

Bricks Before Brown

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Introduction

The Bricks Before Brown digital map will be used as a historical tool for social studies teachers outlining 105 school desegregation cases that occurred before the famed 1954 *Brown v. Board*. Each case will have a hyperlink that provides a description and directs students to online archival materials identified and curated by USU students.

Castro and Linares are working together with professors Marisela Martinez-Cola and Ryan Knowles at Utah State University. The goal of this research is to make an online interactive map that shows the geographic distribution of the cases researched. Students and teachers can click on parts of this map to find specific cases and learn about Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American plaintiffs and their families and read the opinions from the court, newspaper accounts, and see photographs of the people involved.

Methods

Research was conducted and organized using Dropbox, a file hosting service. There, folders for each region of the United States were made, labeled "Midwest," "North," "Southern," and "Western." In each of those were folders for the states themselves, and each state folder contained a separate folder for the individual cases in the state, containing an excel spreadsheet. When opening a spreadsheet, there are six-column headers, from left to right labeled, "Type of Material," "Title," "Description," "Item Dated," "Item Found," and "Found At."

The research gathered on each case would begin by going into Google and searching up the name of the case in quotes. Once each page had been thoroughly examined, each case was searched with "archives" after it. From there, anything relating to the case such as court opinions, photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, interviews, and books were all added to the spreadsheet.

McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

In this case, the University of Oklahoma denied a man named George W. McLaurin admission to its graduate program in education. They claimed this was because Oklahoma law made it a misdemeanor to teach black and white students together. McLaurin filed suit in federal court in Oklahoma City. The law was struck down by a three-judge panel.

McLaurin could now attend the University of Oklahoma, however, he was segregated on campus. In the classroom and library, he had his own desk, sitting apart from the rest of the students. He also had to sit at a separate table in the cafeteria.

McLaurin's case was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court and the lower court's decision was unanimously reversed on June 5, 1950. Chief Justice Fred Vinson said this treatment was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.



George McLaurin in class, Courtesy of The Library of Congress

This photograph found while researching the case shows McLaurin after the initial ruling. He is sitting in a separate room from the other students while attending his first class at the University of Oklahoma.

Wrighten V. USC Board of Trustees:

John H. Wrighten sought admission into the all-white College of Charleston. After a delayed response, Wrighten enrolled at South Carolina State College. A year later, Wrighten decided to apply to the College of Charleston again, where he was denied. Wrighten returned to South Carolina State College where he would graduate in 1946. Prior to his graduation, however, Wrighten applied to the all-white University of South Carolina Law which also happened to be the only law school in South Carolina. Wrighten's application was quickly denied on the grounds of his race, and he contacted NAACP legal council member Harold Boulware to file a lawsuit on his behalf against the university.

Wrighten's lawyers wanted to have immediate admission to the University of South Carolina Law since there were no other law schools in the state, but the Judge rejected this request, and instead gave the school three options. Either they admit Wrighten immediately, they build him a law school at South Carolina State College, or they close the University Law School. Rather than desegregate the law school, the court ruled that the university must provide an equal law school facility for Black students. Two months later, South Carolina State College opened a new law school with only a dean and three faculty members. There was no building and no library, and Wrighten refused to attend.

In 1948 the general assembly appropriated \$200,000 for a building and \$30,000 for a library, which would equal over two million dollars today. When confronted with the high costs of building an entirely new school, the Dean of South Carolina State explained, "Gentlemen, well I'll tell you, the price of prejudice is very high."

Conclusion

The two cases presented today are only a tiny fraction of the research gathered under the Bricks Before Brown project. After mentor review, the research conducted will be used by K-12 Social Studies teachers. The interactive map will give students of all backgrounds the ability to see themselves in the fight for educational equality in the United States.