

SEPARATE IS NOT EQUAL

BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION

Howard University

Howard University is one of the oldest historically black universities in the United States. It was established by act of Congress in 1867 and named for Oliver Otis Howard, a Union general in the Civil War and a director of the Freedmen's Bureau.

Howard provided education in the social sciences, physical sciences, fine arts, law, and medicine at a time when most African American programs were devoted to vocational education. Many Howard graduates became national and international leaders. Howard University's faculty included some of the intellectual leaders of the nation. They came together at Howard and mounted an effective challenge to segregation partly because they were excluded from teaching positions at white universities.

During the 1920s and the 1930s, Howard University was part of an upsurge of intellectual and cultural activity among African Americans. This was largely due to the Great Migration that drew thousands of African Americans from the South to the big cities of the North. A new mood among black Americans caused them to challenge the more conservative leadership of Booker T. Washington. They asserted their right to equal citizenship and proclaimed their pride in their ethnic identity. This new mood was known as the New Negro, and was not limited to New York City in the Harlem Renaissance, but existed in other major metropolitan areas such as Washington, D.C. Part of this New Negro consciousness was the formulation of a systematic legal strategy for attacking white privilege in America.

Charles Hamilton Houston became vice-dean of the Howard University School of Law in 1929 and brought an ambitious vision to the school. At the time, courses were offered only part-time and in the evening. Houston created an accredited, full-time program with an intensified civil rights curriculum. His determination to train world-class lawyers who would lead the fight against racial injustice gave African Americans an invaluable weapon in the civil rights struggle.

Charles Hamilton Houston continued to argue cases in court and work for equality in the legal community during his years as dean of the Howard University School of Law. When the American Bar Association refused to admit African American attorneys, he helped found the National Bar Association, an all-black organization, in 1925.