but he was told he couldn't.

<sup>3</sup> Members of a group called the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had been fighting what they considered the unfairness of separate schools for many years. Linda's story seemed to them to be the perfect case for them to use to prove their point. They took their case to the United States Supreme Court, the same court which had made the "separate but equal" decision in 1896. The process was slow. It wasn't until May of 1954 that the court reached a decision. That decision was based on whether or not they thought that black children were being deprived of an equal education by having segregated schools. In the court's opinion, they were being deprived. It struck down the "separate but equal" decision and ruled that schools throughout the United States should be **integrated**. This ruling applied only to schools. Other facilities such as restaurants and theaters remained separated.

<sup>4</sup> The following year, another event occurred that would change the face of segregation in the United States. This event occurred in Montgomery, Alabama. Public buses in Montgomery were integrated, to a point. Both blacks and whites were allowed to ride the same bus. White people were given their choice of seats in the front of the bus. Black people were told to ride in the back of the bus. If there were not enough white people on the bus to fill the seats, then the blacks were allowed to sit in the seats near the front.

<sup>5</sup> In December of 1955, a lady named Rosa Parks was riding home after a hard day of work. She was tired and she had a long ride ahead of her. She made herself comfortable in a seat near the middle of the bus. At one of the bus stops, a white man boarded the bus. He demanded that Rosa Parks give up her seat and go to the back so that he could sit. Rosa refused. The bus driver told her she had to give up her seat to the white man. She

again refused. She felt she had the right to remain in her seat. At this, the driver got off the bus and summoned the nearest policeman. Rosa gave up her seat, but the driver was so angry that he insisted that she be arrested. She was taken to jail. She made a phone call from there to a lawyer with the NAACP.

<sup>6</sup> When word reached the public about what had happened, the people of both races were outraged. The black people wanted to do something that would prove to the people of Montgomery what a terrible rule this was. They knew that violence would only worsen the matter. They formed a group called the Montgomery Improvement Association. They decided to **boycott** the public buses. A boycott is when a group stops using a product or a service. No black person in Montgomery, Alabama, rode on a city bus for 382 days. The bus company lost a lot of money due to the boycott.

<sup>7</sup> The NAACP took Rosa Parks' case to the United States Supreme Court. In 1958, the court ruled that the segregation of buses in Montgomery, Alabama, was unconstitutional. Cases such as Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education and Rosa Parks versus the Montgomery bus system fueled the fire of a new civil rights movement in the United States.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

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<p>1. What ruling did the United States Supreme Court make in 1896?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Brown v. the Board of Education</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The Emancipation Proclamation</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C "separate but equal" facilities</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D The Declaration of Independence</p>	<p>2. Why couldn't Linda Brown go to the school closest to her home?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A It was for whites only.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B She was too young.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C She needed to walk.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Her school was newer.</p>
<p>3. What group did Linda Brown's parents go to for help?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A FBI</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B NAACP</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C CIA</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D MIA</p>	<p>4. How did the Supreme Court ruling in the case of Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education affect education in the United States?</p> <p><i>Answer below using FSPOQ</i></p> <hr/>
<p>5. Who was arrested for sitting in a seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Linda Brown</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Martin Luther King, Jr.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Rosa Parks</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Charles Brown</p>	<p>6. Why did Rosa Parks refuse to leave her seat?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A She felt she had the right to remain in her seat.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B She wanted to make the man mad.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C She was ready to get off.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D She was there first.</p>

4. \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

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<p>7. How did the Montgomery bus company lose money?</p> <p>Answer below using _____          _____          FSPOQ</p>	<p>8. What was the result of the Supreme Court hearing on the Rosa Parks case?</p> <p>Answer below using _____          _____          FSPOQ</p>
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